Community, Identity, and Resistance in Minority Literature: Arab American Poets - Samuel Hazo, Nathalie Handal, and Naomi Shihab Nye

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to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English,

February 2024.

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Abstract

In delving into the world of minority literature, I argue that contemporary Arab American writers provide a unique and previously overlooked perspective on the United States, particularly concerning the legacy of September 11, 2001 (9/11), and the unfolding narrative of the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of the proposal is to draw attention to the poetry of Samuel Hazo, Nathalie Handal, and Naomi Shihab Nye as representative of an Arab American identity struggle. Their experiences left them feeling marginalised and alienated in both societies. The special nuances of hybridity, resistance, and identity echoed in their poetry, and identified them as one of the ethnic American minority groups. The study also explores the writers' post-9/11 experience, affected by the United States' long history of marginalisation and discrimination against people of colour. As a result, Arab American literature along with that of other ethnic American groups, contributes to art characterised by the aesthetics of cultural hybridity, cultural complexity, and the politics of minorities to promote solidarity and coalition building. The three selected Arab American writers have found a link between their narration and the identity of the exiled by establishing an identity that is a kind of synthesis of diverse identities of Western reality and Eastern nostalgia. The approaches applied in this thesis include historical/biographical and postcolonial. I use the first one to emphasise the influence of the biographical aspects related to the community, identity, and resistance of the three poets in their poetry, and the second to study the effects of colonialism and postcolonialism on these poets and their responses, to establish them as representative poets in their perceptions as postcolonial subjects. This study is significant because it will help shed light on the importance of the Arabic hybrid identity in creating resistance to hegemonic discourses. I also argue that Arab American writers engage in unique and previously understudied ways with contemporary issues.

Dedication

To my dearest father.

To my beloved grandmother.

Then, now, still, and ever.

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I thank God the Almighty for guiding me and for endowing me with the patience to reach an academic culmination. I am really grateful to so many people who had faith in me and supported me during the process of writing this thesis, especially my supervisor, Prof Simon Rennie. I would like to express my sincere thanks to him for his scholarly guidance, intellectual exchange of ideas, critical remarks, continuous meetings, support, and advice, without which this thesis would not have achieved its final form.

I also want to thank my second supervisor Prof Christina Phillips for her remarkable insights. I am thankful to the committee members for agreeing to examine my work despite their busy schedules.

I thank God for showering me all the way with the blessings of a father who believed that his offspring must seek knowledge, even in the most difficult of times. This project would not have been conceived without the love and support of my father. Although he died before this project was completed, his spirit empowered every word I wrote. I am grateful to my mother, brothers, sister, uncles, and aunts for their support, love, and prayers. My children, Ghanem, Mohammad, and Abdullah, enriched my life in ways they might understand later. I am also particularly thankful to my dearest husband who provided understanding and support at crucial times: to Mansour Alghanem, thanks beyond thanks.

To my supervisor at the MA level, Prof Afra Alshiban, I offer my dearest and sincerest thanks.

To Dr Abdulaziz Alnawfal and Dr Nasser Alorfi, I am grateful. My words of appreciation are lacking when I thank their generosity in supporting this journey.

Last but not least, to my dearest friends in Exeter who have been the biggest help to me in the times I spent in the United Kingdom during the course of my studies. I pray that God blesses them with prosperity and surrounds them with His protective embrace. To my dearest friends in Saudi Arabia, may your days be filled with joy, success, and good health.

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Introduction

The United States has witnessed significant Arab migrations in several waves since the 1880s — a global paradigm driven by various factors including colonialism, postcolonialism, and other regional conflicts. Ever since, Arab Americans have historically been established as a racial minority in the American multicultural community. Having found themselves between two worlds, contemporary Arab American intellectuals have embodied a comprehensive understanding of their cultural diversity drawing from the subjective experiences of exclusion and marginalisation (Cainkar "Race and Racialization" 21; Linhard and Parsons 2). In this thesis, I argue that the works of three contemporary Arab American writers, Samuel John Hazo, Nathalie Handal, and Naomi Shihab Nye, address the issue of discrimination against minorities and emphasise minority identity in ways which represent a significant cultural intervention. In their works, Hazo, Handal, and Nye reveal the experience of the double identity of being classified as Arabs associated with the brutal attacks of 9/11 and the political, cultural, and social changes that affected their existence as a minority in American communities.

This study also examines the writers' responses to recent global concerns, including the refugee crisis and COVID-19. Arab American writers have made significant contributions to the complex discussions surrounding these issues. Tracing the historical context from post-9/11 Middle East to the United States interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and examining Trump's oppressive refugee policies, the study focuses on how Arab American poetry engages with the complexities of the refugee crisis. Moreover, I investigate the role of Arab American intellectuals in connecting humanities across divisions to address the challenges of the pandemic. An anthology such as *Dear Vaccine: Global Voices Speak to the Pandemic* (2022), edited by

Nye et al., provides insights into how Arab Americans have not only navigated health disparities but also helped contextualise the global scope of the pandemic.

Overall, the introduction provides a comprehensive range of biographical backgrounds of the writers and a literature review which are critical for understanding the central arguments. Relevant key terms necessary to define Arab American identity and literature, as well as its emergence in the American literary mainstream, are presented. The introduction also touches upon the factors that have contributed to the shaping of contemporary Arab American identity and the diversity within the Arab American community. Additionally, it highlights the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in pre- and post-9/11 events. Finally, the introduction outlines the research methodology and the structure of the thesis.

The Literary Significance of the Writers

It is worth noting that highlighting the biographies of the writers is imperative for understanding the particular backgrounds that have been instrumental in the process of creation of their literary views. In the context of discussing hybrid identity, the poets selected in this study are considered as significant examples due to their multiculturalism and therefore drawing the attention to their biographical details is essential here. Previous studies, such as "Introduction of Focus: Arab-American Literature after 9/11" (2012) by Philip Metres, highlighted the role of Hazo's writing about Arab American life and Nye's autobiographical lyrical commentary that attracted attention in the 1990s. This study is distinct in exploring the connection between Hazo, Handal, and Nye's interpretation of personal experiences through poetry and the knowledge of their Arabic culture that lies at the heart of the question of the hybrid identity. I argue that poetry expresses personal experience and identity in indeterminate ways, making it effective for the

three writers to represent their communities' experiences because poetry's formal freedom allows for free movement between identities.

Samuel John Hazo (1928–) is a prominent contemporary Arab American writer. He is a novelist, translator, critic, playwright, editor, and essayist who has published many books of poems. Hazo was born in America to immigrant Lebanese parents, which influenced his cultural perspective and literary voice. He works as a professor at Duquesne University. In his work, Hazo has extensively covered the topics of religion and faith, war, and family; his poems being mainly elegiac in tone. It is worth noting that his concerns and attitudes might have shifted over his extremely long writing career.

Nye Shihab Nye (1952–) is a distinguished third-generation Arab American poet. She was born to a Palestinian father and an American mother, providing her a rich cultural background that heavily influences her writing. Although her writing deeply reflects the culture of the American Southwest, she also writes from an Arab American perspective. As a teenager, Nye lived in Ramallah and Jerusalem, where she developed a strong bond with her Palestinian *sitti* (grandmother). This experience profoundly shaped her worldview and provided the cultural context for much of her poetry. She often draws on her cultural difference to explore issues of identity and displacement.

Nathalie Handal (1969–) is a French American poet, writer, playwright, director, producer, and literary researcher. Handal was born in Haiti to a Palestinian family from Bethlehem. She has lived in different parts of the world, contributing to her multifaceted perspective. Her contribution to Arab American feminism is essential to consider because it is associated with her efforts to inspire change as related to the narrative of being an Arab American woman and having to battle for empathy, equality, and evolution. Besides, she

mentioned enduring discrimination for no apparent reason, such as being denied entry to the Palestinian villages in the District of Jerusalem (Handal "Crucifixion" para. 7). The irony in this situation is that she was not only commonly accepted and understood in the West but was also alienated from the places where her cultural heritage lies.

The previously mentioned introduction about the writers sheds light on their multicultural identities and explains their relationships to hybridity despite the affiliation of each poet with a different generation. The three writers share the same awareness as of Arab intellectuals living in the United States. It is this great self-awareness that links them and their peaceful resistance to the dominant culture they developed. This self-awareness made them embody a discourse marked by cultural diversity — a discourse different from the topics commonly covered in narratives reflecting the reality of cultural diversity. For example, Hazo's poetry mainly articulates investable loss and the ordinary life, love, grief, and desire. In addition, he explores the complexity of life. Meanwhile, through her extensive travels across conflict zones and marginalised regions, Nye narrates the personal experiences of oppressors, delving into their motivations and humanity. Her poetic language reveals the beauty and tragedy of life, "reviewed as literature of 'cultural enrichment'" (Bonazzi 17). As for Handal, she is well known as a feminist. Her edited book *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology* (2015) reflects her concern with introducing Arab women poets to the West despite their different ethnicities and religious backgrounds, and regardless of their composition language. In so doing, she emphasises the leadership role of Arab American women to represent contemporary Arab women, to be their advocate, and to help them to make qualitative leaps for their nations (*The Poetry of Arab Women* xii). This thesis investigates Hazo's, Handal's, and Nye's contributions as Arab American intellectuals to the diversity and richness of American literature.

The three writers have dealt with the notions of hybridity, third place, and in-betweenness in many of their poems, which reflect where diverse cultures meet. Conceivably, they have nourished a unique self-identification in their poetry by celebrating their hybrid identity and multiculturalism. In a dissertation entitled *The Identity of Arab-American Poets* (1997), Maha El Said concludes that Arab American writers have successfully contributed to the American literary tradition:

> The poetry of Arab-Americans proclaims an identity that is not part Arab and part American, but one that simultaneously incorporates the two: the unique cultural identity of Arab-American. (198)

The three selected poets believe that reformation comes from deconstructing and reconstructing the self, which has led them to engage with social practices that have grounded their abstract notion of multiculturalism in action to fill the gap between theory and practice as intellectuals engaged with their community. Thus, multiculturalism plays a prominent role in creating modern communities. In *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (1992), Charles Taylor discusses multiculturalism in the context of constructing contemporary identity. Taylor believes that multiculturalism should recognise cultural differences in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, and traditions (68). In this sense, multiculturalism encourages cultural understanding and fosters harmonious coexistence, thereby contributing to the richness of the collective community while opposing discrimination and marginalisation.

However, although these three selected poets come from different generations, this thesis investigates how they have used poetry to forge strong bonds with both preceding and succeeding generations. These writers have expanded their poetry beyond traditional publishing methods, such as printed collection and public readings. Instead, they embraced modern technology and communication methods. Hazo and Handal have websites dedicated to

promoting their publications and engaging in literary and academic activities. Nye occasionally reads her poems on YouTube to engage with modern issues and events. These bonds with readers have expanded the appeal to a wider audience and transcended diversity within the Arab American community. In embracing modern communication tools and engaging with contemporary issues, these poets have not only transcended generational boundaries but also broadened the scope of their poetry to address universal themes. However, understanding the factors that helped shaping their contemporary identity and the incorporation of their Arabic legacy, combined with the poetic formal freedom and expressive liberty they gained from their Western present, empowered them to reconstruct a new Arab American identity. This reconstruction addresses young generations, encouraging them to decolonise their minds.

The Construction of Contemporary Arab American Identity

Before delving into this study's subject matter, it is important to define contemporary Arab American identity. According to Cainker in "Becoming Arab American" (2016), this identity is "a pan-ethnic, racialized identity that embraces non-Whiteness while conferring a coherent position in a racially organized society" (para. 23). Understanding terms such as "pan-ethnic" and "racialised" identity is essential for a comprehensive understanding. Okamoto and Mora believe that pan-ethnic identity is developed in multiethnic societies by a group of people who share cultural, regional, and national origin and language backgrounds to signify who they are and to construct an institutional and organisational alliance (219–20). In a broader sense, pan-ethnic identity develops a unique tension of racialisation and exclusion in its categorisation process. Hyphenated identity is another categorisation that can be used to define Arab American identity. It is a key concept to explain the complexity of Arab American identity. The importance

of the hyphenated identity lies in highlighting the diversity of Arab Americans' experiences in multicultural societies. It recognises that Arab American identity is a multifaceted construct that evolves over time and through various influences. Lisa Suhair Majaj argues that Arab American identity is transnational rather than hyphenated. The writer defines Arab American identity as "a transplanted Arab identity, turning upon preservation of Arab culture, language, and sensibilities" ("Arab-American Literature" 6–7). From this premise, race is central to the construction of ethnicity in the United States as a multicultural community. Therefore, the wider social, cultural, and political contexts of the United States have encouraged contemporary Arab American writers to shape and articulate a unifying Arab American identity distanced from the first generation of Arab Americans' claims of being "white." In the nineteenth century, many Arab Americans considered themselves racially "white." Gualtieri documents the story of a Syrian immigrant, Costa George Najour, who met the racial requirements of the United States Naturalisation law and became the first "white" applicant for citizenship in a federal court among all ethnic groups in the United States in 1909 (1). On this basis, Arab Americans fought for political participation and citizenship rights for decades. More recently, Arab Americans have understood their unique characterisation as "non-White." Samer Khalaf, the National President of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), states that some Arab American organisations, such as the ADC and the Arab American Institute (AAI), have demanded that a special identifier for Arab Americans be added under the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). According to Khalaf, Arab American organisations expected the United States government to adopt MENA categorisation in 2015 and 2017. Nevertheless, the urgency of the Trump administration contributed to persuading the Office of Management and Budget to abandon the motion. Khalaf seems cautiously optimistic regarding the promises made by the

Biden administration to count Arab Americans under a correct categorisation (Alsharif, paras. 21–30). However, with the demand to change the federal race and ethnicity standards, Arab Americans are still not counted under the MENA category in the United States Census data.

It is important to highlight the factors that influence the new Arab American identity, including the relationship between the two worlds and concepts such as ethnocentrism, essentialism, and authenticity. Firstly, the relationship between the Old World and the New World has been understood as one of superiority, domination, and hegemony. In his groundbreaking book *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Wadie Said argued that the relationship between the Occident and the Orient is characterised by power, domination, and varying degrees of a complex hegemony (5). Said's *Orientalism* can be described as a turning point in the history of Arab American ethnic writing, encouraging the next generations to reveal their own thoughts and refute the discourse on Orientalism. Said posited that this relationship of power and ideology relies on the perceived inferiority of the "Orient" and the perceived superiority of the "Occident," and it works to establish a hegemonic system that extends beyond military forces and practices in colonial and postcolonial contexts (*Orientalism* 6–7). This relationship also contributes to the creation of Orientalist discourse. However, contemporary Arab American intellectuals have rejected the discourse of Occidental superiority as they believe in the uniqueness of their culture. Although Said's *Orientalism* did not explicitly define Arab American identity or culture, it provides a critical framework for understanding how Western representations have shaped perceptions and stereotypes about Arabs, which in turn affect Arab American identity and culture, profoundly influenced by broader political contexts and media portrayals. Despite the impact of colonisation, Said argued that the Occidental discourse continued to perpetuate hegemony and discrimination, but he believed that this would change

when the Orientals became empowered to define and defend themselves. Furthermore, Said asserted that all hegemonic discourses share a common feature, which is the portrayal of the Orient as a sexual, sensual, backward, and uncivilised "Other." The Occident addressed and reinforced these discourses because the Oriental critics did not write to defend themselves, as they were in a state of loss and lacked the agency to articulate their own perspectives, allowing the Occident to speak on their behalf (*Orientalism* 263). While Said himself did not provide a direct definition, his theoretical contributions offer essential tools for analysing and understanding the complexities of Arab American identity and culture. Additionally, Said utilised Michel Foucault's concept of discourse analysis to comprehend the systematic hegemony that strove to depict the Orient (*Orientalism* 3). Overall, the relationship between the Occident and the Orient, as examined by Said, demonstrates a dynamic equation of power, domination, and hegemony, with the Orient being subjected to Orientalist discourse and representations. However, contemporary Arab American intellectuals challenge this discourse and strive to assert their own cultural identity and agency in the face of hegemonic narratives.

Secondly, the critical problem area is associated with immigrant-related literature. It chiefly lies in the authors using their identity as a shield which is known as the concept of ethnocentrism. This provokes prejudice and unjustified overgeneralisation. Ethnocentrism is created when the oppressed identity regarded as the Other is limited to the individual's cultural identity, causing the individual's view to become extremist and biased besides creating ethnic prejudice. On the other hand, the Westerner's description of the Other as a barbarian and savage is another example of ethnocentrism. Buchanan defines the term as "the tendency to or practice of interpreting, evaluating, and judging ethnic groups perceived as other by the standards of one's own ethnic group" (para. 1). In this sense, ethnocentrism has appeared to be problematic in

multicultural studies because the individual with dual identity will resist the hegemonic discourse and thoughts of the Other. Thus, openness, acceptance, and cultural integration play significant roles in achieving tolerance in multicultural communities. However, Carol Fadda-Conrey believes that the harsh reality of the social and political changes in the United States and the Arab world contributed to constructing a new literary approach in which Arab American writers became acquainted with their existence in exile and the unforgotten homeland living deeply inside them without inclining to the concept of ethnocentrism ("Reimagining the Ancestral Arab Homeland" 29). In this study, I argue that the selected writers have reflected a deep understanding of their ethnic identity which enables them to discuss themes of racialisation, hybridity, and the multifaceted nature of the Arab American identity in their literature.

Thirdly, drawing on the writers' inherited postcolonial history, this research explores their tendency to undo the privileging of the dominant colonisation legacies by composing literature and creating discourse marked by diversity that positions their Arabic heritage and culture in hybrid narratives. In "Can the Subaltern Speak," originally published in 1994, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak critiques essentialism by highlighting how it misrepresents the complexities of marginalised groups. Spivak defines essentialism as the belief in a fixed, intrinsic meaning or identity of a subject or group, which denies the complexity, diversity, and change within the subject or group (91). However, authenticity in minority literature reflects the traditions, customs, values, social norms including language, dialects, idioms, and cultural practices that depict the community's experience. Henry Louis Gates Jr. explores the concept of authenticity in minority literature in his book *The Signifying Monkey* (1989). Gates believes that authentic minority literature should preserve and understand the linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts of the community it represents. In "Authenticity and Essentialism" (2021), Masood Raja

discusses authenticity and essentialism in postcolonial identity, claiming that the assumption of the authentic identity is not retrieved but is textualised and structuralised. According to Raja, the concept of authenticity assumes a kind of essentialism as a fundamental tool in colonisation discourse that relies on essentialism. In this context, cultural authenticity is linked to strategic essentialism, and both are problematic in the sense that the first is imposed by the coloniser to assign unchangeable negative qualities to the native culture. From the other side, the natives establish a strategic essentialism to ensure a certain idea about their culture. Nowadays, in the study of global politics, decolonisation strategies focusing on the notion of non-Western authenticity attract less attention due to the rise of non-Western powers, especially China. In the *Journal of the Institute of Postcolonial Studies*, from the article entitled “The Decolonial Subject and the Problem of non-Western Authenticity” (2019), Vieira argues that identifying postcolonial identity is drawn from understanding the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. By applying Frantz Fanon and Jacques Lacan’s theories, Vieira’s study concludes that no pure identity exists and that non-Western attempts to understand the self are functional to construct a hybrid postcolonial subjectivity rather than non-colonial forms of pure existence in the postcolonial world (150).[1] Hence, the discussion in this research claims the impossibility of establishing a “pure” identity in Arab American poetry. On the contrary, Arab American poetry reflects the cultural hybrid identity that is constructed from the integration of two cultures, and it does this because only poetry as a genre possesses the formal fluidity which can fully express this hybridity.

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[1] Frantz Fanon’s Theory of Postcolonialism argues that colonisation influences the coloniser and the colonised to develop a sense of self through representation and discourse defined by the superior coloniser and absorbed by the inferior colonised.

Jacques Lacan’s work has been used alongside postcolonial theory. Lacanian concepts like “the Other” has been employed by scholars to analyse colonial and postcolonial subjectivities.

Arab American Literature and Cultural Identity: from the 1880s to the Present

Arab American literature and cultural identity are interrelated, and both terms have undergone many stages of formation. Before tracing the formation of Arab American literature, it is important to define it. According to Muhammad Ali Muhammad El Sagheer Suliman, Arab American literature is "literature produced by American writers of Arab descent who were born in or immigrated to the United States of America and their literature was published in the English language and deals with Arab American issues" (164). Thus, the development of the cultural identity of Arab American writers should be considered as they belonged to a group of people from diverse countries and religious backgrounds (Ludescher 106; Noman 69). This diversity highlights a key issue with the term "Arab American" — the potential homogenisation it implies. This term risks focusing on prominent Arab American writers of Levantine origin, as is the case in this study, which can lead to the mistaken assumption that their experiences and concerns represent those of all Arab Americans. Consequently, it overlooks the richness of experiences among Arab Americans of different origins.

However, the three notable generations of Arab Americans have been differentiated into early immigrants, post-WWII immigrants, and post-1967 immigrants.[2] Immigration is noted as the common feature between the three generations and a basic component of establishing Arab American literature. Ameen Rihani, Gibran Khalil Gibran, and Mikhail Naimy are recognised as

[2] In the first wave (1880–1924), the first Arab group that migrated to the United States mainly consisted of uneducated and illiterate Christians, many of whom were self-taught, who fled for their lives and to preserve their freedom from the Ottoman Empire. Although they were considered "white," they were excluded due to their ethnicity as Arabs. This group established the *Mahjar* period of Arab American literature in North and South America, with a special interest in mysticism and Eastern religion, despite their sceptic tendencies.

Many Muslims were introduced to the second wave (1948–1967) of Arab Americans after WWII and among them Palestinian refugees who were forced to leave Palestine after the Arab–Israeli War. This group had received education and was aware of the political conflicts in the Arab world.

In the third wave (1967–present day), due to the American legal reformation, many Palestinians and Lebanese Muslims migrated to America after the Israeli war of 1967 and the Lebanese Civil War of the 1970s and 1980s, accompanied by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. This group was more engaged with Arab politics and had anti-colonial tendencies.

the founders of Arab American literature. In their works, these writers summarise the tragedy of exile and its effects in works of poetry and prose. Although the dual identity of the Arab Americans represents a struggle between the two worlds, the early immigrants chose to make it a starting point to find their own identity, despite the ethnic clashes between the two cultures. They also portrayed their unique cultural identity that is characterised by human integration which exceeds national borders by creating an imagined community in their works and reviving the Arabic cultural tradition. As Philip Metres suggests, the early immigrants had full awareness of their own cultural diversity, which subsequently resulted in discrimination and marginalisation ("Introduction of Focus" 3). However, they made it their respectable strength by abiding by American law while they were roaming the country, which sped up their integration into society and their language acquisition. Ludescher believes that although early immigrants were enthusiastic about embracing United States values and peaceful coexistence, they were regarded as racially inferior to United States citizens and ignorant of the national ideologies in the Arab world despite the series of court cases between 1909 and 1915 and in the 1940s in which they claimed their racial status was "white." This group was affected by the identity struggle that they experienced in exile for the first time, and the effects of French, English, or Russian cultures on immigrants; the tendency to overcome sectarian religious struggles; and the desire to mend the Arab world were among their themes (Ludescher 99). Nevertheless, Albrecht believes that second- and third-generation Arab American identity is engaged with a cultural identity that is separated by trauma, displacement, and the celebration of nostalgic memories due to a remarkably raised awareness about current political issues, such as racial categorisation and minority alienation in the United States. Historically, first- and second-generation Arab Americans have enriched Arabs' presence in American society throughout the past two centuries

and have influenced the American immigration policy to formulate The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (103). Themes of racism, discrimination, marginalisation, and xenophobia were at the core of second- and third-generation Arab Americans' ethnic writing. For those generations, to be out of place transcends the scope of ideological nationality to create an imaginary homeland by composing poetry greatly marked by Otherness.

One of the most prominent problems for Arab Americans is that they often face unfair judgments based on biased stereotypes rather than direct interactions, contributing to their marginalised status as the "Other." Said believed that the field of American Orientalism originated from European Orientalist foundations, gaining prominence as an academic discipline when the United States extended its hegemonic influence in the Middle East, supplanting Britain and France in the post-WWII era (*Orientalism* 290). Arab American intellectuals have addressed this issue in their work, enriching the field of Arab American studies and prompting a reconsideration of the United States' national identity, culture, and power dynamics.

However, the experience of diversity within the same ethnic group is an experience that has inspired many minority writers. This experience cannot be ignored, as it exists in ethnic literature in general, and Arab American literature is not an exception. Thus, defining Arab Americans is controversial in the polyethnic United States. The diversities under different ethnic or religious categories include those between Lebanese Americans, Palestinian Americans, and Syrian Americans, between Arab Muslims, Arab Jews, and Arab Christians, or between Muslims (Sunni and Shia and Alawi and Isma'ili), Christians (Catholic and Orthodox, Anglican and Evangelical, and Mainline Protestants), Jews (Orthodox and Conservative and Haredi and Reform), Druze, Bahai, and other sectarian pluralisms. Ludescher discusses the diversity of Arab American writers, stating that "Arab Americans are part of an extremely diverse group, which

includes third- and fourth-generation Americans, recent immigrants, people from different countries and religious backgrounds, and Arabic and Non-Arabic speakers" (106). Hazo, Handal, and Nye are part of this diversity and classified under different categories, on the one hand, while on the other hand, the literary approaches the writers use to compose their poetry inadvertently create more diversity. For instance, Ludescher calls attention to a major aspect in classifying Arab American writers regarding which side of their experience should be highlighted: Should they highlight the Arabic part of their experience, or should they highlight the American side? From this premise, the writer wonders if Hazo could be identified as an Arab American writer because he avoids revealing his Arabic ethnicity in his writings, whereas Nye tends to reveal it in some of hers (106). Regarding feminism, the third Arab American generation witnessed a remarkable integration of many feminist writers, including Handal. According to Ludescher, Handal also fits in the category of the newest generation of Arab American writers (105). Overall, Arab American literature can be identified as a multi-ethnic literature that embodies different categories and enriches ethnic American literature.

The emphasis on Arab American literature is significant because it has appeared as a minority literature most recently. Before delving into discussing Arab American literature as a minority literature, it is essential to understand what minority literature is. Minority literature refers to the literature produced by writers from marginalised groups in the society, depicting their experiences, histories, and identities, and offering perspectives that are misrepresented in literature produced by writers from the dominant culture. For instance, Toni Morrison reflects on how African American literature has been influenced in contrast with the dominant "white" culture in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992).

Regarding Arab American literature, Kadi states that it has been the least influential and the latest to produce among minority literature (xix). Arab American literature was only introduced during the early part of the twentieth century (Ludescher 95; Majaj "Arab-American Literature" para. 5). In fact, early Arab American literature has received more attention than other Arab diasporic literature due to the high status and literary influence of the *Mahjar* writers in the Arab world. Majaj mentions that Arab American literature did not have an independent existence, nor was it recognised as a significant example of minority writing. The writer also draws attention to the publication of two major works, *Wrapping the Grape Leaves: A Sheaf of Contemporary Arab-American Poetry* (1982) edited by Gregory Orfalea and *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry* (1988) edited by Orfalea and Sharif Elmusa, for introducing Arab American literature to the world ("Two Worlds Emerging" 69). Considering early Arab Americans' claims of being "white" and their tendency to assimilate in order to gain naturalisation, Arab American literature has emerged as minority literature with recent generations. This shift occurred as new generations had started moving away from the assimilationist model of the older generation, choosing instead to contest both their identity and the American political and cultural stance towards Arabs. The complexities of the concept of assimilation become apparent when minority individuals or group integrate into the prevailing culture.

In the context of hybridity, Salma Khadra Jayyusi believes that Arab American fiction writers were given freedom to break with established norms. They were not just unrestricted; they lacked a firm foundation in the Arabic literary tradition because the prose/novel form did not gain prominence in the Arab world until about the 1950s. Although they drew inspiration from Western contributions, Arab American fiction writers were conscious of the risk of

hybridisation. Recognising the significance of refraining from creating mixed models, the writers realised that everything in their novels and dramas had to represent their culture (Jayyusi "Introduction" 13; Ludescher 95–98). In contrast, Arab American poets understood the significance of Arabic poetic tradition in the Arabic literary and cultural heritage. Taking Jayyusi's idea about the poetic literary foundation into consideration, early Arab American poets were restricted in the Arabic poetic legacy, but they were culturally influenced by their Western present to modernise it. According to Ali Ahmad Said Esber, known by the pen name Adonis, the term "cultural influence" not only implies the strength with which one culture affects another but also suggests the resistance of influence from another culture (*An Introduction to Arab Poetics* 20).[3] This reflects the significance of poetry in maintaining cultural identity, underscoring its unique role compared to the flexibility of fiction. From this premise, contemporary Arab American writers have developed a sense of resistance in their poetry. This form of resistance was a response to the threatening influence of cultural bleaching that arose from identifying Arab Americans as "white," which helped construct Arab American individual identity and consequently maintain their cultural identity. I argue that the selected Arab American poets actively contributed to their contemporary culture by intentionally highlighting the preservation of their distinctive cultural identity, which constitutes resistance to cultural assimilation and their ancestors' claim of being "white." This emphasis on cultural preservation distinguishes contemporary Ara American poetry from earlier writings.

However, as an interdisciplinary field, American studies investigates American literature, politics, economics, culture, history, and society. According to Vernon Louis Parrington, who is known as the founder of American studies, studies on the development of American tradition

[3] Ali Ahmad Said Esber (1930–), known by his pen name, Adonis, is a Lebanese Syrian poet, translator, editor, and theorist. He has lived in exile since the mid-nineteen-fifties.

should consider all political, social, economic, and cultural development (ix). In its scope, minority literature appears to be a fundamental component of American literature that has reflected the multicultural nature of the United States. The three writers have worked for years within the American literary tradition as professors. Hazo is a professor of English and directs the Creative Writing Programme at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Handal serves as a professor of Literature and Creative Writing at Columbia University in New York City. Nye has served as a visiting writer and lecturer at several universities and writing programmes, including Texas State University, University of California, and Rice University. Moreover, they have rejected the institutionalised imperial expansion in universities by positioning themselves in various disciplines alongside their academic work. For example, Hazo was the founder and director of a cultural and artistic festival, the International Poetry Forum, from 1966 until 2009, in which he contributed to building the American community literarily, culturally, and economically. Throughout my thesis, I argue that the roles of the "intellectual" and the "poet" overlap for these writers, and both terms are used interchangeably to reference them.

Undoubtedly, the events of September 11 have played a significant role in the shaping of Americans' perceptions of immigrants from Arab countries, with Muslims and Arabs being targeted and suspected as terrorists. Abdullah mentions that the results of the attacks were differentiated into two categories, such as "either a terrorist or sympathetic to terrorist, and they have been suspected and distrusted" (52). Whereas Hollywood movies, such as *The Siege* (Zwick, 1998), clearly examine the stereotypical attitude of the West towards Muslims before 9/11, Arab American writers have attempted to shed light on the effects of the brutal 9/11 attacks on the Arab and Muslim community in the United States. In her book about Arabs' and

Muslims' representation in the media, Evelyn Alsultany highlights the radical transformation that the 9/11 attacks wrought in the world. As an Arab and a Muslim, Alsultany expected violent racist backlash against the entire Arab and Muslim world. And indeed, during this period xenophobia flourished in the United States. However, President Bush's speech distinguished between the "friends" and "enemies" of the United States. He said, "The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them" (qtd. in Alsultany 2).[4] As a result, the attacks placed significant burdens on Arab American writers to speak both individually and collectively while also being capable of rejecting the established sociopolitical agenda (Moqbel iv–v; Philip Metres "Introduction of Focus" 3–4). Moreover, Harb concludes that misconceptions about the Arab world were observed before the attacks due to the rarity and inaccessibility of reliable research, which allowed misrepresentation and distorted knowledge to be imposed. From another premise, the problem with these misconceptions is that they resulted from studies on Orientalism that introduced the Eastern culture through the Western eye. Nevertheless, interest in the Arab world grew, especially after the Arab Spring revolutions began in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain in 2011 (Harb 3–14).

From a literary critical perspective, a wide body of post-9/11 literature reflects on what happened to America after the attacks, as well as the representation of "us" and "them." In *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (2011), Richard Gray argues that the attacks redefined the American narrative tradition and imposed "crisis as a descent from innocence to experience"

[4] In the geopolitical context, the relationship the United States has with the Islamic world includes several phases. This relationship is described as friendship with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE, whereas it is described as tension with countries such as Iran. Nevertheless, this strategic relationship was subject to change at the critical juncture of the launch of the Iran nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on 14 July 2015. The agreement strained relations between the United States and its allies in the region, including Israel.

(2). According to Gray, post-9/11 American narrative tradition is characterised by confusion and disorientation (14). For instance, Lynne Sharon Schwartz's *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006), Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2007), and Don Delillo's *Falling Man* (2007) are preoccupied with the themes of terrorism, racialisation, and the conflict between the East and the West. On the other side, the post-9/11 Arab American novel became the main genre in the body of Arab American literature and emerged to reflect the realities of Arabs in America (Noman 68–69). For example, Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003), Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), Rabih Alameddine's *The Hakawati* (2008), and Alia Yunis' *The Night Counter* (2009) tackle the essential themes of Islamophobia, xenophobia, social injustice, identity, gender, and anti-Arab racism.

In the context of composing poetry, the nature of the historical culture has been linked over time to lyrical poetry, as it is best suited to express an individual's feelings. It is also the most suitable poetic form for expressing the writers' perplexed emotions and asserting their dual identities. Majaj states that lyrical poetry is distinguished by its ability to articulate opposites such as celebration and nostalgia, and war and suffering, which unsurprisingly play fundamental roles in constructing the Arab American experience. In contrast, the problem with lyrical poetry is that it lacks "a broader forum for representation, analysis, discussion and critique," which makes it expressive rather than evocative and assertive rather than analytical (Majaj, "New Directions" 127–28). However, as a prominent Arab heritage literary tradition, Arab American poetry is emphasised as being significant in filling the gap between the dominant cultural narrative and the experienced realities in Philip Metres' article "Carrying Continents in Our Eyes: Arab American Poetry After 9/11" (2015). According to Philip Metres, post-9/11 Arab American poetry has refuted "the ideological blindness of imperial privilege, supplemented by

Orientalism" (136). As a minority literature, Arab American poetry is problematic for the writers and the recipients in that it has been associated with politics since its inception. Regarding the dialectic of Arab American poetry, Philip Metres points to "the problematics of reception and the politics of representation" (125). Accordingly, the controversy surrounding this is related to United States foreign policy in the Middle East and to the misrepresentation of the Arab world, which have both encouraged xenophobia and Islamophobia to flourish. In other words, neo-Orientalism discourse is used to justify United States foreign policy to support Israel and to control oil (126). In the post-9/11 era, the representation of the Arab world as a region marked by ethnic conflicts and devoid of democratic values has promoted neo-Orientalism discourse. This narrative has not only shaped public perceptions but has also been exploited to justify the United States' interventions and extend its political influence over the region. To understand how this discourse intersects with literature, particularly in Arab American contexts, one must appreciate the political dimensions of Palestine's history and oil's role in the Arab world. In this thesis, I explore the implications of neo-Orientalism for the region and its people, shedding light on how this discourse has influenced Arab American poetry.

In fact, the attacks of 9/11 placed added problems on Arabs and Muslims to speak individually and collectively to reject the United States political agenda. This rejection originated from their rejection of all terrorism practices that destroyed their reputation. Nye comments on the extra burden of the attacks in an electronic open letter entitled "To Any Would-Be Terrorists" (2004) by addressing the attackers: "Do you know how hard some of us have worked to get rid of that word, to deny its instant connection to the Middle East? And now look. Look what extra work we have" (362). Nye and other Arab American writers have been haunted by the idea of ethnic hatred towards the Arab American community that gripped American society. In

this atmosphere, Arab American writers are not only concerned with the idea of giving voice to the Arab community, but more so with defending the Arab community's rights and insisting on representing their perspectives by giving public speeches and publishing their writings in the media, motivated by their awareness of their role as ethnic minority intellectuals. Writers such as Hazo, Handal, and Nye are highly affected by their sense of responsibility as representatives of Arab Americans in a sense that gave them more space to be conspicuous and emanated from the concept of self-recognition.

In the context of imperial hegemony, the United States appears to be the most dominant power in the world after the end of the Cold War at the end of the twentieth century. In relation to this, interest is growing in comparative studies to investigate the connection between empires in terms of inter-imperial migration and its reflections on minority literature and the exile's identity. Laura Doyle conceptualises the term "inter-imperiality" as a field in which language, literature, and translation contribute as tools of competitive hegemonies. Thus, the assumptions of labelling identities and civilising the colonised appear as a merely competitive hegemony (4). In this context, Steven Salaita believes that Arab American literary themes synthesise to react against imperiality (*Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* 2). From this premise, this study investigates the intersection between cultural hybridity and imperialism in Arab American poetry. For example, the three selected writers engaged in deconstructing the imperial cultural hegemony of the United States. The United States exercised imperial hegemony over international institutions, including the UN (United Nations) and IEA (International Energy Agency), to validate and legitimise the War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2001. In this study, I argue that these writers have had to write against the predominant influence of the United States, helping to shape discourses surrounding imperialism.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the poetry of Hazo, Handal, and Nye, contributing to a repositioning of Arab American poets as agents challenging dominant discourses, particularly in response to neo-Orientalism. The selected works offer fresh perspectives on themes like Trumpism, anti-Arabism, and COVID-19, emphasising the writers' role in deconstructing issues of discrimination and racialisation. In my argument, I contend that despite their immersion in a Western context, these poets maintain a distinct cultural identity, challenging prevailing ideological discourses. They also critique the vulnerabilities of United States imperial intentions, emphasising the urgency to decolonise the mind. My analysis extends to the portrayal of Saudi women, highlighting misrepresentations and contributing to divisive narratives. The analysis also introduces innovative perspectives on space and border crossing, using poetic form to enhance discourse. Over my argument, I claim that Arab American poetry emerges as a significant tool for resisting hegemonic discourse and enriching the broader United States narrative through cultural preservation, identity redefinition, and sociopolitical critique. My main intention in writing this thesis is to redefine the transnational/transcultural Arab American identity.

Research Methodology

In this research study, I aim to emphasise the role of Hazo, Handal, and Nye in establishing a discourse resisting elements of the hegemonic ideology of the West after 9/11. For them, poetry became a means of deconstructing/reconstructing their hybrid identity and expressing the complexity of their existence. I have used a postcolonial approach to examine the writers' poetry and their acquired postcolonial history. In this sense, postcolonial theory provides a critical perspective to understand the complicated legacy left by colonialism and to envision

more inclusive future for postcolonial subjects. Moreover, the study investigates the relationship between juxtapositions in Arab American poetry. This investigation discloses the implications of the politics of minorities, such as the issue of woman's' voice and body, the politics of silence, the celebration of diversity, and the notion of return. Discourse analysis is also utilised to comprehend the historical, geopolitical, and sociocultural contexts. The methodology used in this research argues that the writers have the ability to confront the powerful ways in which colonialism and imperialism shaped the past and present, and their commitment to a new future. In other words, consideration of the nature of postcolonialism helped to shape their hybrid identity. For example, Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Salaita's *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (2007), Majaj's "Arab-American Literature: Origins and Developments" (2008) and "New Directions: Arab Americans: Arab American Writing Today" (2017), and Philip Metres' "Carrying Continents in Our Eyes: Arab American Poetry after 9/11" (2015) make an important contribution to deconstruct contemporary Arab American cultural identity and understand Arab American literature. Comprehending this formula requires a strong understanding of the dimensions of postcolonialism that accelerated multiculturalism as a sociocultural component and led to the production of Arab American literature among other minority literary traditions in the United States. Postmodernism is employed as a tool to challenge singular narratives, emphasising the subjective nature of human experience. Through techniques such as fragmentation, deconstruction, irony, pluralism, and diversity, the selected poets reject the notion of a singular universal culture. Instead, they highlight the significance of intellectual discourse and embrace the multiplicity perspective. The research methodology also includes applying a decolonisation methodology that refutes the overgeneralisation embodied in imperial expansion to maintain social justice and sovereignty. In this regard, multiculturalism is

not about “us” versus “them” but about valuing diversity and recognising the contributions that different cultures can make to society as a whole.

The research methodology used in this thesis is based on a literary analysis of the three poets’ selected works. It aims to provide evidence from their different published collections of poems ranging from 2001 to the present to answer the research questions. Some of these poems have appeared in well-regarded magazines, such as *The American Scholar* and *The Atlantic Monthly* while some were drawn from the writers’ previous publications. The authors’ literary creations are offered as a way to convey their messages in an aesthetic context that appeals to audiences from both cultures and intended to create a new cultural space stripped of ethnic prejudices and conflicts.

Thesis Structure

Though many critics have explored at length Arab American literature from specific angles, namely themes of war, violence, injustice, and hegemony, few have discussed the political, cultural, ethnic, and racial undertones of Arab American poetry. Taking such works as Salaita’s *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today* (2006), Majaj’s *Transformative Acts: Arab American Writing/Writing Arab America* (2012), Philip Metres’ “Introduction of Focus: Arab-American Literature after 9/11” (2012), Moqbel’s *Arab American Poetry 1967–Present: Songs of Defence and Hope in the Face of Arab-U.S. Political Tension* (2014), Semaan’s “Arab Americans: Stereotypes, Conflict, History, Cultural Identity and Post 9/11” (2014), and Muhammad Ali Muhammad El Sagheer Suliman’s “Who Are We? Where Do We Come from? Interrogating Arab Americans’ Identity and Demystifying the Boundaries of Arab American Literature” (2015) as a starting point for

thinking about questions of Arab American poetry, I investigate the three selected writers' realisation of their hybrid identity and cultural complexity in a contextual commentary, considering the relevant political contexts. This study consists of three chapters with specific focuses and objectives. The introduction has provided a brief historical background of Arab Americans including their cultural and religious diversity. In addition, the introduction has examined the factors that helped to construct Arab Americans' hybrid cultural identity and literary tradition. The portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in pre- and post-9/11 media is addressed in the introduction too. Moreover, the introduction discussed Arab American writers' tendency to deconstruct United States imperial hegemony in their poetry. This introduction has also reviewed different studies and critiques in the field of Arab American literature.

Chapter 1 examines the notions of hybridity, in-betweenness, and unhomeliness as well as their implications in celebrating diversity. The chapter explores the relationship between space and place and how they integrate to construct hybrid identity. In this sense, hybridity means overcoming the concepts of space and place, essentialism, nostalgia, and racialism to develop self-awareness and peaceful resistance to cultural bleach. In the chapter, I argue that the writers' poetry indicates a refusal of the ideological consideration of their ethnicity as "white." The discussion considered here is built on a relevant critique of specifically the poetry of the three writers. The chapter also defines the hybrid identity's struggle and sheds light on how Arab American writers understand the complexity of their existence with a special focus on the significance of youth in constructing Arab American identity. One of the significant implications in deconstructing the hybrid identity's struggle is the notion of anti-Arabism. Chapter 1 investigates the writers' reflections of the notion of anti-Arabism, which they employ to help their readers understand the complexity of being an Arab American. In the chapter, I argue that

the writers have implemented literary techniques to reveal their ethnicity either implicitly or explicitly, including textual hybridity and Arabisation, to resist cultural bleach. A discussion on the sense of border crossing is essential to the notion of hybridity and interrelated to the notions of space and place through the analysis of selected poems. Arab American poetic diction is given a special place in this chapter. The chapter also traces the innovated changes in Arab American poetic commentary, tradition, construction, forms, and themes.

Chapter 2 explores the writers' responses to the events of 9/11 and their attempts to create a minority discourse to refuting misrepresentation and the discourse of hatred promoted by much American media in the aftermath. The historical and political changes of the Arab world in the modern national states' era is traced in the chapter to shed light on the geographical, political, and sociocultural background challenges of the region before the events of 9/11. The chapter also calls attention to the reasons for the embargo of Arabic literature in the West pre-9/11, taking into consideration the relationship between politics and Arab American poetry. Chapter 2 also investigates the nature and context of post-9/11 Arab American discourse and its political, racial, and ethnic dimensions and implications. The emergence of neo-Orientalism is addressed in the chapter too. In addition, Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive picture of the place Palestine occupies in the poetry of Hazo, Handal, and Nye. The chapter examines the relevant administrative policies during United States presidential regimes, including George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden, and their influences on ethnic minorities in the United States, especially Arab Americans. Trumpism's values and ideologies are specifically discussed in Chapter 2 due to fuelling racialisation in the United States.

Chapter 3 concerns itself with the study of the literary means Arab American writers employ to create a discourse. These means include implementing different strategies from

different literary schools, such as adaptation, adopting the concept of the poet-prophet, and intersectionality. More discussion on the notion of anti-Arabism and how the writers utilised it to reflect on the discourse of superiority–inferiority is developed in the chapter. War poetry with global traumatic experiences is also investigated in the chapter to shed light on the universal concern of Arab American poetry. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive discussion on Arab American cultural synthesis to confront global health concerns, including COVID-19 and the writers' active participation as intellectual figures.

The conclusion provides a review of the findings of Chapter 1–3, reassesses the relevant analyses in the chapters, and provides some suggestions for further studies in the field of Arab American poetry.

Chapter One

Hybridity and Resistance

There is no denying that due to continuous political tension in the world, the number of migrants has rapidly increased globally. Subsequently, migrants' practices have contributed to cultural diversity and led to the theory of multiculturalism as a global paradigm. Among these migrants are many Arab people who have expressed their Arabic values, beliefs, norms, practices, and before all else, their Arabic identity, that is often marked by hybridity. Therefore, hybridity emerges as a profound global sociocultural component characterised by diversity. The term "hybridity" is derived from biology to define any new strains resulting from the mating or mixing of two strains. However, in the context of discussing multiculturalism, hybridity appears to be a threat to hegemonic inward-looking societies. According to Papastergiadis, hybridity is rejected in anti-miscegenation discourses in postcolonial and imperialism studies of the nineteenth century (258). Nowadays, hybridity is associated more with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "in-betweenness." In other words, for Bhabha, there is no pure identity and there is always a third interdependent or neutral zone of identity. In addition, Papastergiadis emphasises the notion of "multiple subjectivities" in contemporary discourse, releasing the individual from the notion of exclusivity (257). According to Bhabha, the subjectivity of the exile's identity always experiences trauma and unhomeliness that exceeds the limitations of place and creates a state of mind marked by rejection, disorientation, and lack of welcome from both cultures (*The Location of Culture* 2). In a *Social Text* article entitled "The World and the Home" (1992), Bhabha introduces the term of "unhomeliness" to define a human state that is not related to the homeland as a place, but to a feeling of alienation and a tendency to create an imaginative homeland, for it is this feeling that inhabits the soul and afflicts it with nostalgia and confusion

(141). Besides, the chapter title suggests a relationship between Arab American literature implemented in the hybrid identity and minorities' resistance. In other words, minorities' literature revolves around the marginalised groups' protest against the society. Majaj believes that Arab American literature embraces resistance to hegemonic discourses and cultural bleaching, assertion, and representation of the Arab American hybrid identity (*Transformative Acts* 15). From this premise, this chapter provides evidence from Arab American literature that cultural hybridity and writers with hybrid consciousness reveal a sense of resistance in their writings. Opponents of this might simply evaluate hybridity as an artistic form of storytelling narration. Ortega claims that the modern notions of hybridity "cause individuals to live in a state of uncertainty, making "hybridity" a synonym of liminality and constant in-betweenness" (ii). On the contrary, in this chapter, I argue that hybridised discourses disclose cultural resistance and refusal by embodying distinctive representations characterised by multiculturalism. Drawing from a deep analysis of the concepts of hybridity, resistance, in-betweenness, and unhomeliness, this chapter investigates the inherent trauma and sense of unbelonging experienced by Hazo, Handal, and Nye, that extends beyond physical place and results in a state of rejection and disorientation. This state of alienation is not tied to a specific homeland but rather characterised by a profound sense of nostalgia and confusion.

The chapter discusses hybridity as a celebration of diversity, considering relevant discussions of space, place, and border crossing, and their significance in constructing hybrid identity and culture. Chapter 1 sheds light on how the selected poets have developed an understanding of their hybrid identity, enabling them to critique both the self and the community within the context of Arab American literature. Although the selected poetry reveals the struggle associated with hybrid identity, I argue that the three writers have overcame these challenges by

reconstructing a new Arab American identity. In chapter 1, I contend that hybridised discourses disclose cultural resistance and refusal by embodying distinctive representations characterised by multiculturalism. The argument employs textual hybridity and Arabisation as literary techniques to resist cultural bleach and assert identity. The chapter traces the development of Arab American poetic diction, themes, and structural forms, highlighting the significance of poetry as a genre, especially for Arab Americans.

Hybridity and the Celebration of Diversity in Literature

Discussing hybridity is essential in the discourse on postcolonialism and identity. The popular interest in cultural hybridity has led to greater use of the term as one of the most widely employed postcolonial terms produced by colonisation and globalisation. In defining cultural hybridity, Thomas Elliot states:

> Modern migration has transplanted a mixture of social, religious, economic or political determinations and migrants have taken with them only one part of the original culture and the new culture…, what has developed on the new soil is bafflingly both alike and different from the parent culture. Moreover, in such situation, culture sympathy and culture clash emerge. (63–64)

In this sense, cultural hybridity reflects the interconnection and complexity of modern societies, where cultures are continuously reshaped through interaction. In the foreword to Werbner & Modood's *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (2015), Bhabha introduces the concept of hybridity in literature as an element of global neoliberalism in cultural discourses that celebrate diversity and as a hidden power of minorities' resistance. According to Bhabha, cultural hybridity crosses boundaries and "can morph into a monster of hegemony" (x). However, Said defined the notion of hybridity as a "protective enclosure" and a liberal reaction against hegemony and imperialism (*Culture and Imperialism*

xiv). As a Palestinian who grew up in Egypt and taught literature at Columbia University in the United States and was the founder of post-colonial theory, Said consistently referred to himself as “out of place” in reference to his hybrid identity that cannot be located. Furthermore, Said believed in the duality of the identity that is structured and built on human experiences, and that resulted in formulating cultures and ethnic identities (*Culture and Imperialism* 336). Accordingly, ethnic identity is characterised by a deep-rooted sense of belonging shaped by cultural heritage, values, traditions, rituals, language, and religion. It is related to the idea of “out of place” by emphasising the components that contribute to ethnic identity, which can often be complex and multifaceted.

It is worth noting here that critiques of celebrating hybridity and its associated rhetoric have arisen over the last few decades, including from scholars within postcolonial studies. In “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism” (1994), Arif Dirlik argues that celebrating hybridity can obscure the underlying power dynamics and historical contexts that shape postcolonial identities. Dirlik articulates his concerns about the potential pitfalls of celebrating hybridity, such as brushing away inherent inequalities and injustice, which are disconnected from the lived realities of postcolonial subjects (342–43). This critical engagement with hybridity reveals its significance to understanding the evolving nature of modern societies and for approaching Arab American literature.

Moreover, recent theoretical developments in cultural studies have dealt with migrants’ contributions to cultural innovation and acknowledged the concepts of hybridity and in-betweenness. Because these theories were developed through a critique of literary works produced by migrant settlers, this chapter is aimed at examining these concepts from a literary perspective. People with hybrid identities might constantly question their authenticity, which is

privileged in their Old World but becomes destabilised in their New World. In "Cultural Authenticity Versus Hyphenated Identities: Transnational Modes of Belonging and Citizenship in *The Inheritance of Exile*: Stories from South Philly" (2020), Salam and Abualadas argue that Arab American writers have employed various strategies to contribute to the mainstream American literary tradition. These strategies include developing a strong awareness of their hybrid identities and adhering to the host country's standards of cultural authenticity (52). This reflects the fact that the concepts of hybridity and authenticity are not contradictory but related in a complicated manner. In many cases, what is perceived as authentic may actually be the result of hybridisation over time. Cultures are not static, they evolve and adapt through contact with other cultures, leading to new forms of authenticity that reflect these interactions. Thus, Hazo, Handal, and Nye's sources of hybrid identity are authenticated by oral narrations, literary texts, and national heritage. Integrating symbols of Arabic traditions in poetry serves to articulate cultural identity, preserving the Arabic legacy and striving for authenticity. For example, Nye's personal experience differs from Hazo's, as she was rooted in and connected to Arabic culture by growing up in Ramallah and Jerusalem. In her introduction to *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*, published in 2002, Nye recounts a story about the generosity of Arabs in which an Arab seller in the streets of Jerusalem gave her and her friends "twice the amount of cloth [they] paid for" (xv). She also reflected on authentic Arabic magnanimity in "Red Brocade" by narrating how Arabs welcome a stranger as a guest:

> The Arabs used to say,
> When a stranger appears at your door,
> feed him for three days
> before asking who he is,
> where he's come from,
> where he's headed. (lines 1–6)

It is an authentic and notable Arabic tradition to welcome guests with hospitality for three days without asking them any questions about the purpose of the visit. The hospitality tradition weaves the fabric of trust in the Arab context. In contrast, the hospitality quotient is more perilous in the Western tradition. The notion of treachery in hospitality can be repeatedly perceived in Western literature. Macbeth's murder of his royal guest in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606) and the seductive lady hostess who kills kings, princes, knights, and warriors in John Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (1819) are two landmarks in the Western tradition in which betrayal dominates the hospitality scene. However, Nye's reflection, of the innate Arab hospitality and welcoming the guest, is central to the articulation and representation of her hybrid identity. In the second stanza, she gives more details that echo certain practices and focuses on how the cultural practices of Arabs imbue their tradition:

> Rice? Pine nuts?
> Here, take the red brocade pillow.
> My child will serve water
> to your horse. (lines 13–16)

Nye's speaker offers food to their guest in an essentialised image of an Arabic tradition and the honoured guests of the prophet Ibrahim, who is known as the father of the Arabs. In addition, the image presents an attempt at authentic cultural identity that emphasises its contextual construction with practices such as offering a red brocade pillow to the guest – a direct reference to the Islamic world – while the child waters the horse. In this image, culture and identity are produced through the representation of attempted authenticity. However, the emphasis on authenticity may risk essentialising Arab American culture and identity, reducing its complex narratives to a fixed, singular one. To avoid this, it is crucial to recognise the diversity and evolving nature of Arab American cultural identity. Nye employs this technique at the end of the poem by introducing the collective "we": "We will snip fresh mint / into your tea" (lines 24–25).

“Arabic Coffee,” published in the same collection, is another poem in which Nye attempts to authenticate her hybrid identity when she describes how her father prepares Arabic coffee while telling his children old stories:

> It was never too strong for us:
> make it blacker, Papa,
> thick in the bottom,
> tell again how years will gather
> in small white cups,
> how luck lives in a spot of grounds.
>
> Leaning over the stove, he let it
> boil to the top, and down again.
> Two times. No sugar in his pot. (lines 1–9)

Then, Nye adds to this image another distinctly Arabic tradition in which Arabic and Western culture overlap: “And the place where men and women / break off from one another / was not present in that room” (lines 10–12). In these lines, Nye’s Western reality contradicts her Arabic and Islamic legacy, in which men and women sit in separate rooms. According to Nye, this cultural practice can be seen as an act of resistance against the colonial encounter itself that reflects the fact that every cultural type tends to be situated geographically. In other words, cultural norms and traditions develop within specific geographical contexts and are shaped by historical, social, and political factors unique to those regions. This viewpoint implies that these traditional practices are a deliberate assertion of cultural identity in the face of outside pressures, such as colonialism.

Hazo, who grew up and was educated in the United States, has attempted to authenticate his hybrid identity on several occasions. In 2005, he published his collection of multiple-themed poems titled *A Flight to Elsewhere*. Among these is “The Nearness That Is All,” in which he refers to two authentic expressions of heartfelt love in Arabic culture:

> Love’s what the Arabs

> mean when they bless those
> with children: "May God keep them
> for you."
> Or why a mother
> whispers to her suckling, "May you
> bury me." (lines 8–14)

Before these lines, Hazo demonstrates his understanding of love in the Western canon by referring to Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* (1598) and quoting Bassanio's words when he tells his lady, "you have bereft me of all / words" (lines 180–81). However, in this context, he can only reflect on the authenticity of his Arab identity and the way Arabs express love from romantic and parental perspectives. The comparison between the two cultures reveals how Bassanio, a Westerner, is speechless when expressing his emotions, whereas the Arabic speakers are more spontaneous, religious, and emotional.

Although Hazo's reflection is based on details from everyday life, Handal's reflection is more complex and involves admiration for the multiplicity of her combined Arabic, English, and French identity. In 2020, Handal published her collection of poems *Life in a Country Album*, in which she combines the three cultures. "Les chemins Lumiere," or "Light Paths," is one of her French titles. In the epigraph, Handal quotes Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu, Blanc, Rouge*, originally published in 1998, to point out the speciality and complexity of the hybrid identity: "There's a big difference between speaking in French and speaking French" (qtd. in Handal, *Life in a Country Album* 16).[5] Due to this complexity, Handal describes herself as a stranger despite the dominance of French culture in her experiences and her tendency to express her feelings in French:

> While the city stood
> between uneven lights,
> I slid away

[5] Alain Mabanckou (1966–) is a French journalist, novelist, and poet of African descent. He is currently a professor of literature at UCLA.

as if I didn't belong
to its questions,
as if French wasn't mine,
even if it's the first language
I used to conjugate love, (lines 1–8)

Handal then refers to two French figures, Napoleon Bonaparte and Joan of Arc, to highlight one aspect of French culture's influence on her. French cultural influences, including heroic figures and images, have significantly shaped her thinking and poetic composition. These influences extend beyond mere aesthetics, playing a prominent role in shaping the individual's beliefs and values, thus contributing to the formation of the individual identity. She also focuses on Arab American literature as a means of resisting the French military regime. The poem suggests a form of nationalism shaped by a postcolonial identity, where literature and cultural expression become tools of resistance and redefinition of national identity. This literature also offers new perspectives on nationhood and nationalism in the postcolonial era, involving the blending and reinterpreting of cultural influences, such as French figures, and resistance against colonial legacies. This leads to a multifaceted understanding of national identity in a postcolonial context. From this perspective, Handal's case deserves special attention and can be seen as an example of an international literary activism against colonisation:

even if Napoleon and Jeanne d'Arc
confessed their confusions
to my childhood dreams,
and the books by Apollinaire
were as lurid as the *Muallaqat*. (lines 9–13)

As a poet, she engages Guillaume Apollinaire to show how his poetry affected her writing in the same way the Arabic *Muallaqat* did.[6] She confesses that both literary works confused her due to

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[6] Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) was one of the foremost poets of the early twentieth century and a forefather of surrealism.
The *Muallaqat* or "The Suspended Odes" is a group of seven long Arabic poems that were hung in the Kaaba in Makkah in the eighth century, and which are considered the primary source of Arabic poetry.

their difficulty. This confession calls attention to Handal's dual identity and indicates that all three cultures are in continuous conflict. However, this conflict is just as relevant to the authenticity of her multicultural nature as a hidden vivid stream. In other words, Handal's poetry speaks of her inner conflict as well as that of others who have a multicultural identity. Notably, Apollinaire's presence is significant here due to the nature of his work, which suffered from the distortion of the poet's three lives. According to Shattuck, during the Renaissance and Romantic periods, there was an argument regarding the separation of the poet's life into three parts: his biography, his myth, and his verse. Apollinaire did not openly discuss this in his writings, but he alluded to it in his 1910 work, *The Heresiarch & Co* (3). Handal writes convincingly and implicitly about this trinity in her poetry when she accounts for her multiplicity. However, she also refers to the *Muallaqat* due to their importance to Arabic literature and the variety of their themes, which include being proud of victories. By invoking the *Muallaqat*, Handal reveals her nostalgia for the lost glory of Arabic culture. From a different angle, it can be claimed that Arab American poets have been constructed in the literary sense in an American national context within the boundaries of the American national state. As Benedict Anderson asserts in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (2016), every citizen in modern nations has this vivid image of an authentic imagined community despite of the "inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (5–6). For Handal, the complexity of her identity and experiences often reflects the intricate interplay between her Palestinian heritage and her experiences in Western countries and the impossibility of unifying them into a single context.

During the past years, alongside with the *Muallaqat*, several books and anthologies have shaped Arab American identity and situated Arab American literature within the American

ethnic and multicultural studies fields. According to Salam and Abualadas, these anthologies repositioned Arab American literature within the American literary tradition. Although *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab American Poetry* (1988) resists the politics of minorities, *Food for Our Grandmothers: Arab American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994) investigates the reasons behind their invisibility and alienation, and *Post-Gibran Anthology of New Arab American Writing* (1999) traces Arab American themes after Gibran (52–53). In essence, the three anthologies serve as significant milestones in Arab American literature, encompassing the narrative construction of minority discourses.

Over decades, Arab-American writers have tackled the identity struggle theme at the forefront of their writings. For example, Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*, which is the first Arab American novel, published in 1911, reveals Rihani's own dual identity conflict when his character Khalid declares, "I am a citizen of two worlds – a citizen of the Universe; I owe allegiance to two kingdoms" (xx). Rihani raises a rhetorical question that haunts every immigrant, even today: "Where and to whom do I belong?" Even in the twenty-first century, Rihani's identity struggle remains unresolved. In "Carrying Continents in Our Eyes: Arab American Poetry after 9/11" (2015), Philip Metres investigates the effects of the attacks on narrating the complexity of the hybrid identity in Arab American poetry. According to the writer, contemporary Arab American poets understand the complexity of their identity, which "is haunted by the knowledge of U. S. privilege and the national liberation struggles in the postcolonial Middle East" (124). Thus, contemporary Arab American writers are capable of facing the most difficult issue facing Arab Americans today which is deconstructing and reconstructing the Arab American ethnic identity. As an Arab American, Nye is torn between two extremes: her American present and her Arabic past. She comments on the Arab American identity in her open letter published after the traumatic 9/11

attacks entitled “To Any Would-Be Terrorists” (2004). In the letter, Nye is writing the other side of the Arab story by identifying herself with a distinct identity: “I feel a little closer to you than many Americans could possibly feel” (362). She declares her Americanness and at the same time her Arabness and creates a new identity that is marked by intersectionality and in-betweenness.

In 2005, Handal published her collection *The Lives of Rain*, which is divided into three main parts to illustrate the Palestinian diaspora. The third part consists of one long poem, “Amrika,” in which Handal narrates her poetic journey from Palestine to the United States via France, Haiti, New England, Miami, the Dominican Republic, England, and back to the United States. Throughout the poem, the subject pronouns “I,” “we,” and “they” involve the reader in the uncertain feeling of Otherness. In the fourth stanza, ‘Opening,’ Handal narrates her story of alienation in New England:

> I walk through Fenway Park, through
> streets with names that escape me,
> their stories of sea
> their cries for a stranger’s grief. (IV. lines 11–15)

The feeling of exclusion is prominent in the fourth stanza, where the lyrical “I” is alienated from every part of the city except for the stationary, which reveals the difference between the present, moving self, and the past: “Only the stationary I left in that apartment / remembers what I might / forget to say” (IV. lines 16–18). Without a full stop, Handal’s speaker realises that this feeling of exclusion has changed:

> but time looks different now,
> it wears another hat and owns a car,
> and we are comfortable in foreign tongues
> but the music that continues to move us
> is a melody from the east —
> an opening of whispers in our shivers. (IV. lines 18–23)

The collective “we” indicates contemporary Arab Americans are more integrated into American society, primarily owing to their proficient language acquisition: “we are comfortable in foreign

tongues" (IV. line 20). Nevertheless, they are still attached to their Eastern culture, as expressed in the lines: "the music that continues to move us / is a melody from the east —" (IV. lines 21–22). It is noteworthy that for many Arabs, Arabic serves as a lingua franca spoken alongside other languages. Even when Latin functioned as a lingua franca in Europe, it did not hold the same demotic status. English and French have a similar function in much of sub-Saharan Africa, as a direct modern equivalent. In these lines, Handal stresses the uniqueness of Arab American hybrid identity that has resulted from the mixing of two cultures. Then, the poet ends the sixth stanza, "Another Sun," with a question that haunts every contemporary Arab American by using the collective "we":

> Why do we insist
> on disappointing ourselves —
> past or future
> suspense or dream
> instead of hoping the present. (VI. lines 26–30)

Here, Handal calls for reconstructing a new Arab American identity that is fearless of the past and passionate for a new life. She describes the past in the seventh stanza, "Incantation":

> as I cross the different faces of the wind,
> a past I passed in words and dreams,
> Yeats and Beckett, smoking *sheesha*
> on Edgeware Road (VII. lines 4–7)

In this poetic journey, Handal uses the lyrical "I" to involve herself as the Other in the search for a new identity and reconstruction procedure while she refers to two of the foremost figures of twentieth century literature, William Butler Yeats and Samuel Beckett. Although Yeats and Becket have nothing in common, except they were Irish poets, they were lived in a diaspora. The "I" smoking *sheesha* on Edgeware Road, which is known as a place where Arabs live in the city of London and indicates that hybrid identities reside collectively and solve the identity struggle. In the last stanza '*Debke* in New York,' Handal successfully portrays a picture of the unity of the Arab American community within the American one. *Debke* is a typical Arabic folkloric communal dance performed

during celebrations and weddings to symbolise the unity of the community. A group of Middle Eastern instruments are commonly used to play the background music for *Debke*, including, *mijwiz*, *tablah*, *riq*, and *oud*.[7] By ending the poetic journey with such a communal dance, Handal is alluding to Shakespeare's comedies, such as *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) and *As You Like It* (1599), which end in dancing to resolve tragedy. According to Handal, resolving the dual identity struggle requires acceptance, and she insists that we "wonder why we are obsessed / with difference, / our need to change the other?" (VIII. lines 13–15). To the end of the poem, the lyrical "I" lives to see "a New York *debke*" (VIII. line 27) and imagines finding the way home: "I have found my way home" (VIII. line 32). Ultimately, the journey of navigating a hybrid identity struggle ends with harmonious existence and integration of a present life in New York and the echoes of an Arabic past, vividly embodied in the folkloric dance of *debke*.

In the realm of music, it is worth noting that this art form serves as a key cultural symbol that structures people's lives and is central to their sense of identity. This is very true of the Arab American community and of other ethnic groups. Mainly, preserving ethnic music is a form of peaceful resistance to the dominant culture and the threat of identity erasure, as well as a form of political expression. Martiniello and Lafleur state that political and social studies have not given enough consideration to investigating the relevance between the politics of minorities, identity, and music. The writers believe that music and musical instruments can construct an ethnic minority's identity and can be developed to formulate a political expression (1191). Moreover, music distinguishes ethnic groups from others and at the same time creates unity within one ethnic group. In poetry, musical instruments function as cultural representations and manifest

[7] *Mijwiz* is a kind of reed clarinet.
Tableh is a small hand-drum.
Riq is a tambourine.
Oud is a pear-shaped stringed instrument with a characteristic deep mellow sound.

symbolic meanings. They can perform cultural roles, from providing refuge to embodying resistance. "Song for Refugees," published online in *Poetry Foundation* (2019), is part of a process of identity claim-making. Throughout the poem, Philip Metres reflects on how the *oud*, a musical instrument, is rooted in the production of new cultural forms and hybridities:

> Ooze, oud. Ease hearts whose eyes sink low.
> Be hourglass in the pillaged O —.
> Be wells none see. Unstoppered tears.
> O oud, we gather in your bowl.
>
> O ladle of ores, scoop ink here
> now seeping from the foreigner,
> be sighs, O oud, and coven aches
> in the dark of millions of ears. (lines 1–8)

The speaker addresses the *oud*, asking it to ease the pain of the refugees after all the horrors they have been through in the journey of asylum across the oceans. For the speaker, the *oud* is the only one capable of translating these aches and pains of the diaspora. Amidst all the pain, it is the *oud* that can voice the unvoiced and enrich cultural understanding. Philip Metres incorporates the *oud* into a more broadly based and widely referenced notion of music. By integrating the *oud*, the writer acknowledges and respects the cultural heritage and diversity it represents. This integration highlights the interconnectedness of different musical traditions and encourages appreciation for cultural hybridity. Besides celebrating hybridity, the *oud* works as an active participant to shape the social and cultural life of migrants. In this context, the *oud* defines and unites the Arab American ethnic group: "O oud, we gather in your bowl" (line 4). The writer expands the functional aesthetics of the *oud* to introduce contemporary controversial issues such as the politics of minorities and sociocultural struggles. He explicitly explores the interrelations between the *oud*'s Eastern melody aesthetics and the instrumental symbolism in order to explain the immense power of the *oud* and to celebrate hybridity.

In "Orphic," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), Handal engages music in the social life of diaspora, as well. For the writer, the aesthetics of music embodies the notion of border crossing, physically and mentally (see my interpretation on pages 78–89), as well as the possible human-music-divine relations as seen in the healing power of music.

> waited for my lover to tell me
> the sea can't break
> and found the musician
> born in a small town
> that reminded me
> that music always takes us back
> to the cities we are made from. (lines 41–47)

At the end of the diaspora journey, Handal's speaker defines music as neither a subject nor an object but as a source of action capable of healing. According to the speaker, music can define and identify the individual identity in sociocultural contexts. Handal's poem provides an observation on what music evokes or provokes when played to expand the understanding of the social life of music. Likewise, in "Your Mystery Is the Milky Way," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), Handal alludes to Mahmoud Darwish's "Sonnet II," published in *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* (2003), and starts a virtual conversation with Darwish's speaker in which the *oud* creates a sense of belonging and unity.[8] Darwish, who is critically acclaimed as one of the most important pioneer poets in contemporary Arabic poetry, built on the old English literary traditions while he artistically created new possibilities. In "Sonnet II," Darwish wrote:

> Perhaps you ask only for ambiguity when you turn your back to the
> river.
> There, an autumn sprinkles water onto a stage from a passing
> cloud.
> There, on what you left behind of the crumbs of your departure.
> The Milky Way is your ambiguity, the dust of nameless stars.
> Your ambiguity is a night in pearls lighting nothing but water.
> As for speech, it can light the night of someone setting forth

[8] Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) was a Palestinian poet. Darwish used Eden as a metaphor for the loss of Palestine and the anguish of dispossession and exile.

> between two odes and two rows of palms, with the single word:
> *love*. (lines 1–7)

Darwish followed the old tradition of writing a sonnet in fourteen lines containing strong themes of love. Instead of the common traditional forms of the Petrarchan octave-sestet or the Shakespearean three quatrains and one heroic couplet, Darwish used the uncommon septet form known as rhyme royal to break with the old tradition. The writer depicts a moment of unity between the speaker and nature to reveal the ambiguity of the human mind and psyche when it comes to expressing love.

> I am the one who saw his tomorrow when he saw you.
> I am the one who saw gospels written by the last idolater,
> on the slopes of Gilead before the old countries, and after.
> I am the cloud returning to a fig tree which bears my name,
> just as the sword bears the face of the slaughtered.
> Perhaps when you turn your shadow to me, you bestow unto
> metaphor
> the meaning of something that is about to happen. (lines 8–14)

Darwish's speaker reveals a high level of self-freedom and freedom of awareness to help understand the ambiguity of the human mind and psyche. Proceeding from the same premise, Handal's poem is interwoven as a conversation between Handal's speaker and Darwish's to construct an understanding of the human mind in which the poet employs music to play a decisive role. The intertextuality that Handal practices in the poem intersects with Darwish's creative influence.

> : Who belongs together?
> : *Who undresses their wounds?*
> : Those with a roof.
> : *Those without.*
> : Those with a compass.
> : *Those without.*
> : Those with an oud.
> : *Those without.*
> : Those who dance.
> : *Even if grief wears a dangling ankle bracelet.*

: Even if we can't gather all the natives.
: *But we'll always be able to gather their hearts.*
: Maybe when I finish this line, you will reappear
and the metaphor you left me in a verse, will liberate me
from what is about to happen. (lines 29–43)

Handal's speaker believes in the immense power of the *oud* to define and identify the individual identity, whereas Darwish's speaker keeps giving ambiguous answers to leave open the possibility. Darwish's speaker's ambiguity is essential to the conversation, just like the *oud* for Handal's speaker. For Handal's speaker, the *oud* is an enabler of a social identifier. Bates asserts that musical instruments, for example, long necked lutes such as the *oud*, the saz, and the kopuz, are part of ethnic practices and would be typically used to identify a social identity (377). Thereby, the *oud* has a powerful force in this context and suggests a sense of collectivity in diaspora. However, Darwish's speaker suggests a broader sense of collectivity in a humanistic sense in the line "*But we'll always be able to gather their hearts*" (line 41) as a possible message from the answer.

However, Hazo's sense of identity is expanded to interact with his social and cultural Westerner identity and implies a belonging to a Westerner social status. Whereas Philip Metres's and Handal's speakers have been deeply involved in the *oud*'s aesthetic melody as an instrumental cultural representation of the East, Hazo provides a potential understanding of the psychological and moral effects of opera music. In "To Amira Willighagen," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), the writer spontaneously responds to a live music event.[9] In his response, he indicates that music in its cultural form transcends social and ethnic boundaries.

I listen to a nine-year-old
Dutch girl singing Puccini
on stage alone as flawlessly
as Callas or Netrebko.

[9] Amira Willighagen (2004–) is a Dutch soprano singer. When she was nine years old, Willighagen won the sixth season of *Holland's Got Talent* when she performed "O Mio Babbino Caro" from Puccini's opera *Gianni Schicci.*

Her voice halts me.
I want
to word my feelings, but nothing
happens.
I have words in surplus
for the virus-ridden air,
for cities gone to chaos,
for soldiers trained for homicide
in chosen wars. (lines 1–13)

The young talented soprano inspires Hazo's speaker to transcend their reality. Her voice appears as a foreground for representations and aesthetics encouraging the speaker to move between the symbolic roles of the musical borders. Campana and Morris believe that Giacomo Puccini's late operas, especially *II trittico* (The Triptych) (1918), three one-act operas including *Gianni Schicchi* as the third and final part, are understood as cultural representations of controversial political issues including nationalism, imperialism, and fascism (133). Due to their sense of responsibility, Hazo's speaker strives to voice these issues and their ramifications on the social, political, humanistic, and warfare levels. Proceeding from this premise, Hazo's invocation of the opera is not merely for its orchestral aesthetics. The writer employs music to engage with contemporary political ideologies of his Western status. In his engagement, there is a debate between the aesthetics of the voice of the soprano and the speaker's thoughts about the ramifications of the political ideologies that cause chaos and war:

But now
I'm wordless.
Hearing a child
sing *O Mio Babbino Caro*
evokes from women and some men
intelligent tears.
Applause
seems insufficient.
No one
speaks. (lines 14–23)

To the end of the poem, the abstract debate ends with the triumph of opera music. Hazo's speaker cannot voice their thoughts and is taken by the aesthetic beauty of the soprano's musical performance. In this sense, the poem sheds light on the cultural work that music can perform to anesthetise and silence the psyche towards the ramifications of political agendas. It also highlights the forms of politics and aesthetics in Western narratives, on the one hand. On the other hand, it indicates Hazo's attempt to maintain his status in the Westerner canon and transcends his poetic frame of reference as an Arab American. Therefore, the poet implicitly reflects on how he mutes his Arab voice in deference to the American mainstream. The poem also draws the reader into the inner emotional lives and inside the minds of the audience, which gives more depth to the writer's Western narrative.

In "Big Song," published in *Everything Comes Next* (2020), Nye depicts a personal experience with music and the horizons it opened for her.

> Under the bridge at Washington Street
> a man with acoustic guitar
> was plucking and singing again   in Spanish
> always only in Spanish
> once I would have called him an old man
> before I got old   now no one is old
> his voice amplifying   thanks to the bridge
> shivering off iron girders   echoing concrete walls
> becoming so huge   as if through a megaphone
> but sweeter   rich and round   giant sugar cookie
> of a voice   traveling to our side of the river (lines 1–11)

Through practice writing poetry for decades, Nye creates a distinctive line shape in "Big Song" to stress fluidity and emphasise musicality. The writer's ability to craft such a distinctive line shape is a result of her extensive experience and skill developed over many years of practice. Regardless of the use of inconsistent indentation and spaces in the middle of some lines that create a halting rhythm, the structure of the poem builds around the way music enriches oases of

wisdom and builds cultural understanding. Thereby, the poet practices a greater degree of control over the reader and the way and the speed the poem is read. From a sociocultural perspective, Nye employs the cultural identity of the guitar to transcend the cultural boundaries between the musician and her speaker and construct a cultural space. The narrative that takes place in Washington Street and the musician who always sings in Spanish indicate the sociocultural web the guitar interweaves. The guitar occupies a prominent place in Spanish culture. Dawe and Bennett assert that the guitar can create a cultural discourse in Spanish culture:

> Clearly, musical instruments are empowered, not only by their sound but also by the written word, verbalizations, visual imagery, gestures and movements imbued with values and ideals that are created and maintained within specific social, cultural, political and economic settings. (64)

On the one hand, the image of the man playing the guitar and singing in Spanish eventually forms a sociocultural web in the poem. On the other hand, it encourages Nye's speaker to consider other possibilities and opens new horizons of cultural understanding:

> my three-year-old walking partner
> twirled in place *that sounds big*
> never asking *why would a man be singing?*
> near our chattering ducks
> who never lose hope we might one day
> defy the signs and *feed them*
> river reeds blooming yellow bells of Esperanza
> only a few hours distance from camps of wire and concrete
> thin mattresses aluminum foil sheets
> sisters and brothers whose stories we can't really know
> whatever we think about them what happens next
> how hard it has been (lines 12–23)

In these lines, Nye's speaker succeeds in moving between spaces and introduces the reader to a new setting. Despite the beauty of the natural surroundings, the speaker depicts an image of refugee camps "a few hours distance" (line 19), where there are plenty of untold stories. The image reveals the writer's concern with the refugee crisis and how it shapes the politics of

minorities. The power of the musicality of the guitar enables Nye's speaker to roam and transcend the limitation of place before considering other possibilities about the legacy of the guitar player:

> who is this man?   so many years
> singing in winter   summer   no cup beside him
> not asking for anything   people run past with their dogs
> ears plugged   their own music
> I don't know where he lives
> secret stories under the bridge
> all these years of echo (lines 24–30)

The facts that the guitar player is an outsider, and his music is ignored by people who "run past with their dogs / ears plugged   their own music" (lines 26–27) provide an illustration of the politics of minorities and their cultural exclusion and marginalisation in social contexts. The power of the musicality of the guitar emphasises a range of social and cultural exchanges between the speaker and the guitar player and creates an intimacy between the poet and a Western musical instrument.

The selected poets have employed the aesthetics of musicality to convey a set of overlapping ethnoscapes. In their poetry, music evokes and provides cultural understanding and social interaction and constructs cultural identity. Nye's "Big Song" and Hazo's "To Amira Willighagen" intersect with the writers' Western present. Opera music and the guitar are used as a construction of the self, others, and communities. Unlike Nye and Hazo, Philip Metres' "Song for Refugees" and Handal's "Your Mystery Is the Milky Way" explore a narrative of collectivity with the Eastern musicality of the *oud* in which the musical instrument provides a sense of identity and place.

However, it is worth noting that despite the developed awareness of Arab American intellectuals, the relation between Arab American ethnic identity and American imperialism remains

controversial. It is believed that Arab American critics have initiated strong ties to American imperialism by deconstructing the American imperialistic intentions both domestically and internationally. In his article, “Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism: Arab Americans before and after 9/11” (2005), Salaita argues that Arab American intellectuals, such as Edward Said and Lisa Suhair Majaj, have exposed American hegemonic works and challenged the American hegemony, although discussing American imperialism is taboo in the Arab world (146–47). This concern was expressed widely by the selected poets. After the breakout of the endless war on terror and the military occupation of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, Hazo’s “For Which It Stands,” published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), discusses the topic and criticises American imperialism in the Arab world after the Iraqi War broke out in 2003:

> Today
> for once we’re spared the names
> of occupying soldiers shot
> or crocketed to fragments in Iraq.
> Collateral damage?
> Two boys,
> their mother and both grandparents.
> No names for them…
> Just Arabs. (lines 34–42)

Hazo intends to reveal the cruelty of the American hegemony and inhumanity to the Other, yet, involves himself as an Arab American using the collective “we.” While the names of the American soldiers are honourably announced, a whole Iraqi family is buried unnamed because they are “Just Arabs” (line 42). In the eyes of American imperialism, their deaths are just “collateral damage.” Hazo uses his multiculturalism as a spatial strategy of “Othering” that leads him to engage critically with the American narration as well as the Arab narrative tradition. This strategy enables him to navigate beyond binary identity politics and address spatial injustice. By actively participating in these cultural

dialogues, Hazo challenges established narratives and promotes an understanding of identity and space.

Handal's "Amrika" also can be read as a literary strategy of resisting the hegemonic American narratives that promote American superiority and intentions of excluding and alienating the Other. The title reflects a sense of resistance by using the transcription of the word "America" instead of using the English word, which suggests a deliberate act of resistance, emphasising a distinct perspective and challenging dominant narratives. The poet's antihegemonic journey passes through Haiti as one of the colonies in the history of colonialism. This interpretation implies that the poet draws inspiration from a historical context of resistance against colonial powers, reinforcing the theme of challenging dominant forces. In the third stanza, Handal narrates the story of the natives' resistance to the colonisers:

> Cite' Soleil, where the sun forgets
> and people compete for the heavens,
> with baskets on their heads
> perfectly balanced
> walking at all speeds
> counting their steps their days,
> hoping to find God
> in the poor hands of another. (III. lines 11–18)

In Cite' Soleil, Handal depicts the natives fighting the coloniser to the death and competing for Heaven, which reflects their resistance despite the fact that they live in an extreme poverty.[10] In the context of its distant history of colonialism, Handal offers an enduring critique of the domestic inequalities that arose from colonialism. Haiti, where Cite' Soleil is located, underwent phases of colonisation. Its brutally destructive colonial history started with Christopher Columbus's discovery of the island of Hispaniola and annexation of the island for the Spanish Crown from 1492 to 1625. By the seventeenth century, France had built a settlement in the west of the island and started a colony

[10] Located in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Cite' Soleil or Sun City is an extremely poor community.

that lasted from 1711 to 1789. Diaz et al. claim that France had no intention to build an offshore colony in Haiti. On the contrary, France's colonial practices "focused solely on the systematic extraction of resources" and extended control over the slave trade, which led to a long history of lack of development of infrastructure, which still endures (494). The Haitian Revolution broke out in 1791 with the uprising of the slaves, and in 1804, Haiti won its independence. Nevertheless, France, England, and the United States refused to acknowledge Haitian independence until the Haitian government compensated France "for the revenue shortfall incurred from the loss of its former slaves and agricultural plantations." The Haitian government had to pay France 150 million francs, "a debt it could only pay by borrowing from private French banks at exorbitant rates and by closing half of its schools" (495). The extreme poverty the loan payment caused created destabilisation and paved the way for the United States to occupy Haiti from 1915 to 1934. Haiti was recently ranked 163 out of 191 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index, with three-fifths of the population below the poverty line ('United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICIF), Country Office Annual Report, 2022, Haiti' paras. 1–2). Themes of national resistance in Haiti and poverty in Cite' Soleil are in contrast to life in America. In the fourth stanza, "Opening," Handal describes migrants' life in New England:

> New England
> quiet echoes raindrops autumn leaves
> an alley of tiny butterflies
> the difference between where we are from
> and where we now live. (IV. lines 1–5)

The writer draws a comparison between two different worlds. The Old World is marked by poverty and death and the New World is full of life: "raindrops autumn leaves / an alley of tiny butterflies" (IV. lines 2–3). Noticeably, Handal's poetry marks the continuity between the artistic legacies of the two worlds. Handal's comparison of the two worlds parallels the binary

oppositions of "us" versus "them." The exploration of these oppositions extends beyond a simple comparison of two worlds; it delves into the complexities of identity and transcending geographical borders. In other words, it celebrates the hybrid identity's struggle to cross the borderland and mirrors the hybrid identity's gradual development. By adopting a Romantic perspective, the writer strives to depict the development of the hybrid identity. Images such as raindrops and butterflies become a metaphor for the profound transformation those navigating the borderland experienced. Thus, the writer shifts the traditional critical focus of Romanticism and its interaction with nature toward the notion of border crossing. The juxtaposition of the forgetting sun and heavens in the Old World against the rejuvenating symbols of raindrops, autumn leaves, and butterflies in the New World critically reflects the intersection of nature and the politics of minorities.

However, the relationship between place and space becomes important to study due to its significance in the migration act and its reflection on identity. Linhard and Parsons argue that the relationship between a migrant's identity, space, and place is interlocking because migration takes place between spaces and results in the notion of in-betweenness, in which it is difficult to determine the differences between the concepts of place and space. Linhard and Parsons state that what gives places their importance is human contributions, whether practices or manifestations, in building spaces. In this sense, the writers connect places to identities that are shaped by personal experiences and memories. They conclude that an identity is a group of ideas that express the individuals' positions within societies, whereas space is an abstract receptacle containing human practices and experiences that in turn constitute place (1–20). However, the concepts of identity, space, and place contribute to formulating the concept of border crossing that is encountered in liminality and intersectionality. Azade Seyhan, a professor of humanities at

the University of Washington, emphasises the idea of crossing borders for writers of ethnic minorities who try through their work to move back and forth between borders and cling to their ethnic identity and reach the Other, expressing the inherent crisis of identity within them (4). In this sense, the selected poetry represents a module integrating the significance of these concepts in constructing the hybrid identity.

Despite the ambiguity in defining cultural hybridity, W. E. B. Du Bois, the civil rights activist and Pan-Africanist, discussed the concept of double consciousness from the perspective of an individual's self-evaluation based on how others evaluate that person in *The Souls of Black Folk* first published in 1903. In other words, how does society's dominant class evaluate its marginalised classes? According to Du Bois, the marginalised groups are in a continuous state of inner struggle or dilemma that is reflected as a fundamental drawback of cultural hybridity. From this perspective, the concept of "in-betweenness" appears problematic in hybridity theories, a dilemma experienced by every Arab American and definitely reflected in literature.

Correspondingly, Pnina Werbner describes the elusive nature of cultural hybridity by delineating it across two scales. On one scale, Werbner situates the potency of cultural hybridity in shaping societies characterised by racial integration, intertwined with ethnic rituals and norms. On the other scale, she identifies cultural hybridity characterised by systematicity, underscored by the ambivalent notions of in-betweenness and uncertainty (1–2). Consequently, the concept of in-betweenness becomes profoundly influential in theorising cultural hybridity within minority groups. Bhabha defines the term "in-betweenness" in cultural hybridity as a transitional phase wherein individuals transcend borders, navigating from one realm to another. For Bhabha, hybrid identities often find residence in a third space, a response to the perceived abandonment of both cultures ("In-betweenness" 96). Thus, understanding the concepts of space, place, and in-

betweenness is imperative for comprehending hybrid identity. These notions not only facilitate an understanding of hybrid identity, but also play a pivotal role in its construction.

It is important to note that hybridity, like any other concepts, has its positive and negative features. Papastergiadis believes that one of the concepts of hybridity's positive features is its analytical view of the others' differences and accepting them with all their flaws and strengths through civilised debates and not considering their defects signs of failure (258). Along with that, Arab Americans have incorporated a dual representation of their Arabic culture and the predominant American culture in their literature. It is no wonder, then, that the term "essentialism" opposes the acceptance debate and celebration of the hybridity phenomena. In this context, Burke recognises that essentialism is "a way of criticising one's opponent in many kinds of argument" (1). In this sense, the other is defined by a fabricated identity and the relationship between the two is always tense. On a longer scale, the concepts of hybridity and essentialism have been criticised for their lack of extended indigenous roots and their disregard for cultural and ethnic discrimination and the loss of authenticity (Burke 7). Simultaneously, both concepts suggest the intersectionality of two worlds.

In contention with the negative claims against cultural hybridity, this chapter discusses the significance of cultural hybridity in creating a hybrid Arab American identity in minority literature. In any case, the three writers' innovations implement cultural encounters, encourage creativity, and celebrate cultural exchanges.

Hybridity and Multicultural Identity in the Scope of Self-Recognition

Contemporary Arab American writers have addressed the complexity of their coexistence between two cultures to produce literature delineated with the complexity of culture and identity.

While hybridity refers to a mixture of two things and cultural hybridity is associated more with a third space that is marked by diversity and promotes tolerance, the concept of identity is relatively related to allegiances. Throughout history, defining identity was affected by several factors, including political, national, religious, cultural, and social factors. In the Medieval era, identity was defined by religion (i.e., Islam, Christianity, and Judaism). By the nineteenth century, it was defined by ethnicity and the nation states, such as France and Germany, which are good examples of the rise of ethnic tendencies. Today, identity is defined by ideas and narratives in which transnational ideas and narratives are reflected in devotion and practices. In this context, Bhabha conceptualises cultural hybridity as a continuous process in which culture and identity refute essentialism and both are produced through representations ("The Third Space" 211). Drawing from evaluations of self-construction, this section argues that hybridity as an empowerment tool demands dynamic actions represented in hybrid narratives. Accordingly, Hazo, Handal, and Nye have embodied affiliation with both cultures and produced poetry with a great emphasis on self-recognition to constitute their multicultural identity.

Regarding the postcolonial theory, analysis of a cultural text should consider a great emphasis on hybrid identity as a primary component of individual and communal identity. Derived from Bhabha's concept of third space, Barry believes that the interaction between the cultures and identities of the colonised and the coloniser should be studied to understand literature, which draws more attention to spaces where cultures meet and interact (193–95). Considering immigration as a result of postcolonialism, Barry's interpretation can be reflected on the interaction between the dominant culture of the received country and the culture of the sending country, which results in a hybrid culture and is translated into practises and produced literature. In this context, postcolonial theory is significant particularly when it comes to hybrid

identity and the third space concepts that provide valuable insights on how immigration takes place in the United States. Understanding hybridity requires analysing the aspects of contacts and interaction between the dominant culture and immigrant cultures.

Generally, literary models are often helpful in structuring what is meant by deconstructing and reconstructing the self. However, one of the main issues confronting Arab American literary criticism today is filling the gap between cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. Salaita's "Vision: Arab-American Literary Criticism" (2000) enumerates some crucial concepts in the critique of Arab American literature, such as loyalty to both cultures, assimilation versus preservation, language, ethnicity, misrepresentation, acceptance, politicisation, diversity, nationalism and religion, and cosmopolitanism versus multiculturalism. According to Salaita, cosmopolitanism is privileged in the discussion of affiliations over multiculturalism due to the diversity and complexity of Arab Americans' inherent identities. Salaita gives *Mizna* as an example of a literary journal that publishes literary criticism and literary productions of Arab American writers (paras. 2–21). In fact, *Mizna* is edited by Lisa Gizzi, who is non-Arab American, and Salaita's article strives to encourage Arab American writers to overcome their ethnic boundaries to produce literary criticism competent to confront the literary criticism produced by non-Arab Americans.

The hybrid identity's struggle has always been confusing to migrants in general and to Arab Americans in particular. In this context, self-recognition seems controversial to many Arab Americans. In "Boundaries: Arab/American" (1994), Majaj admits that her personal experience of realising her identity is intricate and challenging to articulate (65). Although there have been many theoretical approaches aimed at understanding hybrid identity, Hakim-Larson and Menna believe that Arab American identity is influenced by multiple background factors and

sociopolitical incidents. In “Acculturation and Enculturation: Ethnic Identity Socialization Processes” (2016), the writers refer to three main components that illustrate Arab American identity. Firstly, they refer to Jean Phinney’s developmental approach, in which she traces the development of ethnic self-realisation over time. According to Phinney, national identity and the ethno-cultural identity affect the development of the ego identity and the youth status identity, and both are integrated to formulate the personal hybrid identity. Secondly, although early studies focused on the content of the hybrid identity, such as the adaptation of behaviours and attitudes, Hakim-Larson and Menna also call attention to the importance of the content and process in their deconstruction of hybrid identity. Accordingly, hybrid identity develops over time from a subjective sense of self-understanding that results from self-exploration and commitment to both cultures. Lastly, the writers call attention to ethnocultural activities such as the use of visual symbols and values that are embodied in Arab American identity and affected by social forces. They also take into consideration the religious aspect of the Arab world, in which Judaism and Christianity share common values on one side, Christianity and Islam share common values on the other, and all three faiths are practised individually. Understanding these three components (i.e., content, process, and ethnocultural activities) leads to a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the Arab American hybrid identity. Regarding the premise of the hybrid identity, Hakim-Larson and Menna state that Arab Americans may understand the complexity of their existence by constructing “primarily interdependent or relatively independent” self-understanding (35). In other words, primarily interdependent self-understanding involves practices that seek oriented goals drawn from the realisation of the self in relation to others. However, relatively independent self-understanding includes practices that seek personal goals stemming from the realisation of the self as a separate, inherited entity (34–

35). In a broader sense, hybrid identities have become a prominent component of multiculturalism in the United States. Therefore, understanding the complexity of these hybrid identities is essential to comprehending the national identity.

More relevantly, understanding the implications of anti-Arab racism is significant in deconstructing Arab American racial identity and contributing to creating this hybrid identity's struggle. Arab American writers have used their personal experiences to help readers understand how anti-Arab strategies affect their writing and encourage xenophobia. Nevertheless, these writers have developed a unique narration style competent to confront messages of hatred and racialisation. In the identity-struggle context, these writers have responded in varying ways to a non-White Other identity. Whereas some writers tend to embrace the non-White identity, other writers find it difficult to adopt. In *Syrian Yankee* (1943), Salom Rizk privileges the American culture and criticises his Arabic background. Rizk's identity struggle triumphs democratic America over the barbaric Arab. In contrast, over recent decades, contemporary Arab American writers have become acquainted with their racial differences and varied in reflecting that. For example, Khaled Mattawa interpreted anti-Arab racialisation and alienation in the feeling of exile and unbelonging.[11] In "Echo & Elixir 1," from the collection *Zodiac of Echoes* (2003), Mattawa's poetic image expresses this marginalised subjectivity:

> City without words. Night without night
> Somewhere I remember
> these clothes are not my clothes.
> These bones are not my bones.
> I forget and remember again.
> Ships in the harbor which is the sea
> which is the journey
> that awakens a light inside my chest. (lines 1–8)

[11] Khaled Mattawa (1964–) is an Arab American writer and a leading translator of Libyan descent.

Mattawa's interpretation of his exile is woven from a deep understanding of racial marginalisation. However, Nye and Handal articulate the anti-Arab racialisation issue in a more explicitly politicised way. In the scope of prose poetry, each writer narrates an incident reflecting their senses of non-White Otherness. In "Knowing," published in *Transfer* (2011), Nye comments on a letter from Eleanor Roosevelt sent in response to one from her father. According to Nye, the first lady, who was a human rights activist and pioneer figure who helped found the United Nations, failed to admit Arabs' and Arab Americans' rights to live "side by side":

> No, she said. I do not think Arab refugees
> should be permitted to return to their homes
> in Israel. There are few homes to return to.
> …
> I do not know if there should be an Arab Palestine
> as an independent state side by side with Israel.
> …
> … We live on, puzzles of power
> unraveling around us, building new walls, proclaiming,
> protesting. One phrase worth clinging to – side by side. (lines 3–5, 19–20, 28–30)

Nye's lines reveal that the perception of anti-Arab racialisation shapes contemporary Arab American poetry as well as Arab American identity. Moreover, critics note that post-9/11, the significant racialisation of Arabs, Muslims and Middle Eastern ethnicities in the United States symbolises a non-White Otherness (Salaita, "Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism" 158–59). However, Handal illustrates racialisation in a holy journey entitled "American Camino," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020). Handal's speaker roams America looking for a sufficient answer to their rhetorical question: *Who is American?* Throughout the journey, the speaker recalls several incidents reflecting racialisation: "When a man told us, *your accent is a cemetery, bite your tongue and speak like the rest of us*, we thought, *like the rest of who*, but said nothing" (89). In another incident, the speaker narrates a story where one stranger tells another, "*Go back to your country*" (91). Handal's lines are self-referential, and the personal "I" stands

for the speaker and the poet when she writes, “I wondered which — didn’t we all belong somewhere and now belong here? *God Save America. My home sweet home*!” (91). Unlike Mattawa, Handal’s interpretation of the perception of racialisation is woven from a sense of belonging and loyalty to America. She emphasises this when she remembers Theodore Roosevelt’s speech: “*There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American*” (91). At the end of the poem, Handal finds the answer to her question: “When Billy told me: *Jackson Heights, I have come to realize, is the Mesopotamian Valley of the United States. EVERY OTHER PERSON comes from there*… And I knew I was American” (95). Ultimately, she highlights the concepts of racialisation, Otherness, and hybridity as prominent components of the American community and Arab Americans as non-White Others in the American context.

Whereas Nye’s “Knowing” and Handal’s “American Camino” were written in prose poetry in a highly explicit way to shed light on anti-Arab racial issues, Hazo’s portrayal of racial marginalisation of Arab Americans and infringements on their citizenship is philosophical. In “The Torch of Blood,” published in *And the Time Is: Poems, 1958–2013* (2014), Hazo uses Greek mythology to narrate a story about the succession of generations and the development of Arab American identity:

> I’m plucked
> by God’s hooks up
> from Scylla through an open door,
> Charybdis in a socket and a Cyclops
> lamp that glares floorlevel
> souls away from too much
> light to lesser darknesses
> What god in what machine
> shall pluck my son?
> Amid
> the Carthage of his toys, he waits
> unplucked, unpluckable. (lines 9–20)

Hazo's intertextual use of Greek mythology alludes to hybrid identity struggles and the implications of racialisation: "souls away from too much / light to lesser darknesses" (lines 14–15). On the one hand, the symbolism of the contradictory images of light and darkness is intended by the writer to emphasise the problem. On the other hand, the two gods (Scylla and Charybdis) are encountered to portray the inner dilemma of choosing between two dangerous situations in the idiom "being between Scylla and Charybdis," which reflects the struggle of the hybrid identity to choose between two opposing cultures. The Cyclops is introduced to the scene to create more tension. The one-eyed monster was presented widely in several literary works, such as Homer's *Odyssey* (written in the eighth century BCE) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (first published in 1920), to symbolise a biased viewpoint and to represent narrow-minded people. However, Aguirre and Buxton investigate the evolution of Cyclopes throughout history. The writers believe that Cyclopes are imposed in modern traditions to symbolise overwhelming workers, putting more emphasis on physical power over mental power (331). From these premises, Cyclopes represent devoted American hard workers and an American-biased community. Thus, Hazo's image is highly complicated and full of contradictions. First, there is the hybrid identity struggle. Second, there are devoted racial Americans. Then, there is hybrid identity development. The old generation, which is symbolised by the father, is "plucked" and confused, but the younger generation, which is symbolised by the son, is "unplucked, unpluckable." According to Hazo, the contemporary generation is still too young to understand the feeling of racialisation; thus, "he waits" (line 19). Then, Hazo introduces himself as "Laocoon":

> I'm suddenly Laocoon
> at bay, condemned to hear
> some telephoning Trojan offer
> me a more prudential life

> where I can wake insured
> against disaster, sickness, age
> and sundry acts of Genghis
> God. (lines 30–37)

In Greek mythology, Laocoon was a Trojan priest attacked by giants sent by God to attack him and his sons. Hazo's implicit image can be illustrated as how Arab Americans suffer from the waves of hatred and racialisation that attack them and their succeeding generations.

Within the past two decades, the study of Arab American youth identity has attracted scholars' attention for its prominent role in constructing Arab American identity. Undoubtedly, the role of visual media and globalisation have impacted Arab American youths and have been incorporated across certain cultural contexts. Hakim-Larson and Menna believe that in addition to the parents' role, the internet has played a significant role in formulating Arab American youth identity by addressing the values and culture of their Arabic legacy as well as adapting to the American culture. The writers conclude that further studies on the impact of social media and its role in identifying ethnic identity must be made, especially because the boundaries today are becoming porous in the time of globalisation. However, considering the fact that the construction of culture and identity is directly relevant to the construction of youth identity, the selected poets vary in portraying Arab American youth in their poetry due to their different personal experiences of displacement. In her poetry, Nye recalls her youth in Jerusalem and Ramallah and addresses young readers, as she expresses in her introduction to *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002): "I dedicate these poems of my life to the wise grandmothers and to the young readers in whom I have always placed my best faith" (xviii). In a very spiritual journey, Nye professes a message of tolerance and acceptance in "Different Ways to Pray," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*. Nye alludes to people's

differences by their different ways of praying and interjects Arab American youths in the sixth stanza:

> There were those who didn't care about praying.
> The young ones. The ones who had
> been to America.
> They told the old ones, *you are wasting your time*.
> Time? The old ones prayed for the young ones.
> They prayed for Allah to mend their brains,
> for the twig, the round moon,
> to speak suddenly in a commanding tone. (lines 38–45)

In these lines, Nye highlights young Arab Americans' adaptation to the dominant American culture. Although these young people were introduced to various Arabic cultural values, practices, and rituals, they are not committed to their ethnic identity. The poet draws attention to a fundamental problem for Arab American immigrants and their second, third, and later generation descendants who are separated from their cultural heritage and tend to indulge in the dominant secular culture. Yet, "the old ones" never capitulate and insist on praying for "the young ones" in a direct reference to the development of Arab American ethnic identity. Different ways to pray evoke not only the message of tolerance but also devotional works to connect younger generations to their roots.

While Nye focuses on Arab American youth by narrating a story in the homeland, Handal narrates it in the diaspora countries. In "Lettera a Damir," which means "Letter to Damir" in English, published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), Handal raises essential questions related to their multicultural identity that haunt young people in diasporas. In several cities in Croatia, starting from Split to Dubrovnik via Zagreb, Handal's speaker asks young Damir, which is a male Arabic name that means "lean and slender," questions about the melancholy of the tune they hear before leaving him with no answers. Clearly, Handal's choice of Split as a city is not coincidence, but rather it symbolises migrants' physical division from the homeland as "Damir"

personifies their pale and emaciated appearance. “Remember this tune, / who’s playing? / Is it you?” (lines 1–3). Handal’s speaker is wondering about the secret behind the sad melody: “is this happening where war / is just a painting in an empty pool / somewhere in a foreign country?” (lines 12–14). The soliloquy here exposes the speaker’s dilemma and sense of belonging to the occupied homeland that is alluded to in the next lines: “Remember god / and the men who began to live / the unspoken dreams of other men / but finally couldn’t?” (lines 16–18). In the middle of this belonging, Handal conveys a message to young generations to blame them for not clinging to the homeland enough in return for pursuing an unknown dream: “Remember what was written on the earth / we neglected to love enough: / *we’d give our life for an unknown world*” (lines 19–21). At the end of the poem, the speaker asks Damir the last question about the melody that provokes them, “Let’s follow it — where do you think it will take us?” (lines 25–26), before expressing the feeling of loss and sadness that brings them together: “Friend, we are only shadows / in our sorrow” (lines 27–28). In this poem, Handal seeks to initiate a dialogue between young Arab Americans in the diaspora, guiding them in constructing their identity in the postmodern era and envisioning a more promising future. With this analysis, I explore how Handal utilises symbolism to engage passive participants in the newly democratic society of Croatia. Additionally, Salaita, in “Vision: Arab-American Literary Criticism” (2000), delves into the theme of divided loyalty among Arab Americans, emphasising their hybrid identity. Salaita claims that Arab American authors are actively shaping a heritage that is not only pertinent to the Arab world but is uniquely their own (para. 8). According to Salaita, affiliation is central in the critique of Arab American literature (“Vision” para. 9). Regarding the concept of affiliation, Handal’s allusion to the unforgotten homeland signifies a deliberate effort to integrate the

Palestinian issue into the work, underscoring the Arab world's artistic legacies and Arab Americans' contributions to critiques of United States foreign policy in the Middle East.

Stemming from Said's interpretation of his identity as "out of place," the incorporation of Palestine in Nye's and Handal's works can connect them directly to this interpretation. As representatives of Levant descent, these intellectuals contribute to the broader discussion of Arab American identity, a product partly shaped by United States institutions and traditions. Despite adopting Western modes of thinking and criticism, they employ these tools to criticise United States foreign policy and unmask imperialistic intentions. Salaita believes that post-9/11 ethnic works, including those by Arab Americans, challenging United States hegemony are often labelled unpatriotic ("Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism: Arab Americans before and after 9/11" 146–47). Arab American intellectuals find themselves compelled to redefine their ethnic identity — which United States institutions initially moulded — to engage in critiques of United States hegemony and imperialism. Both themes are considered taboo in their Arabic legacy. This redefinition often takes them out of the literary mainstream, exposing them to accusations of being unpatriotic.

Interestingly enough, Hazo's interwoven generational narrative implicitly alludes to young Arab Americans without clear identification. For instance, "For Those Who Will One Day Live Here," published in 2014 in *And the Time Is: Poems, 1958–2013*, can be interpreted as a narrative of the next Arab American generation:

> Some nights I notice
> teen-age deer determined
> to act like bucks or does.
> They roam as if they own
> the place and make it seem
> like I'm the interloper.
>   One shout
> would waken in their wild eyes

> the same dismay I've seen
> in people startled by strangers,
> shock, or death itself.
> Tonight the law of tenancy
> have given them first rights.
> I watch them while they graze
> and let them have their fill. (lines 1–15)

In the poem, Hazo depicts Arab American youths as a teen-age deer who is a hunting target and metaphorically a subject of criticism and hatred, especially after the aftermath of 9/11. In their journey to deconstruct their hybrid identity, young Arab Americans pretend to act like real Americans. Hazo implicitly criticises young people who lose their identity and indulge in an American lifestyle "to act like bucks" (3). Due to his American upbringing and age barrier, Hazo excludes himself and portrays himself as an outsider narrator. According to Salaita, like other contemporary Arab American writers, Hazo learned his Arab heritage in a contemporary American tradition ("Vision" para. 1). Thus, the intersection between his Arab heritage and American environment enables him to create his own tradition through self-distancing narrative strategies. In a direct self-recognition moment, the writer voices himself as well as his narrator in which he draws a portrait of himself in a third place alienated from the young generation and the place and seems out of step with the modern world. Then, he illustrates another image for migrants. Hazo's illustration of the end of the migrants' journey that is full of contradicted feelings including trauma, terror, shock, and belonging is extraordinary and dramatic. In the new world and according to the immigration policy, they will have a guaranteed right to life. Both Hazo's images are muddy to any simplistic reading and suggest an allusive philosophical point of view. Bearing this in mind, self-recognition is essential to the intersection between multiculturalism and poetry.

In the context of hybridity and regarding the subject matter of this study, Hazo, Handal, and Nye appear to understand what it means to be hybrid in a contextual self-recognition. Indeed, the three poets embody both the "primarily interdependent" and the "relatively independent" concepts of self-understanding in the core of their writings. It is important to note that they developed these concepts with implications for their ethnic identity. Although Hazo avoids revealing his Arabic ethnic identity, he implicitly refers to it in several poems. Among these is "Middlemost," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), in which he narrates how he was inspired by listening to Andalus songs in Arabic in reference to an amalgamation of different cultures in an individual experience:

> Alone and listening to songs
> from Andalus in Arabic, I drove
> a midnight road I never
> drove before.
>   The music kept
> the dark at bay. (lines 1–6)

In this image, Arabic, Andalusian, and Western cultures merge, expressing a keen capacity to celebrate the difference with a strong emphasis on individuality, evident through the repeated use of the pronoun "I." What is most important here is Hazo's appreciation of cultural differences "songs / from Andalus in Arabic" (lines 1–2). The poet goes on to describe this sense of difference in the third stanza:

>   I felt as chosen
> as I felt the day I lingered
> near the stone altar of Le Thoronet.
> The stone changed color in the sun,
> and what was beige turned saffron
> as I watched. (lines 12–17)

In these lines, Hazo's sense of uniqueness is evidenced by his upbringing in a different environment "I felt as chosen" (line 12). Symbolically, he uses the sunlight to reveal the

reflection of his hybrid identity. The writer connects his sense of existence in life with the sunlight, which reflects the plurality of the stone's colour. Implicitly, Hazo's hybrid identity is symbolised by the stone here and its change of colour from beige to the colour of saffron in reference to Hazo's Eastern ethnicity.

Featured in *And the Time Is: Poems, 1958–2013* (2014), Hazo celebrates his hybrid identity in a fundamental self-recognition and combines it into an aesthetic. Among these are Hazo's "Splitting" and "Home are the Sailors." He expresses this in "Splitting":

> … Only
> my passport knows me now.
> My mirror shows me half-American,
> half-Adam. (lines 8–11)

In these lines, Hazo strove to compass a vision that reflects his awareness of his existence. This existence is linked merely to official identity papers. It is the passport that reflects his separation from the emotional world and emphasises his connection to the material world. At the same moment, Hazo basically realises and admits his hybrid identity to the reflection of his image in the mirror that he is half American and half human, belonging to Adam without specifying any nationality. Hazo's reference to "Adam" here indicates the Biblical fall model in which paradise symbolises the "Old World" while the fall symbolises the "New World" that are related to immigrant literature. Besides, he implicitly refers to the notion that Adam, as a Biblical figure, is "middle-eastern" in Western parlance. Therefore, Hazo's realisation of his hybrid identity is undoubtedly manifested in a high sense of self-identification in a serious attempt to reflect his multiculturalism. In fact, the themes of hybridity and self-recognition are clearly attributed among Hazo's themes. In "Home are the Sailors," Hazo again reveals his concept of individuality:

> And what

> are we but random pilgrims
> stopped in progress to remember?
> It now seems more like then,
> why care?
>   As long as home
> Means where we most belong —
> For just that long — we're there. (lines 13–20)

The mutual identity in those lines reveals the author's tendency to create a safe haven, bearing in mind that all identities are pilgrims roaming this world and that the homeland has no borders and is where the identity resides. In addition, the writer refers to the themes of Arab American Christian identity and hybridity. Therefore, Hazo connects this conflict to the significance of the spiritual journey of pilgrimage in Christianity as a metaphor for belonging while bearing a hybrid identity. Hazo also highlights "pack-peddling" narrations as the early Syrian immigrants' contributions to American society in which early immigrants practiced a mobile physical trading activity abiding by American law while they were roaming the country, which sped up their integration into society and their language acquisition. Accordingly, both journeys are fundamental for understanding Arab-American history. In her analysis of Alixa Naff's *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*, as a foundational work in the Arab American literature first published in 1985, Albrecht claims that pack-peddling practices facilitated early Arab Americans' integration into American society and turned them from temporary migrants to permanent citizens (100–01). From this premise, the Christian spiritual journey and the trading physical journey have developed Hazo's notion of identity, which is based on a foundation of the clear self-identification of the combination of the American Christian and Eastern identities.

Nye's works are popularly understood as representing a profound self-recognition through realism, drawing from her Palestinian American heritage. Her poems call for the unity of humanity and the commonality of peoples around the world, regardless of all their cultural,

ethnical, and religious backgrounds. She has always acknowledged her ethnicity in a contextual autobiography. In Section One of *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002), Nye celebrates her multiculturalism in "What Kind of Fool Am I," "Going to the Spring," and "Biography of an Armenian Schoolgirl." Throughout "What Kind of Fool Am I," Nye expresses her love for her father and her relationship with him symbolises her genuine connection to her eastern heritage. "Combing his black, black hair" (line 2) emphasises his Oriental look, and his singing in Arabic every morning reflects that nostalgic feeling for his homeland. This brings delight to his family, whereas his attempts to sing in English are met with rejection in a familial agreement "… *No kind at all!* We'd shout" (line 8). From the family perspective, his singing in Arabic remains the most beautiful as it is their only link to their eastern legacy. In the midst of this longing, Nye acknowledges what her upbringing in Western culture offered her "freedom;" "but he gave us freedom to be fools" (line 11). Nye refers to the English proverb 'where ignorance is bliss, "tis folly to be wise"' which ironically explains the wisdom that she carries as a multicultural individual embracing two opposing cultures. According to Nye, wisdom and freedom are the concepts she considers the greatest gifts she received from her eastern father "perhaps a father's greatest gift — / *that blessing*" (lines 14–15). In "Going to the Spring," Nye reflects a great sense of self-awareness and intellectuality:

> In the evenings the women
> walk to the spring,
> my cousins balance huge buckets
> on their heads. (lines 1–4)

Like Hazo, Nye implicitly refers to the story of the "Old World" and the "New World." The springs here are devoted to pastoral poetry and symbolise a source of inspiration. Nye employs Old Testament imagery influenced by John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), when Milton's speaker invokes the Holy Spirit to illuminate his mind and inspire him to write poetry. In this

spiritual journey, he roams to different places: "… where the Muses haunt / Cleer Spring, or shadie Grove, or Sunnie Hill" (III. lines 27–28). In Nye's vision, she seeks inspiration in the springs of her homeland as a land of wisdom that has taught her cousins everything: "They know all the stories of water / that comes through pipes" (lines 5–6). Nye continues her lyrical representation to compare the Arab life with the American life to emphasise her cousins' knowledge about and awareness of the Western culture: "They know there are countries / where men and women kiss in the streets" (lines 11–12). Through to the end of the poem, Nye depicts her individuality and locates herself in a third place as a different entity:

> They know I can't carry the bucket.
> Still they offer it, grinning.
> They eat sour peaches and laugh
> at the way I look into things, (lines 29–32)

Nye dramatises her cultural difference and articulates it as a hyphenated identity. The poem, at its heart, hints at a deep message in which Nye reflects on her hybrid reality. In fact, Nye's pioneering role in ethnocultural narration is marked by self-orientation and commitment to an open form poetic commentary. In "Biography of an Armenian Schoolgirl," Nye narrates the story of an Armenian girl in an open-form poem with a fluid structure. This indicates Nye's resistance to any imposed rule, even in writing poetry. In the sixth stanza, Nye reveals her hybrid identity, as symbolised by three languages:

> Now I copy the alphabets of three languages,
> imagining the loops in my Arabic letters are eyes.
> What you do when you are tired of what you see,
>
> what happens to the gray body
> when it is laid in the earth,
> these are the subjects which concern me. (lines 24–29)

However, Nye emphasises the way she writes in Arabic and imagines the loops as eyes that stare at her, suggesting an alienated identity. The lines of the sixth stanza are the longest lines in the

poem. This reflects Nye's confidence in showing her feelings and revealing her Arabic ethnicity despite the hatred of the eyes that surround her. According to Philip Metres, hybrid identity is inseparable and "what we believe and who we stand with can be as important as who we are or how others think of us" ("Carrying Continents in Our Eyes" 131). In the third line, Nye employs fluidity to indicate the continuation of her questions and concerns about humanity and to create a sense of rising emotions. This continuation suggests Nye's ability to discuss her identity as fluid.

In spite of the uniqueness of each of the three writers in their styles and literary schools, they were united in their awareness of their hybrid identities. This is reflected in Handal's "Poetry as Homeland: A Letter to Lisa Suhair Majaj" (1999), in which she portrays an imaginary homeland for her and for her friend that was drawn from her subjective self-recognition. For Handal, the realisation of her cultural and ethnic existence is related to her understanding of her hybridised identity. She declared that in Majaj's "Interview with Nathalie Handal" (2006):

> I am Palestinian and permanent transience has been my reality. I cannot escape the trauma of losing my "homeland" and all that it represents for me, for the history of my people, so of course that will always transpire in my work. (613)

According to Handal, the experience of exile is the most powerful force that provides an individual the drive for life and at the same time a feeling of loss that cannot be described — a feeling that has always been associated with a dual identity ("Poetry as Homeland" 141). Nevertheless, this sense of loss arising from a hybrid identity finds expressive freedom in poetry due to its inherent formal flexibility. Throughout her poetry, Handal's perception of her multicultural identity is seen generally within the context of the melting-pot formula. She continues her pursuit of wisdom and discovery through writing poetry. In 2005, Handal published her selection of poems called *The Lives of Rain*. Among them is "Blue Hours," in

which Handal acknowledges her multiculturalism in a contextual self-recognition merged with a sense of nostalgia:

> … my English
> failing me, my Arabic fading
> my Spanish starting to make sense…
> we are in a *finca* now —
> perhaps we are safe,
> perhaps we desire nothing else,
> but I can't stop bowing in prayer
> five times a day,
> my country comes to me, tells me:
> *Compatriota — I will always find you*
> *no matter what language you are speaking*. (lines 28–38)

In these lines, Handal reflects the multicultural struggle within her between English, Arabic, and Spanish. The struggle ends with the spread of the Spanish language. It is worth noting here the common history between the Arab and Spanish civilisations, which makes the poet feel safe to complete her five prayers in reference to Islam. Handal expresses the unity of humanity despite the multiplicities and differences between human beings. At this moment when humanity triumphs, nostalgia and belonging appear personified in "Compatriota." This type of nostalgia haunts the person wherever they are and regardless of what language they speak to inhabit: "*I will always find you / no matter what language you are speaking*" (lines 37–38). According to Handal, the homeland resides deeply within the diasporic individual, regardless of their location, raising questions of identity and belonging.

Ultimately, Handal's self-recognition regarding her dual identity is well reflected in "The Moor," which was published online in *Poem Hunter* (2014).[12] Handal introduces a young boy from the Moor who shares the same history and experience of dual identity with the poet:

> barefoot on the unnamed roads,

[12] The Moors is a term used by Christian European to describe Muslims and Arabs who inhabited the Meghreb, the Iberian Peninsula, Sicily, and Malta during the Middle Ages. Originally, the Moors were the Maghrebine Berbers of mixed Arab, Spanish, and Amazigh origins.

> sleeping in the dream another is having.
>
> An 'oud, a violin, a guitar,
> a mirror of dew, (lines 3–6)

As the poem shows, Handal realises her dual identity and provokes sentimentalism to her motherland Palestine. "Barefoot" and "unnamed roads" reflect the boy's state of loss and displacement accompanied by nostalgia to "the dream another is having" (line 4). Then, Handal moves on to talk about three musical instruments of different origins which reflects the harmony of the music they produce together and symbolises the human harmony that results from multiculturalism. While the *oud* symbolises the East, the violin symbolises the West, and the guitar reflects the mixture of the two cultures in it.

Indeed, the three poets have experienced dual-identity crises and have been confronted with the significance of the question of their cultural existence, but due to their fundamental self-identifications, they have managed to overcome these crises successfully by drawing images in their readers' minds constructed from the words they have used. By employing a formal lyrical tradition to express their personal emotions and feelings in the first-person pronoun "I," the writers continue to encourage their readers to transcend the material world towards an imaginary spiritual one. In addition, their tendency to follow free verse emerges as a liberation act to resist the dominant imposed poetic rules to control their creativity. In Hazo, Handal, and Nye's cases, constructing the self is directly related to identity and belonging. The three writers reconstructed their dual identities by acknowledging their unique hyphenated existence. In psychoanalytic term, Hazo, Handal, and Nye developed a sense of individuation in which they distinguished their identities as separate hybrid entities. Therefore, the themes of hybridity and multicultural identity are prevalent in the writers' works and appear to overlap in an attempt to create their own worlds.

Language Hybridity and Resistance

Language has always been closely associated with identity. In the case of hybrid identity, hybrid language is considered a kind of individual existence. On a grand scale, language can be critical in a personal and communal sense. For example, the term "Arab American" might suggest associating this hybrid identity with the Arabic language in the first place and the Arab world in the second place. Kadi claims that the term "Arab American" appears problematic for two reasons. First, it separates the Arab identity from the rest of the ethnic identities linked to colour. Second, it excludes those identities that do not speak Arabic although they share common features and skin colour with the Arab world, such as Armenia, Turkey, and Iran (xviii–xix). Armenians, Turks, Persians, and Kurds are not Arabs and have their own ethnicities. It is worth noting here that identities can be complex and multifaced and that language may not be the only determining factor in defining cultural or ethnic affiliations. Nevertheless, Kadi considers avoiding the ambiguity of the term by using the term "Middle Eastern," but she rejects it due to its political dimensions related to Western colonisers "who named the region only as it related to their particular worldview" (xix). Moreover, she considers the term offensive and states, "Using the term "Middle Eastern" feels very much like I am adopting the oppressor's language" (xix). Alongside Kadi, Philip Metres believes that Arab American poets have responded to the dominant culture by adapting rebellion strategies, such as the "deconstructive modes of language-dereterritorialising" to cross the limitation of place and to produce globalised literature ("Carrying Continents in Our Eyes" 126).[13] According to Philip Metres, the writers employ lingual techniques to reveal their diversity. In a broader sense, these techniques embody resistance to the dominant mainstream literary and cultural norms.

[13] The idea of deterritorialisation is a critical theory that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari developed in 1972 to describe the lingual, social, cultural, political, and economic norms in relation to their origins.

In the context of hybridity, hybridised language reflects a sense of border crossing literally and metaphorically. More importantly, border crossing has become a major theme in contemporary minority literature as a natural consequence of migration. The term literally refers to migrants' actual movement and crossing state borders, and it metaphorically incorporates their mental and psychological states of crossing social and cultural borders. In this sense, the literature produced by minority writers crosses borders; thus, their tendency to cross the borders of the "Old World" to the "New World" can be interpreted as an attempt to break down barriers in pursuit of human equality and tolerance and implicitly embodying a notion of peaceful resistance. Avtar Brah, a diasporic subject herself, defines the notion of borders as follows:

> Arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others; forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where fear of the Other is the fear of the self; places where claims to ownership — claims to "mine," "yours," and "theirs" — are staked out, contested, defended, and fought over. (625)

Brah's definition deconstructs the geographical action of border crossing to embody the social, cultural, psychological, racial, and sexual ramifications that construct boundaries. In this sense, the term embodies a problematic meaning that creates constant confrontation for opposites. Amal Al-Juburi pictures the complexity and ramifications of the state of crossing borders in "Enheduanna and Goethe," published in *The Poetry of Arab Women* and edited by Handal (2016). The Iraqi poet narrates a romantic story full of contradictions in order to draw on her own present experience and to unify her heritage into a whole where the two characters come from two different worlds, as the speaker declares in the first line: "We are both different" (line 1). Enheduanna was a Sumerian princess and the daughter of King Sargon (2300 BC), and she is the earliest known author in world literature, representing the female speaker, the East, and the

Old World. However, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) was a German poet, politician, scientist, and critic, and also the inventor of the concept of a "World Literature." In the poem, Goethe represents the male passive character, the West, and the New World. In addition, the two worlds indicate gender differences as the male counterpart is more rational and conservative; for example, the line "you thought and spoke your verses" (line 2) can be associated with traditional interpretations of the West. On the other hand, the female speaker is more irrational and spontaneous: The line "I gave my poems birth, / then conceived my thought" (lines 3–4) is linked to the East in the same context. In his landmark *Orientalism* (1978), Said explained the relationship between the Western and Eastern worlds and Arabs, which is dominated by the inferior view and stereotypical image of the East as backward and an irrational other (4–5). However, the speaker's attempt to cross the border between the two worlds is marked by a great awareness of the difficulties surrounding her:

> O West, I am hurtful…
> There is no piety in my heart
> but I am the priestess of the great suffering,
> I drag your land from the webs of words
> while you drag me to your "West-East Divan."
> We both balance on the same rope
> though we part walking toward two abysses. (lines 9–15)

Although Al-Juburi's picture reflects Arab American intellectuals' awareness of the physical and mental complications of border crossing, it is marked by a moment of uncertainty: "we part walking toward two abysses" (line 15). This moment of uncertainty reflects the mental state of border crossing, on one side. On the other side, it challenges the multiplicity of Arab Americans. Moreover, the speaker imposes a sense of uncertainty and confusion on the reader:

> I open the windows of your words,
> I find my coffin in your elegies,
> exiled, abandoned by a distant East.
> My years are horses wounded with your lances…

> they never cease neighing.
> A stranger in your home
> but in my home
> I am the mistress of lamentation.
> O East, what have you done to me? (lines 16–24)

The writer succeeds in creating an abstract image of the border crossing. Despite the speaker's ability to cross the geographical borders, she fails to transcend the feelings of alienation and sadness that inhabit her. Certainly, the speaker is fully aware of the racial and ethnic differences preventing her from indulging in the Western culture, which encourages her to live in the border zone or in the third space because she struggles to reconcile with her Eastern heritage:

> I loved you but you brought me shame.
> You disfigured me like a herd of blind Scheherazades,
> you exceeded all bounds in dancing over my body,
> you have fed me the lust of the stars
> in the fleeting moments of lightning —
> but all of that from behind a veil. (lines 25–30)

By illustrating the dilemma of the speaker's refusal to embrace her Arabic heritage, the writer reveals that Arab American writers, especially female writers, have faced political and social obstacles that subject them to racism and discrimination in both worlds. Most importantly, Al-Juburi's adaptation of the Sumerian character of Enheduanna in the poem indicates an attempt at peaceful resistance to the dominant culture. While characters from Greek mythology are widely adapted in Western narration, the writer intends to incorporate her Eastern heritage to illustrate the border crossing and nostalgia in diaspora but from a feminist point of view in order to convey the complexities of being an Arab American woman.

Nye pictures the nostalgic feeling that is usually encountered by migrants in diaspora, which is interwoven with the notion of border crossing in "For Mohammed on the Mountain," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*:

> Uncle Mohammed, you mystery, you distant

> secretive face,
> lately you travel across the ocean and tap me
> on my shoulder
> and say "See?" And I think I know what you are
> talking about,
> though we have never talked, though you have
> never traveled anywhere
> in twenty-five years, or anywhere anyone
> knows about. (I. lines 1–10)

Uncle Mohammed's character, which represents the East as Mohammed, is a very authentic Arabic and Muslim name. His mysterious, distant, and secretive face reveals the writer's attachment to the Old World, which seems unknown and full of mysteries because of her present experience in the New World. However, the border-crossing movement, as represented in "lately you travel across the ocean and tap me / on my shoulder" (I. lines 3–4), symbolises the speaker's mental state and nostalgia towards the Old World. Throughout the poem, the writer continues to move between the two worlds, cross borders, and create a border zone for herself:

> That my father edits one of the largest newspapers
> in America
> but keeps an Arabic inscription above his door,
> *Ahlan Wa Sahlan,*
> a door you will never enter. (II. lines 7–11)

In fact, Nye's speaker finds themselves living in a heavily multicultural United States context due to the fact that their "father edits one of the largest newspapers / in America" (II, lines 7–8). Nevertheless, the poet's insistence on using the Arabic transcription "*Ahlan Wa Sahlan*" without providing its translation in English reveals tranquil resistance to her present and adherence to the Old World. At the same time, it is interpreted as a liberating factor that allows the past to be revisited, which is interpreted by Said as the "perpetual state of the exiled" (*Orientalism* 34). This state encourages the character to create a border zone and dedicate half of their involvement to both worlds. Most importantly, the writer tends to widen the space for both cultures to be

articulated. Majaj describes this attempt as acknowledging the diversity of experiences and the urgency of change (“Arab-American Literature” 5). Thus, Nye’s poem addresses dynamic identity and challenges inclusiveness:

> Believe me, Uncle, my father is closer to you
> than you know. When he tends plants,
> he walks slowly. His steps sing of the hills.
> 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?
> …
> As for friends, they are fewer and dearer,
> and the ones who remain seem also to be
> climbing mountains
> in various ways, though we dream we will meet
> at the top.
> Will you be there? (II, lines 23–29, III, lines 19–24)

In these lines, Nye raises some problems resulting from crossing the borders, including nostalgia for the Old World and the inability to immerse herself in the new one. Racialisation and marginalisation become another problem. At the end of the poem, the writer succeeds in creating a third space characterised by cultural intersection.

Indeed, the three selected Arab American writers recorded their impressions of the notion of border crossing although they had not physically experienced it themselves as second generations. In “Saved from the Sea,” published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), Hazo documents his thoughts about the difficulties of the border-crossing process and his ability as a second generation to face them:

> Now I swim well enough
>   to save myself, but doubts
>   still bother me.
>   I never
>   relax in the water.
>   Never.
> Even when I’ve dared myself

to swim farther than I should
and back, the sea still wins.
It never loses.
It never
will.
It never can. (lines 11–23)

The writer challenges the symbolism of the sea as a place to dream and hopes for the migrants' border-crossing journey provides them a better future. Despite the experience he has acquired, he still believes the journey itself can destroy the migrant. Undoubtedly, Hazo's speaker has to contend with major prejudice similar to what the author overcame: "Even when I've dared myself / to swim farther than I should / and back, the sea still wins" (lines 16–18). The chaos of the image of the sea is followed by the literary technique parataxis, in which the writer uses noticeably short phrases like "It never loses. / It never / will. / It never can" (lines 20–23) as rhetorical terms to add drama to the scene and attract the reader's attention to emphasise the sociocultural, economic, political, and racial ramifications of the journey. This use of parataxis produces a dramatic effect similar to that of the phrase Julius Caesar pronounced to emphasise his military achievement after a Roman triumph in 46 BC: "I came, I saw, I conquered." In the poem, Hazo uses the pronoun "I" to reflect the individual narrative and its role in grounding the border-crossing experience. In addition, it archives the migrants' struggles; however, the poet appears defeatist in dealing with these struggles, as he concludes the poem by acknowledging the sea's victory. Thus, although Hazo's individual reflection reveals his resistance to overcoming the border-crossing struggles, it shows an understanding of the urgent difficulties of the experience that other migrants failed to overcome. In this poem, Hazo enlists his intimate experience to challenge the border-crossing experience from an individual perspective that simultaneously inhabits intersecting spaces.

As a member of a diasporic community, Handal's sense of nostalgia leads to the introduction of new interpretations of crossing borders in "Orphic," the title of which is derived from the word *Orpheus*, a hero in Greek mythology who had superhuman musical skills. *Orphic* also means oracular. The poem is published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), and it places the writer at the centre of American ethnic studies due to her ability to draw on free verse as an American literary tradition:

> As a child I believed
> God was in the wind
> that carried us elsewhere
> that departures were returns,
> I buried the sun
> in my father's ashtray
> to see him in eyes
> in Berlin or Stockholm,
> where the cold
> is another country
> longing another landscape
> and the past comes back: (lines 1–12)

The writer depicts an image of diversity which blends nostalgia, diaspora, the Old World, and the New World. In "Arab American Literature: Origins and Developments" (2008), Majaj states that contemporary Arab American writers have explored their "ethnic affirmation and diaspora sensibilities" (para. 3), which empowered them to face the exclusionary forces. The fragmentation of the image represents Handal speaker's mental state and an attempt to create another space: "where the cold / is another country / longing another landscape" (lines 9–11). The sense of belonging in the image is more than an attempt to narrate the experience of an ethnic diaspora. It is an attempt to revisit the past and preserve it from a new perspective. Then the speaker introduces the past as an active character in a romantic attachment to their old experience:

> *close the door*

solitude will not leave
close the window
light will not escape
close the wooden trunk
memory will not vanish
close your eyes
home will not disappear
close everything close
all will remain
like Mostar and Jerusalem
like our Roman chants
Byzantium icons, Muslim prayers. (lines 13–25)

By voicing the past and enabling it to dictate Handal's speaker, the writer creates spiritual resistance to crossing borders and an intimate relationship with the Old World. The repetition of the word *close* in the narrative of the past indicates the writer's affirmation and insistence to revisit it and all its details. Majaj claims that Arab American writers' portrayals of the old experiences memorialise the traditional values of the past and inscribe nostalgia ("Arab American Literature" para. 4). For instance, "*like Mostar and Jerusalem / like our Roman chants / Byzantium icons, Muslim Prayers*" (lines 23–25) offer a portrayal of the past and seek to retrieve nostalgia through the insistence on including four ancient places and traditions. However, the fragmented memory of the Old World is considered a liberating factor, enabling the writer to revisit and revive her past. It also aims to enhance Western understanding of the East's legacy. In contrast, the next part of the poem describes the speaker's struggle for empowerment and recognition in the New World and in the present experience:

The years passed —
I looked for death in Palermo
and found my mother's womb
looked for life in Thessaloniki
and found a song about death
looked for my image in Venice
and found all of my images
crossed Trieste with my heart
and Naples without my hesitations

> memorized Marseille
> from Notre-Dame de la Garde
> counted all my dreams in Acre
> found my name in the Colosseum
> listened to the lemons
> fall for hours in Rome (lines 26–34)

Undoubtedly, the fragmentation of the image in this section is inseparable from Handal's individual experience and life in the diaspora. By illustrating her experience this way, Handal puts herself in the centre of border crossing experience and identifies herself as a universal citizen. In this context, Handal's poem deals less with the celebration of individuality than with the celebration of a collective inclusivity in a diaspora.

In an age of cultural globalisation, textual hybridity appears as a form of cultural hybridity. From a literary point of view, hybridisation in literature is considered a skill for the writer and adds a fundamental sense to the literary work that makes it a mixture of multiple cultures and that transcends space limitations. The use of hybridisation in language or transcription in contemporary American poetry is attributed to the debate between Carl Sandburg and John Lomax about folk song as a form of cultural hybridisation in Chicago in 1917 (Peart vii). In *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994), Kadi comments on keeping the transcription in her edited book as it is due to the diversity of her writers and part of American pluralism. Kadi believes that every writer reflected their cultural background in the words they used without their English language equivalents and had expanded cultural and national horizons (xvii–xviii). In other words, transcription in literature revives the exiled identity in the language of the oppressor, which in postcolonial studies is considered a form of colonial radical resistance or resisting "cultural bleach." Boudakian explains cultural bleach as:

> a force in white supremacist U.S. mainstream culture, wherein light-skinned people of color are urged to consider ourselves physically, historically, and ideologically white. Resisting cultural bleach is a refusal to participate in this kind of assimilation and instead to affirm who we are. (35)

Arab Americans were considered “white” (see my interpretation on pages 6–7). More recently, they are considered non-White, and in colonial discourse they are considered people of colour. In this case, transcription as a literary technique resists cultural bleach and exposes cultural pressure.

It is important to note here that Arabic as a language has a great influence on the writer and the reader. In this sense, the writer is not addressing only English readers but is also attracting Arab readers. Shouby states that language is influenced by two main factors: psychology and culture. Thereafter, Arabisation reflects the Arab influence on non-Arab populations, causing a linguistic transition between the Arabic language as a language and the culture transferred to it, and implements loyalty to the Arabic literary heritage. Regarding the psychological implications, the connotations carried by the language are linked to two symbolic images, one of which is related to the linguistic connotation and the other to the symbolic sign. Shouby expresses that symbolic connotations may be visible, audible, or sensual, and they always refer to perceptible and concrete things. The linguistic connotations may be visible, audible, or sensual as well, and beyond that, they include the symbolism of the word, the idea, and the feeling. Thus, they indicate the symbolism of perceptible and imperceptible things (284–86). Hence, the utilisation of the Arabisation technique by Arab American writers is regarded as a pivotal element in the preservation and transmission of Arab culture, along with the aesthetics of its vocabulary. Arabisation serves as a means to transcend borders and acts as a cultural and linguistic conduit, fostering connections between diverse cultures.

In contemplating Nye's poetry, there is no doubt here that her insistence on using Arabic words like *sitti, booza, gazelle, mish-mish, ya' Allah, habibi*, and *habibti* in her work although she could have used their English equivalents implements more than imitation or commentary. Nye's English interacts with her Arabic to produce a hybrid literary text, reflect a hybrid identity, and mark peaceful resistance. On this front, Nye portrays a hybrid image in which it is impossible to say when or where Arabic stops and English begins. For instance, in various instances, Nye insists on using the word *sitti* although she could have used its English equivalent (grandmother) due to its rich connotations in the Arabic language. *Sitti* vividly describes the elderly woman, evoking the symbolic image of an aged Arabic woman with wrinkled skin and white hair, often covered in veil. In other contexts, *sitti* is also employed to denote a lady of esteemed status. Nye's deliberate choice of the word indicates all the previously mentioned meanings, enriching her expression and imbuing it with greater depth and significance compared to using the English equivalent. From this perspective, *sitti* evokes a profound Arabic sense and spirit of resistance.

Likewise, Handal successfully conceives a hybrid mental image in the recipient's mind by using transcription. In this regard, transcription implies primary and secondary meanings and words like, *baladna, maktoob, inshallah, Amrika, jiddos, khoubiz, and kaak* relate to the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's notions of "presence and absence" and "literal and metaphorical" in which both meanings are inseparable. According to Derrida in Deconstruction Theory, deconstructing the aspects of the text's meaning rely on figurative or performative uses of language (Rasche 255). In this context, Handal's multilingual diction renders hybrid and striking images in her reader's minds and is open to several possible interpretations. For example, in "Baladna," published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005), Handal reflects on her Arabic side by

remembering the common things in her homeland, "*ahweh, zaatar, khoubiz, kaak*" (line 5). Handal's choice of words embodies the sensual meanings related to the smell of the Arabic coffee, thyme, bread, and biscuits, which makes the reader live the same experience with their senses. In another context, Handal declares her belonging to the Arabic language while insisting that such language can only ever be present. In her prose poem "Une fin," which is the French meaning of "an end," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), Handal alludes to the Arabic language:

> We will never see the sea the sea the way we saw it together nor the wind that pushes us back into an old language we refuse to forget, like a book unopened after decades, the pages braced together. (38)

The presence of the "old language" exposes Handal's resistance to the domination of the French and English languages. The literary dimension of using the simile here tends to create a vivid image in the reader's mind of the unforgotten homeland that cannot be visited as an "unopened book" due to Handal's denied entry to the Palestinian villages in the District of Jerusalem for years. Regarding the structure of the poem, Handal's choice of a prose poem reflects the influence of the French and American writing traditions on her, on one side. On the other side, the poet architects a plot where the presence of the "old language" includes the rising action and climax to depict the dramatic conflict of the dual identity struggle.

Although one can observe similarities, stylistically and thematically, within the body of works produced by the three writers, there is also a wide diversity at the expression of their Arabic identity through language. While Handal and Nye tend to expose their Arabic ethnicity through transcription and Arabisation, Hazo prefers to reveal it through speaking of his roots in the Middle East. In literary analysis, the presence of Gaza and Jerusalem in "Mediterranean

Update" and "Documentation," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), is a type of allusion in which Hazo reflects his eastern ethnicity and criticises the political situation as well:

> "Everything's the same
> but us," I said, "because
> we've come back once too often."
> French television flashed
> a raid by F-16's in Gaza
> followed by a sacrificial bombing
> in Jerusalem. ("Mediterranean Update" lines 14–20)

Obviously, Hazo's cultural and political allusions in the above lines allow him to add meaning to his writing as a multicultural intellectual. In this atmosphere, Hazo insists on representing the Arabic part of his experience where the Palestinian issue is at the heart of it. It is this very mixture of images and cultures that make Hazo's writing so powerful and pertinent. In "Documentation," Hazo depicts Palestine through the girl who has been raped, "A woman punished / for adultery lost her nose" (lines 17–18) due to the deprivation of dignity and oppression they share:

> Abelard gave up to his castrators
> all that Eloise's father thought
> engendered love, but Abelard
> loved on.
> And what of her
> whose rapist took her tongue,
> forearms and eyes to keep her
> from identifying her defiler? (lines 19–26)

In a very poetic diction, the poem narrates the story of Abelard and Eloise as an allusion to the tragedy of Palestine that inhabits Hazo and reveals his ethnicity.[14] Hazo's allusion is firmly rooted in both a historical and cultural context, and it places him in a category of people calling for the formation of the collective consciousness. The importance of the story also lies in

[14] Eloise was a French nun and philosopher who had a love affair with the logician and theologian Peter Abelard in the twelfth century. Their Medieval love story and their surviving letters inspired French and European literature from the late thirteenth century and onward.

showing, on the one hand, how literature enables readers to analyse the two tragedies and, on the other hand, the writer's adherence to his Arabic legacy.

In fact, the explanation of resisting cultural bleach embodies notions exceeding language hybridity and transcription. The literature that resists cultural bleach involves the presence of images and characters from the Old World to confront the promotion of Whiteness. In "Mom Gives Away Your Ties," published in *Transfer* (2011), Nye articulates her adherence to a hybrid identity and resists "white" identities constructing cultural bleach. The work is one of the writer's autobiographical poems in which she documents her life with her mother representing the West and her father representing the East. The title "Mom Gives Away Your Ties" reveals an attempt at cultural bleaching in the small circle of the family which reflects similar attempts in neo-colonial institutions. On several occasions, Nye refers to her family members to achieve her goal. The attempt by her mother, who was American, to give away the ties belonging to Nye's father, who was Palestinian, is reassuring of the idea in the small circle, whereas throughout the poem, Nye does not refer to her mother, which takes the idea to bigger level as an institutional cultural bleaching that has functional and multidimensional imperial goals. The poem starts with an emotional moment gathering the complexities of the past and the present: "Just last week, nearly three years since you flew / from your miserable precious body, / I buried my face in your ties" (lines 1–3). The ties are deeply symbolic here because they indicate more than a piece of cloth worn around the neck. They indicate Nye's bounds to her legacy, which she revisits and explores to liberate herself.

> … fragrant still as your cheek
> every morning of my own young world.
> I thought of taking some but liked them there
> in place, where you left them,
> so today when I heard they'd be given
> to a raggedy swap shop near a lake,

> I had to stand outside a long time
> in the huge air, your one real home
> for all the days you walked among us. (lines 13–21)

Nye's image is very veteran, and she shows great flexibility in dealing with the passage of time. Moreover, the speaker draws strength from the past and from the sensuality of the image, which empowers them to develop an argument to confront cultural bleach: "when I heard they'd be given / to a raggedy swap shop near a lake, / I had to stand outside a long time" (lines 17–19). These lines also integrate Nye's rejection of rigid identity binaries and indicate the psychic strength to resist cultural bleach. In the last line, Nye puts more emphasis on diversity — "for all the days you walked among us" (line 21) — by celebrating it. Thus, the writer highlights her hybrid identity by accepting her multiplicity.

Undoubtedly, resisting cultural bleach interlinks with a refusal of the present and a representation of the past. Handal shows how Arab American literary and cultural productions resist cultural bleach and are highly privileged in being able to reclaim hybrid identities. In "Canto Mediterraneo," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), the poet voices her unique experience of multiplicity. The title itself, "Canto Mediterraneo," is the Spanish translation of "Mediterranean Singing" and identifies the poet with a multiple identity. Handal's engagement with the idea of resisting cultural bleaching comprises involvement with traditions, languages, music, style, ethnicities, and the self:

> The spell of each wave
> like the scent of absence
>
> like the distance between
> two longings
>
> like the ray's shadows
> in another light
>
> try to heal

with a different grief

but some heartaches
resist

even now
generations later

I return to you, Rebetiko[15]

to your qanun, oud[16]
toumperleki, politiki lyra[17] (lines 1–15)

Handal's lines play a role in articulating the politics of minorities, border crossings, the two worlds, and before all, resisting cultural bleaching. The tendency to engage different ethnicities — in this case, Greek and Arabic — emerges to create intersecting contexts where the word *return* is highly decisive. Handal's narrative of the spiritual return lies at the heart of both memory and transcendence. The word appears on a separate line, which indicates its crucial significance. According to the speaker, it is a return to what was lost within two contexts: the emotional and the physical. In an article "On Writing and Return: Palestinian-American Reflections" (2001), Majaj suggests the notion of a "return" exceeds the literal meaning of the word for Arab Americans, especially those who descend from Palestine, on two levels. The first level is because they are physically forbidden to return to Palestine through "military force, political collusion, confiscation of identity papers, imprisonment, and worse" (117). The second level is cultural and historical because they were divested of the right of historical and cultural return through the deprivation of "the right to preserve, express, document, and transmit their history" (117). Handal's lines make clear that the return to history is not necessarily related to a specific place. Moreover, it offers a new perspective of the return to the self after displacement.

[15] *Rebetiko* is Greek urban music.
[16] A *qanun* is an Arabic stringed musical instrument.
[17] A *Politiki lyra* is a stringed musical instrument derived from the medieval Greek Byzantine lyre.

> and I ask
>
> in what language will I love
> in what waters will I breathe
>
> in what voice will I find the world
> in what sound will I find the beats
>
> in what sun will I learn to speak
> in what love will I learn to sing (lines 16–22)

The questions, here, arise from an urgency to create cultural representation by deconstructing the structure of cultural domination and invoke scenes of searching for the self. In other words, the speaker does not give in to the idea of exile and displacement that is imposed on them but rather seeks to create an imagined homeland in the present and an individual identity: "now I listen to Kalaitzidis" (line 23).[18] With this premise, Handal's speaker attempts to memorialise the past — "swim back, swim back" (line 25) — by listening to ancient music. Majaj argues that Palestinian American literature explores the dual nature of the notion of a return ("On Writing and Return" 116). According to Handal, the notion of a return is multidimensional in that it revives the past, lives the present, and changes the future:

> my life
> is in your refrains
>
> listen, listen
> a song can change a people
>
> I'm Venetian and Greek
> I'm Jerusalem in Arabic
>
> I come from the outskirts of cities
> and the sea
>
> and to you Rebetiko, I return (lines 27–35)

[18] Kyriakos Kalaitzidis is considered a prominent contemporary composer and *oud* player who specialised in the post-Byzantine era of the Mediterranean.

For Arab American writers in the diaspora who are living in privileged circumstances, the interpretation of the notion of a return has different contexts than it does to Palestinian refugees in camps. For the privileged, the notion is kind of an emotional desire to return compared to what the notion means to the actual Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. Majaj observes that Palestinian refugees in camps in Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, Gaza, and individually in other countries lack the necessities of life, and for them, a return is vital ("On Writing and Return" 116). In this context, Handal's desire to return is mixed with her collectivity in the diaspora: "I'm Venetian and Greek / I'm Jerusalem in Arabic / I come from the outskirts of cities" (lines 31–33) and the return to the self: "and to you Rebetiko, I return" (line 35), on one hand. On the other hand, this return to the self also indicates an implicit return to the homeland in Palestine and challenges any arguments against Palestinian repatriation. These arguments claim that demographically, the Palestinian/Israeli land is overpopulated and does not have enough space for all the refugees to return. On the contrary, Majaj provides a recent study indicating "there is ample unpopulated refugee land in Israel to which Palestinians could be repatriated" and highlighting the deceptive democratic claims in the politics of minority, which aim to minimise the number of the indigenous in the territory ("On Writing and Return" 119). Considering that, Handal's poem shows an understanding of the complex realities of the notion of a return, invokes an emotional and existential return to the homeland, and challenges the politics of minority.

Hazo's experience is delineated by border crossing, border exclusion, and the cultural politics of silence versus cultural bleach. In "No Echo in Judea," published in *And the Time Is: Poems, 1958–2013* (2014), Hazo's speaker responds to a sense of marginalisation through a

journey to the south that suddenly turns into a journey through time and place and takes him back eight hundred centuries to his homeland of Syria:

> As I drive south to Christ and Abraham,
> the tires speed the desert road before
> me back to Syria. The clocks have stopped.
> …
> The sun blinks at me from a donkey's eye
> exactly as it blinked eight centuries
> ago on tribes of Arabs armed to purge
> the last crusader from Jerusalem.
> How many bones survive? How many skulls
> did Timurlane leave stacked in pyramids (lines 1–3, 7–12)

The image projects the modern concept of cultural bleaching that has been imposed on minorities throughout history and interlinks it to the last crusade and the ways armed Arab tribes resisted it. In the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries started French, English, and American schools in different parts of the Arab world which imposed cultural bleach. Badran and Cooke claim that in the early nineteenth century, Arabic was the language of the majority and Turkish was spoken by the elite since the Ottoman Empire ruled most of the Arab world for three centuries. In the 1920s, English and French replaced Turkish because they were the languages of instruction in schools. After WWI, most Arab countries gained independence, and Arabic became the language of instruction (xxv). Implicitly, however, Hazo suggests that military forces can confront forced cultural bleaching, but that might cause civilian deaths: "How many bones survive? How many skulls?" (line 11). Nevertheless, the next image emphasises how Arabs were desperate to resist different waves of cultural bleaching, including English, French, Turkish, and Mongolian:

> where Bedouin fork wheat against the wind
> and watch it fall. I squint for evidence.
> The deadness of the sea near Jericho
> unscrolls no secrets, and the sand endures
> for wind alone to sift and re-arrange
> and blew the smell of Briton, Frenchman, Turk

> and Mongol to the sun. (lines 13–19)

The image becomes more complicated and confusing:

> … The tribes
> of Canaan graze their camels near the road
> I conquer like a new crusader armed
> with film and cigarettes. Nursed on the blood
>
> of Europe's cross and Europe's rack, (lines 21–25)

Hazo's speaker is celebrating a Western identity rather than an Arab or hybrid identity, and the simile in the line makes this clear: "I conquer like a new crusader armed / with film and cigarettes" (lines 23), which indicates the speaker does not resist the attempts at cultural bleaching but rather indicates his surrender to them. Additionally, it reveals Hazo's tendency to adopt United States culture to gain acceptance and his desire to assimilate

> … I search
> for what was here before the world moved west.
> A donkey blinks. Bedouin cane their sheep.
> A child cries until his mother plumps
> her breast against him, thumbs the nipple firm
> and plugs the blind mouth mute as history. (lines 25–30)

The speaker's attempt to search for something missing "before the world moves west" (line 26) is merely a reflection of a search for the self. At the same time, it reflects a surrender to cultural bleach. Hazo's speaker appears passive to these cultural practices, whereas Nye's and Handal's speakers in "Mom Gives Away Your Ties" and "Canto Mediterraneo," respectively, appear more active to resist them. However, the last image indicates a fundamental strategy in the politics of minorities: the cultural politics of silence. The writer highlights some of the literary practices which often work to silence minorities and their literature. The metaphor of "the blind mouth" (line 30) and the simile "mute as history" (line 30) enforce notions of marginalisation, exclusion, cultural bleach, and the cultural politics of silence. Throughout history, dominant cultures have

used the politics of silence oppressively to censor and erase ideas, identities, and literature. In contrast, the child's cries indicate powerful resistance to the politics of silence, in which silence is both a concept and a practice. However, the child's cries might be his richest contribution against hegemony, and a form of silence embodies civil disobedience.

In general, multiculturalism, identity, and language are central to understand the notion of hybridity in Hazo, Handal, and Nye's writings. The three writers' representations of their notion of hybridity reflect a fundamental understanding of an individual identity. Thus, their realisation of the "self" transcends the limitations of place and embodies the notions of openness, acceptance, and tolerance. The essence to understanding hybridity in these representations lies, then, in understanding the concepts of in-betweenness and diversity. Instead of being suspected of cultural ignorance by their Western and Arab readers, the three writers have developed awareness of their cultural dualism where hybridity can coexist and intersect within their poetry, which contributed to resisting cultural bleaching as a strategy in the politics of minorities.

Poetic Diction

Over the last century, Arab American literature has sought to attract more attention in the mainstream among United States minorities. However, the attacks of 9/11 led to a turning point with the increased interest of readers in everything Arab and Muslim. On the other hand, the attacks of 9/11 encouraged Arab American writers to write prolifically and cover more ground with new themes and topics. Shalal-Esa states that the American literary mainstream highlighted themes centred on the Middle East, Islam, and women's rights in post-9/11 literature. The writer provides a database revealing a remarkable increase in the publications about the Middle East and the Arab world. The data show that United States publishing houses released 793

publications about the Middle East and the Arab world in 1997. In 2004, the publications jumped to a peak of 1304 (para. 2). The huge effect of the attacks on the publishing industry illuminates the communal interest in literature that portrays the Middle East in human terms and mirrors the Arab American experience from a personal dimension. Moreover, it reflects that Arab American intellectuals took the lead in publicising their true culture and providing narratives to articulate their cultural identity to American readers.

The increase in the number of publications produced a change in the writing tradition as well, and contemporary Arab American poets followed the same poetic tradition that Arab American first-generation poets introduced to the Arabic poetic tradition. Shalal-Esa believes that writers such as Gibran, Rihani, and Naimy were influenced by the Western writing tradition due to their surrounding American social and literary contexts. The greatest influence on them was the adoption of free verse, which they introduced to their poetic heritage. According to Shalal-Esa, Rihani's most notable achievement was introducing free verse to Arabic poetic tradition in 1905 (para.4). However, Handal claims that the recognition for modernising Arabic poetry and innovating free verse goes to Gibran and Rihani (*The Poetry of Arab Women* 10). Therefore, Arab American poets broke away from their Arabic poetic tradition, or the traditional form which Jayyusi described in her edited *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (1992) as "characterized by a two-hemistich monorhymed arrangement and has been the only form used in traditional "formal" poetry since time immemorial" (8). By breaking away from the formality of the traditional form, Arab American poets evolved in their expressiveness and freely discussed numerous issues in a variety of forms, such as prose poetry, poetic prose, blank verse, strophic verse, and free verse. The revolution was not exclusive to the stylistic construction; it exceeded

that in new themes, language, imagery, metaphors, mythology, tones, and attitudes. Notably, the revolution against the classical literary tradition made them less appealing to Arab readers.

Some of these themes reveal a discourse that embraces the aesthetics of sensuality, sexuality, and eroticism, which have been considered taboos in the Arabic literary tradition for centuries. Nizar Qabbani played a significant role in liberating Arabic literature and freeing the body and the spirit from the traditional cultural structure and is considered one of the first pioneers who introduced eroticism to Arabic poetry.[19] Qabbani was influenced by Western poetic diction, especially French poetry, due to the influence of translated foreign poetry on Arabic poetry in the postcolonial era. In his erotic poetry, Qabbani engaged with controversial themes of politics, patriotism, and nationalism, which made his poetry the most widely read in the Arab world, and the integration of these themes made his poetry universal, on one hand. On the other hand, these themes caused his poetry to be banned in some countries and institutions in the Arab world. However, according to Kahf, Qabbani's erotic visions create aesthetics: "esthetics, then, is the field that unites politics and erotics, but never in the abstract, never divorced from the sensuous realities of human life. Beauty's form is love; its political form is freedom" ("Politics and Erotics in Nizar Kabbani's Poetry" 45). Erotic poetry has evolved over time in Western narration. For instance, Shakespeare's first published narrative poem, *Venus and Adonis* (1593), contains an erotic discourse on the topic of lust versus love. Regarding Arab American poetry, Arab American poets are concerned with Qabbani's themes and the relationship between them, the individual, and the homeland in their Western contexts even though discussing sexuality can create tension within an Arab American family that puts more

[19] Nizar Tawfiq Qabbani (1923–1998) was a Syrian poet. He held several political positions during his life. His poetry is characterised by exploring forbidden themes of politics, Arab nationalism, eroticism, and feminism. His poetry has been translated into several languages, including English and French.

emphasis on family and marriage. Kayyali believes that Arab American families conservatively discuss issues related to sexuality (66). In "Sex," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), Hazo compares the concepts and practices of sexuality in his conservative heritage and the liberal present. He also sheds light on the subject from a feminist point of view that calls for chastity rather than freedom from values and principles. The conversation between the male and female characters is characterised by sexual openness while they are talking about a movie they watched that contained love scenes:

> "Forget the love scenes," he said.
> "Which ones?" she answered, "Half
> the movie was one love scene
> after another."
> …
> "I read somewhere that it's like
> nudism — everything displayed,
> nothing revealed."
> "It's insulting
> to women, and I'm a woman." (lines 1–4, 14–18)

The female speaker adopts a hostile attitude towards dealing with women as objects in the cinema market and draws attention to the complicated relationship between nudism and sexuality. According to Hazo's speaker, the freeing of the body does not have to be obscene, vulgar, and erotic.

> He said, "Not much is hidden
> any more."
> "Not anything."
> "I guess
> you're right."
> "My mother's mother
> never knew a thing until
> her wedding night, but still
> she had six children and was happy." (lines 20–28)

The conversation between the two is rooted in their Arabic heritage, where talking about sex is taboo. The ignorant grandmother portrays the image of women in classical Arabic tradition and

sheds light on the history of women and marriage. Myrne notes that in traditional Arabic societies, discussing women's sexuality was characterised by fear. In addition, the writer claims that female sexuality was restricted by legal principles during the eighth century in the Arabo-Islamic world (1–2). According to Malti-Douglas, the core of the Arabic culture remains Islamic despite the fact that some Arabic cultures are non-Islamic. The writer defines the Arabo-Islamic cultural discourse as "the reflection of a civilizational reality in which religious values and ideals become embodied in the literary and cultural expressions of historical Middle Eastern societies" (4). In fact, the dilemma of liberating the woman in the Middle East is complicated and interlinked to Orientalist discourse and politics. From an Orientalist perspective, the oppressed woman in the East puts the Oriental in a superior position. Moreover, Malti-Douglas believes that nowadays, the liberation of women in modern Middle Eastern societies is essential to westernisation and the politics of minorities (3–4). Arab writers such as Nawal El Saadawi explicitly discuss female sexuality and the female body in their works to empower and liberate women. In this context, Hazo's female character is empowered and liberated to carry on a conversation about sex that transcends her legacy:

> He laughed
> and said, "That shows how men
> and women differ where it comes
> to sex."
> She poured some coffee
> for herself and said, "With men
> it's all performance."
> "What's wrong
> with that?"
> "Nothing, until they can't."
> "Can't what?"
> "Just when they get good
> at it, they find it harder
> and harder to do."
> "Let's change
> the subject."

"I guess it's just
a case of desire getting ahead
of ability."
"Let's change the subject." (lines 33–52)

In these lines, Hazo articulates the contradictions between the man and the woman, the Old World and the New World, and erotic discourse and traditional culture. His literary articulation is inextricably linked to women's bodies and the expressiveness of women's voices. Therefore, the erotic implications of the text convey a woman's body and a woman's voice and reveal the Western influence on the writer, on one hand. On the other hand, they textualise the problematic nature of a woman's voice when the male speaker insists on changing the subject and questions the male and female traditions. In "The Painters of Nudes," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), Hazo also employs eroticism and nudism to illustrate a woman's body:

Like girls not yet aware
of what a woman's body
means, they offered Renoir
the texture of skin.
On canvas
they became an old man's dream
of women playfully nude
for him alone…
Picasso's
early nudes look almost
like cartoon.
His fans
anointed them "Picassos." (lines 1–13)

The poem explores the writer's poetic diction to discuss the problematic portrayal of a woman's body in which he does not adhere to a safe traditional cultural heritage to limit his creativity. On the contrary, despite the controversialism of the topic in Arabic literary tradition, Hazo positions himself in a Western context and speaks freely and explicitly about the topic. Throughout the poem, Hazo's speaker depicts the relationship between nudism in art and the complicated relationship between genders. At the end of the poem, the speaker draws his own conclusion:

“Art as reaction / says less about the woman, / more about the man” (lines 41–43). Hazo intends the text to share a philosophical message. The poem alludes to the problematic nature of a woman’s voice and a woman’s body, where the presence of her body assumes the absence of her voice.

Likewise, Handal provokes contradictory feelings when she freely expresses her romantic thoughts about sexuality and eroticism in “Life in a Country Album,” published in her 2020 collection.

> I waited for thee,
> said, Come to bed,
> where bodies drown love
> to reach pleasures
> free of parsing,
> said, Come to dreams
> that undress other centuries.
> …
> I waited for thee,
> full of salt,
> syllables and stones.
> O maiden, hold my waist.
> O beloved, hold my body. (lines 1–7, 23–27)

In these lines, Handal portrays a sexual and erotic image to pave the way to the main theme of the poem.

> Teach me the thunder
> that took you away
> and told you
> to stay nowhere.
> Tell me if this album
> is the love we swore to. (lines 28–32)

Handal creatively builds on the erotic image to represent the themes of exile, the diaspora, and displacement. The speaker employs sexual and erotic discourses not only to reveal gender concerns but also because they are linked to concerns about the Arab American national identity. From a postcolonial perspective, a link exists between Arab American national identity and

sexuality, both of which include a dominant personality and a subservient other. In Handal's poem, the speaker yearns for an absent beloved, who is displaced, which explicitly alludes to Said's concept of "out of place." Moreover, Handal speaks about the political function of eroticism in her work in an interview with Sherouk Zakaria titled "Poet-Voyager: A Conversation with Nathalie Handal" (2022), in which she says, "Eroticism is an act of resistance" (para. 4). In other words, eroticism in poetry resists conservative cultures and traditions. According to Handal, the way that the body expresses itself erotically provokes the writer's imagination and pulls the reader deeper into the poem.

In Nye's poetry, the writer — who spent some years of her early life in Ramallah and Jerusalem — might have avoided exploring controversial themes of eroticism, sexuality, and nudism due to their sexually or socially controversial content in the homeland, where any attempt to discuss a woman's body and her sexuality is considered a challenge to the normative prescriptions of conservative Muslim and Arabic cultures. The writer avoids bringing controversial erotic issues to the forefront of her poetry, which indicates she also adheres to a masculine culture. The presence of Nye's father and his legacy in poems such as "My Father and the Figtree," "What Kind of Fool Am I?," "Biography of an Armenian Schoolgirl," "For Mohammed on the Mountain," "Arabic Coffee," and many other poems, all published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002), suggest the influence of strict Islamic, Arabic, and masculine cultures in which men are given more rights to express and practice their sexuality than women are. Moreover, it shows that Nye moves away from her Western present and its tendency to liberate a woman's voice via a sexual liberation of her body. In "Spark," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*, Nye tends to liberate the female body and spirit in a respectful political framework:

> Two girls danced, red flames winding.
> I offered my shoes to the gypsies,
> threw back my head, and yelled.
> …
> I gave American shoes, sandals from Greece.
> They held each one curiously, shy to put them on.
> Later the shoes disappeared into the tent
> and I walked home with their drums in my belly. (lines 1–3, 16–19)

Nye's speaker swings between two worlds, the gypsies' world and the real world, which are obviously associated with the Old World and the New World, respectively. The speaker's desire to be free from the shoes and to throw her head back and yell reflects an unbridled desire for freedom, but this kind of freedom is restricted within a larger framework bound by red lines that cannot be crossed. The speaker declares a hybrid identity in "I gave American shoes, sandals from Greece" (line 16) and alludes to the poet's respectful illustration of a woman's body and nudism: "Later the shoes disappeared into the tent / and I walked home with their drums in my belly" (lines 18-19). Although the speaker succeeds in freeing herself and gains a voice "with drums" (line 19), this voice is repressed "in my belly" (line 19) when it comes to discussing controversial issues, which indicates that Nye is illustrating a woman's body, a woman's voice, and that the freedom she has gained from her present Western context is still restricted by her Arabic conservative past. She also implicitly discusses female sexuality and sexual problems in the context of the history of women and marriage in the Arab world. In "Biography of an Armenian Schoolgirl," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*, the poet sheds light on the problems of certain unions, such as arranged marriages and child marriages, which are interwoven in her autobiography:

> I have lived in the room of stone
> where voices become bones
> buried under us long ago.
> …
> What is the history of Europe to us if we cannot

> choose our own husbands?
> Yesterday my father met with the widower,
> the man with no hair.
> How will I sleep with him, I who have never slept
> away from my mother? (lines 1–3, 13–18)

Nye's speaker, who is a multicultural Armenian schoolgirl, narrates a story that takes place in an ancient room that depicts the Old World and the ancient cities of Ramallah and Jerusalem to critique the politics of silence, "Where voices become bones" (line 2). The critique extends to include the social and cultural practices of arranged marriage and child marriage, because the speaker is a schoolgirl in the Arab world. In both unions, a social injustice is practiced against a woman or girl's voice and body. In "Arab American Writing and the Challenge of Reinventing Tradition" (2003), Mattawa argues that in the post-9/11 literature, Arab American writers have unconsciously applied a cultural protectiveness by avoiding confrontation with problematic issues that define the Arab culture as a misogynist, masculine culture, including forced marriage: "We fear airing our dirty laundry because we fear the very likely possibility of that information being used against us" (46). Conversely, Nye cautiously attempts to draw attention to female sexuality and a woman's right to sexual fulfilment because the speaker's arranged husband is a widower, which alludes to an age gap between the bride and the groom. In discussing controversial themes involving sexuality and women's bodies, Nye positions herself in a conservative stance to engage with an Arabic context and domestic concerns, whereas, in contrast, Hazo and Handal are open to discussing these themes in a liberated Western context.

Even though Arab American poets rebelled against their poetic tradition, contemporary Arab American poets did not escape their sober history by writing poetry in the first place. In her article "New Directions: Arab American Writing Today" (2017), Majaj highlights the significance of producing poetry for Arab Americans:

> as a group Arab Americans have produced more poetry than prose because poetry is somehow "in our blood". This intrinsic link to poetry often claimed even when the writers in question do not read Arabic and have no direct relationship to the tradition of Arabic poetry. (127)

Majaj points out the cultural significance of poetry for Americans of Arab descent although they composed their poetry in English which explains why poetry is the most dominant genre in Arab American literature. Hazo conceptualises the significance of poetry in "Preface to a Poetry Reading," published in *And the Time Is: Poems, 1958–2013* (2014). Although philosophy and poetry may seem to be disparate disciplines, the writer strives to philosophise the poetic process:

> Since eyes are deaf, and ears are blind to words
> in all their ways, I speak the sounds I write
> hoping you see what somehow stays unheard
> and hear what never is quite clear at sight. (lines 1–4)

The whole poem is composed of one quatrain and sentence. Hazo's creativity enables him to compress the highly complex process of writing poetry into a short narrative, yet self-contained enough to maintain the full expression of the idea. The writer is capable of changing a well-known English adage, "blind eyes, deaf ears," to convey his philosophical conceptualisation of poetry. In this context, Hazo follows in the footsteps of Nietzsche and Ali Ahmad Said Esber, known as Adonis, who reflect on philosophy and poetry, and employs contradictory metaphors with the aesthetics of beauty and art. Nietzsche also manipulates the use of metaphor in his work. He writes that "the drive toward the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive" (88). Nietzsche suggests connections among language, thought, and the human experience. This perspective emphasises the role of metaphor as a fundamental aspect of the individual's cognitive and existential processes, emphasising its significance in shaping how the individual perceives and navigates the complexities of life. Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said Esber) believes that the aesthetics of metaphor lie in its spiritual potential need to transcend reality: "Metaphor

transcends: just as the language of metaphor goes beyond itself to something less accessible" (*An Introduction to Arabic Poetics* 71). According to the writer, metaphor is a vehicle for reaching beyond the surface of reality and connecting with deeper, more profound truths. Therefore, in the poem, Hazo employs contradictory metaphors to celebrate what poetry could achieve to transcend the limitations of the real world. In his poetry, Hazo aims to devote the concepts of philosophy and knowledge to illuminate humanity from a philosophical approach.

Primarily, Hazo's concept of poetry is philosophical and universal and not limited to one ethnicity. Yet, Handal highlights the significance of poetry for Arab Americans in her quartet "Tessera," published in *Volo* (2022).

> poems divine and alive,
> Their repetitions
>
> keep us moving,
> explain to us histories,
>
> wars and nature.
> Poems, a long paper
>
> covering the world
> like a great music
>
> composed together
> to tell us
>
> that love is all love needs.
> We forget poems all over again
>
> but poems continue to sing
> to us, and wait for us to sing. (lines 19–32)

For Handal, poetry is not merely poetic. It restores memories and history. Foremost, it celebrates the contradictions of life and death, presence and absence, and grief and happiness. This recalls a fundamental question: why do contemporary Arab American writers write poetry in English and not Arabic? To answer this question, different barriers should be considered. The first one is that

most of these writers do not have the capabilities to write in Arabic because they do not speak Arabic due to their upbringing in the West. The second barrier is related to their hybrid identities, which makes them seek a unified whole and results in a split vision. Salaita states that Arab American writers adopt a split vision which enables them to move back and forth between two cultures ("Vision" para. 12); however, when it comes to self-expression, English is more expressive for them. In her interpretation of the concept of a split vision, Majaj suggests that Arab Americans tend to integrate the two cultures, experiences, and identities into one. In this process, the split between the two still exists, which makes the individual view their current United States context. At the same time, they view the Arab context from a different perspective. Nevertheless, in many cases, the individual views "the ground beneath their feet" ("New Directions" 123). The third barrier is more sociological. Majaj argues that due to economic and social bureaucracy, the publication process for a book-length work of fiction demands more money and efforts than publishing a book of poetry ("New Directions" 127). The difference in publishing demands between fiction and poetry reflects how these literary forms are valued and supported. Poetry, often seen as requiring less economic investment, tends to offer more diverse uses of language. These barriers are considerable enough to justify why Arab American poetry has largely been produced in English.

However, the attacks of 9/11 put contemporary Arab American writers under renewed pressure to fill the gap with new portrayals and more representations of the Arab American identity and to provide more critiques of the self and the community. In their poetry, Hazo, Handal, and Nye use radically different strategies to provide critical discussions of the self and the community, which Majaj believes can help lessen "the pressure on Arab American writers to serve as "translators" and guardians of their culture" ("New Directions" 130). By providing their

own critiques, the three poets contribute to the identity of contemporary Arab American literature.

Hazo productively moves forward in his critique to discuss humanistic concerns, which makes him appealing to readers outside the local community. The writer's intellectual and thematic expansion justifies the expansion of his literary style to write prose poetry. In "Manolete and Islero," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), Hazo memorialises the tragic death of the famous bullfighter Manolete, who was killed by the Miura bull Islero on August 28, 1947. Hazo's speaker reflects on his visit to Museo Taurino in Cordoba (Bullfighting Museum of Cordoba) which has preserved Manolete's legacy. The speaker takes a tour of the two rooms, the first of which was designed for conducting business. The second room could be described as a crime scene, where the remains of the victim and the murderer are tragically displayed:

> The other encases or displays his sword, cape, three suits of lights, the supine graveyard replica of his likeness in effigy and his last shirt torn and yellowed with fifty-year-old bloodstains. Stretched and mounted on one wall splays the black hide of Islero, the bull that gored Manolete to death while it was being fatally stabbed by him in the last second of the last act of the last fight of the last tour in Manolete's career. (40)

The speaker employs a detailed description of the display rather than expressing their feelings to evoke an imaginative awareness of the experience and an emotional reaction through language. Explicitly, Hazo criticises the brutality practiced against animals that causes the brutality practiced against humanity. The writer also engages with the anaphora literary technique in repeating the phrase "the last" in "the last second of the last act of the last fight of the last tour" (40) to create a sonic effect and a sense of ascending dramatic action. Implicitly, however, Hazo takes the poem to a postcolonial critique in "the hide displaces approximately one third of the wall space and dominates the room" (40). The wall represents the world that is dominated by

imperial powers despite all the unhuman practices to justify power struggle. The black hide of the dead animal symbolises the domination of the imperial powers that dominate the world. The last sentence reveals the writer's critique when his speaker asks one Spaniard, "Why so much space was given to Islero. 'Why not?' he answers. 'Look at what he did'" (4). The elegiac tone of the poem in all the horror that Islero caused suggests the problematic of the idea of imperialism on the humanistic and political levels. On a literary level, the symbolism of the text criticises the United States' imperial intentions as the most dominant imperial power in the modern world. Moreover, the symbolism of the story of Manolete and Islero engages with the uneven political exchange of power in the Palestinian/Israeli crisis in which the black hide represents the Israeli occupied territories and where the Spaniard represents the international community that justifies the brutality of the Israeli military forces and the deaths of civilians. The Spaniard's attempt to justify the domination of the black hide on one-third of the wall to promote the notion of imperialism to persuade the international community of the legality of imperial expansion and its domains. The poem strives to deconstruct the political, cultural, and humanistic domains of imperialism in a way that constructs a critique of the community, whether domestic or international, and a critique of the self in reference to the Other. Most importantly, it contributes to reconstructing or redefining the boundaries in the context of modern globalisation and imperialism.

Nye composes prose poetry and writes ethnographic poetry to serve not only as a linguistic translator but also as a cultural translator. In "Gate A-4," published in *Honeybee* (2008), Nye illustrates her thoughts on the American racial ideology and contemporary Arab American experience. The writer's choice to write the poem as narrative prose poetry using ordinary language to narrate a short story indicates an intention to make the poem accessible to a

person who typically reads prose. Moreover, it indicates the writer's focus on plot over emotion, which is the main distinction between lyrical and narrative poetry. The poem narrates an incident during a flight delay at an airport where the main character, who is Nye's speaker, hears a request for help from anyone who speaks Arabic announced over the loudspeaker. The poem's speaker responds and takes the reader to another scene where they spot an old Palestinian woman who reminds the speaker of their grandmother: "An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing loudly" (180). In fact, the direct reference to Nye's grandmother makes the poem autobiographical. The vivid imagery and detailed descriptions she portrays from her own experience create a strong connection between Nye and the poem.

> 'Help,' said the Flight Agent. 'Talk to her. What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this.' I stopped to put my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly. '*Shu dow-a, shu-bid-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bit-se-wee?* The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, 'You're fine, you'll get there, who's picking you up? Let's call him.' We called her son, I spoke with him in English, saying I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane. (180)

Although Nye's speaker sympathises with the old woman in the way the speaker puts their arm around her, the speaker criticises the woman's overreaction and the way she becomes emotional before understanding what is actually happening. The speaker of the poem bases their reaction to the woman on assumptions rather than facts. Her overreaction is built on assumptions rather than facts due to the language barrier, which indicates a critique of the Arab world and the East and leads to Orientalist discourse and judging the East as an irrational and emotional Other. From this premise, Nye implements an Orientalist discourse in the way she portrays the old Palestinian

woman. Yet, this discourse embodies a critique of three communities: the old Palestinian woman who represents the East, the speaker who represents the Arab American community, and the flight agent who represents the West. In her critique of the self, Nye criticises Arab Americans for neglecting the Arabic language and declares that it is “poorly used” (180). In an interview with Majaj in an article in the journal *Aljadid* “Talking with Poet Naomi Shihab-Nye” (1996), Nye expresses her regret that she did not learn to speak Arabic:

> our father didn’t speak much Arabic in the house because our mother didn’t speak it. The only times we would hear it is when he spoke with guests or relatives. I was fascinated by it, but it was not taught to me. I think my father regrets it now, too. (para. 11)

She also criticises the West for the way it considers everything a threat, seen in the way the flight agent speaks (i.e., “Help … Talk to her. What is her problem?”; 180). Majaj believes that in the post-9/11 Arab American literature, Arab American writers were under pressure to move beyond traditional themes of nostalgia, ethnicity, and diaspora “toward a more critical, reflective, creative and transformative engagement with the many strands of Arab American experience” (“New Directions” 129). According to Majaj, this expansion is not limited to literary themes: it extends to include new literary styles, and genres that correspond to the formulation of self-critique rather than simple celebrations in a lyrical form (“New Directions” 129–30). Thus, Nye’s intention to narrate the story using prose poetry is not a coincidence. In fact, it is to provide an expanded critique of the self and the community in the best suited form, which is prose poetry because of its emphasis on plot over emotions.

In fact, finding a connection between the notion of imperialism or modern globalisation and composing prose poetry is related to cultural domination. In other words, the dominant culture imposes its poetic literary form on the Other. In this context, and regarding the subject of this study, it is understandable why Arab American writers employ prose poetry to create a

critique of the self, the Other, and the community, and before all, to enable them to work as linguistic and cultural translators to translate their awareness of displacement as a ramification of the postcolonial era. In "Letter from the Levant," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), Handal reflects on her experience as a person descended from the Levant and the way that constructs the fragmentation of her poetry:

> There is no city behind the window. No place of worship. No stars between our stories. No gleaming meadow. The ruins we never named are endless. The survivors our scars. We have to believe God is the faint resonance inside, that silence will take eternity apart and hang it on death's small door. It's true, once we knew every stop on the Palestinian railway. Now from other windows, we still see the route to Baghdad, Homs to Tripoli, Baalbek to Beirut, Tyre to Acre, Haifa to Jaffa, Jerusalem to Gaza before Alexandria. Now from distant places we read postcards that say, *my hands are for my absence only*. We pretend not to believe. Where we come from the truth never disturbs the horse in our sleep. We close our hands to forget what we know and are unable to tell. (54)

Handal wrote this piece of poetry as a coauthor for a longer piece in contribution with Dr Lily Balloffet and Dr Elizabeth Saylor. The writers dedicated the poem to *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North Africa Migration Studies*. However, the fragmentation of Handal's poem is meaningful because it is connected by the Palestinian railway that linked most of the Levant cities between 1920 and 1948. After WWII, the colonial powers, including Britain, France, and Tsarist Russia, divided the Levant and the Arab world into states through the geographical division of borders to divide the Ottoman Empire. Britain took control of the southern regions of the Levant, Baghdad, Basra, the ports of Acre and Haifa, and the areas between the Arab Gulf and the French region. France received the largest part of the Levant, part of southern Anatolia, and the Mosul region, whereas Russia received Constantinople, the Bosporus, and large parts in eastern Anatolia. Palestine was placed under international

administration in consultation between the three countries. On 14 May 1948, the British Mandate expired, and the British government provided support for Jewish people to create a state in Palestine. In the same month, the Palestinian railway ceased its operation due to the dissolvement of the British Mandate and the Zionist forces declared the foundation of the Israel State. In the poem, Handal illustrates the collective trauma in the aftermath of postcolonialism and draws life before the geopolitical borders were launched. At the beginning of the poem and over one window, the speaker's fragmentations and short sentences reflect their state of mind after trauma to look at the ruins and the divisions of the Levant. Then, the speaker looks at other windows and remembers how life looked before as a flash back. The writer creatively squeezes the timeline that extends from the beginning of the twentieth century and before the World Wars to the end of colonisation to narrate the story of exile in the diaspora for migrants in 12 lines of prose poetry: "Now from distant places we read postcards that say, *my hands are for my absence only*" (54). In "Diasporic Cartographies: An Interview with Nathalie Handal" (2017), Balloffet and Saylor believe that one of the distinctive features of Handal's poem is the vividly visual images it provides of the fragmentations to depict the ramifications of postcolonialism. According to the writers, the poem employs the fragmentations to document the strategies of denial and oppression that have been practiced to divide the people of the Levant (148). Handal provides the reader with an understanding of the geopolitical divisions and calls for cultural unity in the diaspora. To absorb this unity, the writer involves an immense critique to reform her community as well as the self.

In the literary tradition, ballads began as oral poetry and were originally dance songs meant to narrate a story in a song-like manner. For Arab Americans, composing poetry in ballad form connects them to the continued legacy of Arab American culture rooted in the Old World.

Featured in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), Hazo follows the traditional form of the ballad in "Ballad of All Battles." The poem is written in repeated quatrains of ABAB to narrate the story of all battles, taking the poem to a universal level and widening the sense of poetry.

> The first ones to leave were the wealthy.
> They packed all they owned and were gone.
> Because they were mobile and healthy,
> there was nothing to make them stay on.
>
> They left to their fate all the others —
> the children, the poor and the lame.
> Why bother to see them as brothers
> since nobody knew them by name? (lines 1–8)

The poem depicts a vivid image of the ramifications of war that begin a diaspora's journey to nowhere. The ballad is directly concerned with humanity and Marxism rather than patriotism or nationalism. The wealthy or the elite represent the greed of the upper class who flee for their lives without feeling any responsibility towards their country or community. From their perspective, there is a sense of dehumanisation of the poor and lower class: "Why bother to see them as brothers" (line 7). In the next stanza, the writer highlights the significance of the resilience that the middle class showed in defending their country:

> The workers remained out of duty.
> They called it their city to keep.
> Their work had a laborer's beauty,
> and their roots in the city were deep. (lines 9–12)

It is worth noting here that throughout the poem, the writer does not mention a specific enemy, which suggests that he narrates the story of all battles. The last two stanzas may reveal that Hazo narrates the Lebanese battle. The siege suggests the Siege of Beirut (1982):

> Under siege from all sides but unbeaten,
> the starving ate dogs and then cats.
> When the last of the cats had been eaten,
> the desperate feasted on rats. (lines 21–24)

On 15 June 1982, the Israeli units entrenched outside Beirut to force the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to withdraw from Lebanon. The siege caused a massive number of civilian deaths and unforgettable macabre, which offer Hazo a viable frame to narrate the horrors of the war. Moreover, the last stanza may also indicate the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990):

> Even now who can answer what ended
> or even what started the war?
> The people were left undefended,
> and the innocent died by the score. (lines 25–28)

One of the causes of the civil war in Lebanon, besides the religious and political reasons due to the diversity of political polarisations that resulted from the multiplicity of Lebanon's demography (Sunni Muslims, Shi'a Muslims, Maronite Christians, and Druze), was the economic reason that Hazo sheds light on at the beginning of the poem. The concentration of Lebanese economic interests in the capital city of Beirut was largely linked to political powers and caused an imbalanced economic structure, especially in Southern Lebanon. Despite his Western upbringing, the poem reflects Hazo's portrayal of the horrendous experiences people underwent during Lebanon's civil war. The traumatic memories of the war leave the reader with questions about the usefulness of war in writing human history. From another premise, by taking the poem to a universal level, Hazo writes about the tragedies of the war for an international readership to draw attention to the Arabic nation's tragic events and narrate the story of the homeland, which helps to shift the focus from thematic readings of his poetry to appreciation of the humanistic strategies he employs.

Whereas Hazo adheres to a traditional form of writing a ballad in ABAB quatrains, Handal chooses to hold on to the tradition of composing a ballad in 13 lines. Handal's poem best described as a free-verse ballad, taking inspiration from the ballad storytelling tradition while adapting into a more contemporary form. In "The Ballad of Haya," published in *The Lives of*

Rain (2005), Handal paints a portrait of a dead Palestinian schoolgirl, which is suggested by her "uniform." The poet produces a sentimentalised depiction of the remains of the dead girl in aesthetics:

> And a hand was left
> nothing more of her
> And the memory of
> a bullet through
> her uniform was left
> nothing more of her
> And the old gold color
> of her hair
> and the silver dark beneath her eyes
> and the borders of her heart
> falling as she walked
> block after block was left
> nothing else of her (lines 1–13)

The poem concentrates on one tragedy and ignores the chaos of the biggest tragedy in Palestinian history to provide insight into a lived human experience. The lack of punctuation and capitalisation give the poem an emotional tone and an elegiac narrative fluidity. In addition, it drives the narrative to an open conclusion. In the poem, the aesthetics of Haya the schoolgirl symbolises Palestine, and lines 10 and 11 ("and the borders of her heart / falling as she walked") symbolise the Israeli settlements built on the occupied Palestinian lands. The poet reflects on the constant expansion of the occupied territories at the expense of sovereign Palestinian territories: "block after block was left / nothing else of her" (lines 12–13). The links that Handal creates between Palestine and Haya suggest that the poem is a compilation of symbolic textuality and it evokes the damage caused by Palestine's tragedy within every Arab reader. In addition, the symbolism that Handal employs makes the poem more appealing for American readers to help them relate to Arabs' suffering.

However, Nye breaks with the ballad tradition in “Morning Song,” published in *The Tiny Journalist* (2019). She calls it a song to narrate the story of Janna Jihad Ayyad, the Palestinian youth activist and amateur journalist. The poem is written in a free-verse form and two-lined stanza couplets except the final line to narrate the story of the young journalist:

> The tiny journalist
> will tell us what she sees.
>
> Document the moves, the dust,
> soldiers blocking the road.
>
> Yes, she knows how to take a picture
> with her phone. Holds it high
>
> like a balloon. Yes, she would
> prefer to dance and play,
>
> would prefer the world
> to be pink. It is her job to say
>
> what she sees, what is happening.
> From her vantage point everything
>
> is huge — but don’t look down on her.
> She’s bigger than you are. (lines 1–14)

Nye also relates Ayyad to Palestinian youth forced to live in devastating circumstances. She takes her as a representative of them and thus the poem is a documentation of their existence and their peaceful practices to enjoy life: “she would / prefer to dance and play” (lines 7–8). The young character represents Palestinian youths’ struggle to find their way in the harsh conditions under the occupation:

> She stares through a hole in the fence,
> barricade of words and wire,
>
> feels the rising fire
> before anyone strikes a match. (lines 35–38)

At the end of the poem, Nye puts an emphasis on a better future, “She has a better idea” (line 39), which indicates the contemporary generation has overcome trauma. Seen from this perspective, it is understandable why Nye employs an optimistic tone in the poem. From the title to the last line, the sense of hope does not cease.

Overall, Hazo, Handal, and Nye tend to narrate the story of the Levant in a ballad form to maintain a link with the Old World. Handal draws a clever insight in “Baladna,” published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005): “We write a ballad to celebrate ourselves, baladna / and wonder, is that what it’s like / to dance in Arabic…” (lines 22–24). Notably, the writer finds a link between composing poetry in ballad form for Arab Americans and the homeland. The transcription for the word “homeland” in Arabic is “*ballad,*” which is equivalent to the English word “ballad,” the poetic form. According to Handal, composing poetry in ballad form propels the tradition of the story of the Old World to a celebration of the self and the homeland. In this context, Hazo’s “Ballad of all Battles” can be read as the homeland of all battles. Likewise, Handal’s “The Ballad of Haya” might suggest the homeland of Haya. Both writers’ implementation of an elegiac tone in the poems could be linked to the titles and their choice to adopt the ballad literally and metaphorically. As for Nye’s “Morning Song,” the optimistic tone of the poem reveals that the writer breaks with the tradition of composing a ballad literally, metaphorically, and stylistically. At their core, the three poems meet in their commentary of the story of the self and the Levant as a homeland.

Examining the experience of Arab Americans’ identity suggests that they have developed a hybrid identity combining elements of their Old World heritage and their experiences in the New World. This hybrid identity interacts with each context differently, creating a new, unique identity for Arab Americans. In their poetry, Hazo, Handal, and Nye show an understanding of

the complexity of being seen as the Other and navigate the struggle associated with their hybrid identity. Analysing their poetry indicates that, despite sharing the same cultural background, these writers reacted differently to the discourses they encountered. Hazo chooses not to explicitly reveal his ethnicity in his poetry, while Handal and Nye actively strive to reveal their Arab American identity through their work. This difference in approach reflects Arab American community's diverse perspectives. In this chapter, I conclude that the poetry of Hazo, Handal, and Nye demonstrates how their ethnicity influences their writing. While Hazo's poetry may not explicitly mention his ethnicity, it still reflects the interplay of his cultural heritage and experiences. On the other hand, Handal and Nye use their poetry as a platform to explore and celebrate their Arabic heritage. I have argued that the selected writers employed various literary techniques, such as Arabisation and textual hybridity, as a means of resisting cultural bleaching. Furthermore, I contended that the implications of their ethnic identity, including the incorporation of oral narration and music, reflect a celebration of hybridity. I have emphasised understanding the complexities inherent in the concepts of space, place, and border crossing, forming the basis for my argument on the significance of poetic freedom. Poetry's ability to embody these intricate dimensions is central to the movement between them, offering a unique lens through which to understand cultural diversity. Overall, however, the poets have created speakers within their poetry who are influenced by both Arab and American cultures. This fusion of cultures results in a new, distinct identity that goes beyond ethnicity. Instead, it becomes a celebration of diversity, showcasing the richness and complexity of the Arab American experience.

Discussing these issues together explains how Arab American poets navigate and express their hybrid identities, highlighting the diversity within their community. By investigating the

selected poetry, the reader gains insights into different responses to cultural and ethnic discourses. Hazo’s approach contrasts with Handal and Nye’s celebration of their Arab heritage. This comparative kind of analysis brings out the uniqueness of their cultural background in their poetry in terms of resisting cultural assimilation and at the same time, celebrating their hybrid identity. Space, place, and border crossing as themes used by the poets have revealed the complexities of their experiences, emphasising that Arab American identity is rich and dynamic.

Chapter Two

Post-9/11 Discourse

For approximately two centuries, Arab American writers have been integral in delving into the complexities of racial formation in the United States. Their literary exploration reveals a keen awareness of the persistent model-minority stereotype, highlighting the ongoing presence of racial formation. This has far-reaching consequences for the intricate interplay between racialisation, marginalisation, and discrimination. In this chapter, I argue that a valuable contribution to this discourse comes from Arab American writers, whose works offer illuminating insights into the intricate racial dynamics in post-9/11 United States culture. According to Said, the decisive stereotypical assumptions have persistently promoted an ideological demarcation of Westerners and Arab-Orientals; "the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things" (*Orientalism* 49). Moreover, the events of 9/11 reinforced the existing stereotypical assumptions and misrepresentations regarding Arab Americans and helped increase their marginalisation. In his article "Muslims in Pre- and Post-9/11 Contexts" (2015), Abdullah mentioned that although racial discrimination and alienation practises are nothing new to Arabs and Muslims in the United States, contemporary Arab American writers can illuminate the impact of the aftermath of the attacks of September 11 (52). Taking into consideration that the attacks are strongly considered as a decisive moment in Western-Arab relationships, therefore, this chapter discusses the textual connotations of the attacks as represented by Hazo, Handal, and Nye. I argue that the writers have expressed and reflected fundamental notions through their representations, encompassing cultural, social, political, and historical commentaries. Based on an integration of various approaches to critical

discourse analysis, this chapter considers the discourse of the three writers, which refutes the stereotypical image of Arabs as terrorists and inspires change to the Orientalist attitude promoted in the West.

Overall, the chapter discusses imperialism as an extension of colonialism and the emergence of neo-Orientalism and its discourse. The chapter investigates how the writers differentiate between the “good Arab” and the “bad Arab” to confront the distorted image promoted, particularly in the post-9/11 era. The chapter examines nature and context of Arab American discourse since 9/11 to highlight the political dimensions and implications of Arab American poetry. Additionally, it explores the history of the embargo on Arabic literature in the West. In chapter 2, I argue that the writers understand that racialisation still exists within the United States, and this understanding enables them to redefine boundaries. The chapter discusses the presidential changes in the United States, with a special focus on Trump’s administration, Trumpism’s values, and ideologies, and their role in fuel racialisation and dividing national identity.

Neocolonialism as a New Geographical Colonialism

Theoretically, postcolonial theory is considered a landmark in cultural and non-Western studies after the publication of Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978 and paved the way for discussion of resisting Orientalist discourses. Therefore, postcolonial discourse has included literary narrations of history and culture as a critique of colonialism and imperialism. Most important, postcolonial discourse focuses on the misrepresentations the coloniser produces and creates resistance to imperialist ideologies. Building on Foucault’s discourse, Said interpreted the decisive misrepresentation of the East in traditional Western literature and its interference with culture

and history as an attempt to justify domination not only for knowledge but for political powers as well (“The World, the Text and the Critic” 22–23). In this context, The Arab Spring challenges imperialism and hegemony and emphasises what Said stood for. In *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (2012), Hamid Dabashi believes that the aftermath of the Arab Spring in countries like Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain in 2011 provoked liberation movements in protest against economic inequality, social discrimination, and political repression, similar to national movements whereby nations resisted colonialism during the second half of the twentieth century. Dabashi argues that the West has lost its potency and the revolutionary uprisings across the Arab world have ended postcolonialism (2). On the other hand, opponents of this belief might claim that postcolonialism itself doubts the end of colonialism. In other words, neocolonialism has replaced geographical colonialism to maintain sociocultural and political hegemony. In “Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism” (1997), Xie claims that colonialism is not a matter of the past despite the differences between the First World and the Third World. On the contrary, the writer believes that neocolonialism is a possible extension of postcolonialism. In this case, postcolonialism and neocolonialism still exist as the aftermath of colonialism (8). Xie’s argument refutes the end of postcolonialism and contradicts any claims of the displacement of Western hegemony. Thus, political, economic, and sociocultural hegemony assume imperialism and Western hegemony.

However, despite the instability of racial formation in the United States, Arab Americans and other identity frames across historical periods and sociocultural contexts have expressed the pain of prejudice, racial discrimination, oppression, exclusion, denial of identity, and social difference. The experience that different identities share has been forced rather than autonomously built and has become an impulse for initiating a dialogue about minority discourse

that attracted more attention precisely during the last half of the past century (Semaan 17). In the preface to their edited book entitled *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (1990), JanMohamed & Lloyd define "minority discourse" as "a theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture" (ix). Thus, minority discourses continue to celebrate variation and flourish regardless of cultural differences among minorities. In many cases, minority discourse reflects the injustice and socioeconomic discrimination that are practiced by the dominant class. Thio believes that minority discourse mirrors the exclusion of minorities from decision-making centres in any government as well as their exclusion from any significant participation in the public and political spheres (409). Armed with postcolonial and minority discourse, this chapter examines minority discourse in the works of the selected poets, who, despite their marginalisation, have dedicated their efforts as intellectuals and confronted the modern world by bringing together desperate voices. Thus, multiethnicity and minority discourse are the transitional features of their poetic production.

Unsurprisingly, to the present day, minority discourse has gone through many turning points directly related to the extent of the minorities' empowerment and political participation in the American community. One of the most important of these points is the political agenda applied by the elected government, which reflects the policy of the ruling party. Thus, one can find the significance of the notion of nationalism and how it is theoretically interpreted and embodied in the concept of the modern state. According to Anderson, nationalism combines political agendas implemented by the dominant classes to practice hegemony (1). In this context, nationalism, in its broadest sense of the state, has faced several challenges, the most important of which is the issue of ethnic minorities. Although nationalism purports unity as the basis for the

formation of the state, contemporary experiences have reflected the difficulty of integrating ethnic minorities into the basic formation of the state. The German experience in the era of Hitler is considered a prominent example as it distinguished the German race and marginalised other races. On the other hand, the nation-states in the Arab world were founded during the postcolonial era, when the colonial powers decided to imitate the Western national states in the Arab world, neglecting the geographical and sociocultural history they share and thereby creating a national identity struggle and planting the seeds of racial conflicts.

Many Arabic poets have freely addressed their liberal views of politics and concerns about their homeland outside the Middle East. Nizar Qabbani was one of these poets who was able to express himself with great freedom during his exile. The defeat of Arabs after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War had a great impact on Qabbani's poetry; instead of utilising an erotic/romantic nature, it became more political. Qabbani was a committed Arab nationalist, and he used his poetry to reflect his radical views and inspire other writers. He portrayed the national identity struggle in the nation-states' era in "We Are Accused of Terrorism":

> About a homeland that has nothing left of its great ancient verse
> But that of wailing and eulogy
>
> About a homeland that has nothing in its horizons
> Of freedom of different types and ideology
>
> About a homeland that forbids us from buying a newspaper
> Or listen to anything
> About a homeland where all birds are always not allowed to sing
> About a homeland that out of horror, its writers are using invisible
> ink (lines 7–14)

Qabbani's poem depicts the impacts of a long history of discrimination under colonialism and the shades of politics in constructing the national identity. The poem also rhetorically textualises the politics of silence practised in the nation-states era. The instances of being forbidden from

buying a newspaper or listening to anything, the birds being forbidden to sing, and the writers using invisible inks show that people are silenced. Qabbani uses reflexive poetry to criticise the hegemony of politics and demand that people rebel against any tyrant and reject their undignified lives. In the poem, Qabbani navigates conditions of oppression and the politics of silence to explore silence as violence and voice as power. After several decades, in "In the Time of Tumult of Nations," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), Hazo portrays the national identity struggle but only in diaspora. His image of the Arab world is contentious and emphasises a unity of the cultural past and strongly defines him as an Arab American writer in an American context who is still involved in crises in other parts of the world:

> We thought that the worst was behind us
>   in the time of the tumult of nations.
> We planned and we saved for the future
>   in the time of the tumult of nations.
> The crowds in the streets were uneasy
>   in the time of the tumult of nations. (lines 1–6)

The poem draws two interrelated images in the reader's mind. The first image is full of disappointments and depicts the deceptive glory of America: "We thought that the worst was behind us" (line 1). However, the second image is full of chaos: "in the time of the tumult of nations" (line 2). The second line and the second image are continuously repeated throughout the poem. They appear second in the first and third stanzas but first in the second stanza so as to create a rotating loop:

> In the time of the tumult of nations
>   the ones who were wrong were the loudest.
> In the time of the tumult of nations
>   the poets were thought to be crazy. (lines 20–23)

In addition to its significance in intensifying the poem, the repeated anaphora creates a driving rhythm and a sonic effect. Hazo uses this technique to recall places in a world of massive

uncertainty and inveterate fear and intensifies them in the reader's mind. Moreover, he uses a refrain at the end of the first and last stanzas:

> We voted for men we distrusted
>   in the time, in the time, in the time,
>   in the time of the tumult of nations.
> …
> We pretend we are still the same people
>   in the time, in the time, in the time,
>   in the time of the tumult of nations. (lines 17–19, 54–56)

By repeating the last two lines, Hazo stresses the significance of the passage of time in drawing a comparison between the two images. Although the first image gives a continuous sense of insecurity and gloominess, the second image is static:

> We readied our handguns for trouble
>   in the time of the tumult of nations.
> We tuned in to war every evening
>   in the time of the tumult of nations.
> We watched as the bombs burned the cities
>   in the time of the tumult of nations.
> The name of the game was destruction
>   in the time of the tumult of nations. (lines 44–51)

Although Hazo does not refer to his ethnicity throughout the poem and engages himself within the Americans using the collective pronoun "we," his national identity struggle is reflected in the contrast between the two worlds. Despite the challenging depictions of Arab Americans in the United States, Hazo redefines exclusionary conceptualisations of American citizenship. More importantly, he highlights the inner struggle within the Arab American community related to the adoption to the American culture. Fadda-Conrey believes that, in post-9/11 national discourse, Arab American identity has become one of the most controversial issues dominating the American national discourse and has led to Arabs and Muslims being labelled as unpatriotic and un-American. The writer states that Arab American writers have striven to emphasise the role of literature in creating a debate of "national belonging in the United States, particularly following

such an intense and traumatic crisis in the history of the nation as the 9/11 attacks" ("Arab American Citizenship in Crisis" 532–33). In fact, the debate of the Arab American identity within the American national discourse did not result from a single crisis but rather was the result of a cumulative stockpile of crises and continuous exclusion based on the quest to increase the United States political and military hegemony, on the one hand. On the other hand, it is an indicator that reflects the foreign political relations of the United States with the Arab world.

However, Nye highlights the refractions of the multiplicity of the Arabs in diaspora and how it contributes to conceptualising the Other. In "Arabs in Finland," published in *Tender Spot: Selected Poems* (2015), the writer makes sense of her own collective narrative in a challenging environment that excludes the Other but from a neutral humanistic perspective:

> Their language rolls out,
> soft carpet in front of them.
> Strolling slowly beneath trees,
> men in white shirts,
> belts, baggy trousers,
> women in scarves,
> glinting cigarettes in the dusk. (lines 1–7)

Nye's descriptive language portrays a vivid image and illustrates strong feelings. The possessive pronoun in "their language" indicates their collectivity in being marginalised by the community. Moreover, the description of them strolling beneath the trees emphasises the exact notion of stigmatised members of the community. Then, Nye dramatically introduces the national identity struggle: "What they left to be here, in the cold country, / where winter lasts forever, / haunts them in the dark —" (lines 8–10). According to Nye, these people are haunted by their national identity that they left behind in their homeland and are no longer confined to the postcolonial binary of the Other. The writer succeeds in illustrating the feelings of gloominess and dismal by

using such descriptions as “cold country,” “winter lasts forever,” and “in the dark.” Nevertheless, Nye finds consolation in calling for unity:

> gentle calling through streets that said, brother,
> sit with me a minute, on the small stool
> with the steaming glass of tea. *Sit with me.*
> *We belong together*. (lines 12–15)

In a very gentle way, Nye shifts the feeling of gloom in the first image to warmth in “the steaming glass of tea” (line 14). Moreover, she transforms the image of diaspora in “Strolling slowly beneath trees” (line 3) to a feeling of settlement in “sit with me a minute, on the small stool” (line 13). In the last line, Nye reflects on her understanding of the national identity struggle in diaspora and involves herself with the rest. This formative moment becomes apparent through the pressure of labelling. Fadda-Conrey states that Arab American writers have articulated cohesive responses in the post-9/11 era. They have synthesised these responses to create a discursive self-representation of the individual and collective identities. Therefore, they deconstruct the simplistic labelling to confront the exclusionary conceptualisation of the Other (“Arab American Citizenship in Crisis” 534). Thus, by articulating Arab identities in diaspora, Nye strives to redefine binaries instead of removing them.

Although Hazo’s reflection of the national identity struggle is divisively rhetoric and Nye’s is merely humanistic, Handal’s reflection is more feminist. In “On the Seven,” published in *Life in A Country Album* (2020), the writer portrays seven separate scenes in various settings with different characters. In a prose poem, Handal gives every scene a different subtitle (‘Dancing on Roosevelt Avenue,’ ‘Sergei’s Conditions,’ ‘Tenoch’s Confession,’ ‘Steam Engine Dream,’ ‘Brasserie Creole,’ ‘Lee Tan’s Jintian,’ and “Milky Way’). In the first scene, she depicts her speaker as a dancer: “The tracks shriek. I stop dancing. And in the eight breaths I take (and the four spins of a boy’s yo-yo) before I hear them again, look at the pigeons rule the avenue”

(82). Handal's image narrates the moment of the 9/11 attacks, but from a Romantic perspective, in which elements of nature replace engines and airplanes. In the first sentence, Handal uses personification to make the tracks shriek as humans in the attacks, which causes her speaker to stop dancing. In fact, the image embodies more than a turning point that changes everyone's life. It embodies a broader sense of the national identity struggle and a turning point in a long history of continuous misrepresentation of Arab women as belly dancers and symbols of sensuality and sexuality. The poem opens with a strike in which the pigeons, symbolising the hijacked airplanes, rule the scene and cause destruction — "Their strain everywhere" (82) — and make people shriek. In addition, the attacks force the dancer to stop dancing. Fadda-Conrey thinks that the 9/11 attacks have changed other representations of Arabs and Muslims, including "the rich Arab oil sheikh and belly-dancing harem girls," to terrorists and Islamic fundamentalists ("Arab American Citizenship in Crisis" 533). The image underlines the Arab American national identity struggle from a feminist perspective.

For decades, the stereotyped image of Arabs in American media has portrayed them as barbarian, uncivilised, backward, and diasporic. Different studies have discussed the ugly image of Arabs that have been presented in American media. In his article "Coverage of Arabs in Two Leading U. S. Newsmagazines: *Time* and *Newsweek*" (2021), Hashem states that American media have presented Arabs as a diaspora group with a long history of defeat and fundamentalism (155–56). Meanwhile, Hollywood movies such as *The Siege* (Zwick, 1998) clearly supported the West's stereotypical attitude toward Muslims before 9/11 by solidifying the belief that all Arabs are terrorists. These movies and other media productions affect and reflect public opinion, which can be received on a national level without critical thinking.

Several writers have discussed the distorted images of Arabs that have been shown in American media since the 9/11 attacks. In an article entitled “Terrorists Are Always Muslim but Never White: At the Intersection of Critical Race Theory and Propaganda” (2017), Caroline Mala Corbin, Professor of Law at the University of Miami School of Law, critiques the dangers of false narratives either by accusing Arabs and Muslims of being terrorists based on racial prejudice or by prejudging that no white people are terrorists. The writer discusses the stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims in the West by presenting terrorists as “always (brown) Muslims… white people are never terrorists” (455). Corbin raises a controversial question about the first image portrayed in the reader’s mind when they hear the word “terrorist.” This distorted image has motivated Arab American poets, who have experienced a long history of alienation as a challenge of cultural domination, to establish a discourse that appears to be a liberation activity. In “Culturalism as Hegemonic Ideology and Liberating Practice,” published in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (1990), Dirlik argues that current minority intellectuals insist on integration to create a discourse “as a condition of liberating practice” (428). Consequently, the selected works discussed in this chapter reflect Hazo, Handal, and Nye’s efforts to resist the assumptions of hegemonic West since the attacks and the manner in which they contend for integration in the minority discourse.

Arab American scholars and critics used “invisibility” to describe the pre-9/11 Arab American community. Nevertheless, the aftermath, in a paradigm shift, had made Arab American more visible as a signifier of non-White Otherness. Suddenly, Arab Americans became visible in correspondence with American mainstream curiosity and legal measures (Salaita “Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism” 148–49). Therefore, in line with many other Arab American writers, the three selected poets have striven to distinguish between the good and

bad Arabs in the midst of their attempt to redefine the us/them boundary. Suheir Hammad attempts to situate her poetic voice within a collective victimised entity in "First Writing Since," published in *Poems on Crisis of Terror* on November 7, 2001, just a few weeks after the attacks, to revive feelings of anger over empathy:

> on my block, a woman was crying in a car parked and stranded in
> hurt.
> i offered comfort, extended a hand she did not see before she said,
> "we're gonna burn them so bad, i swear, so bad." my hand went to
> my
> head and my head went to the numbers within it of the dead iraqi
> children, the dead in nicaragua. the dead in rwanda who had to vie
> with fake sport wrestling for america's attention. (IV. lines 4–9)

The good Arab in Hammad's poem experiences a traumatic moment in which they have double sympathy with the Americans and all those victimised entities of United States foreign policy outside United States borders, even despite the discourse of hatred that prevailed in the domestic American environment.

In this context, Nye embraces a concept to differentiate between the two and change the American mainstream perception of Arabs. In her article "This Is Not Who We Are" (2002), Nye attempts to draw her American readers' attention to the fact that all Arabs are not terrorists: "because men with hard faces do violent things, because fanaticism seizes and shrinks minds, is not reason for the rest of us to abandon our song" (para. 9). She articulates her point by highlighting a real Arab's good nature and manners. In "The Sweet Arab, the Generous Arab," published in *You and Yours* (2005), Nye feels compelled to write about the good Arab,

> Since no one else is mentioning you enough.
>
> The Arab who extends his hand.
> The Arab who will not let you pass
> his tiny shop without a welcoming word.
> The refugee inviting us in for a Coke.
> Clean glasses on a table in a ramshackle hut.

> Those who don't drink Coke would drink it now.
> We drink from the silver flask of hospitality.
> We drink and you bow your head. (lines 1–9)

The space after the first line reflects the poet's insistence to launch a mission to defend the figure of the good Arab. The Arab in Nye's poem is a refugee who depicts the exiled Arab's feeling of belonging in diaspora, which Said described as an "essential sadness [that] can never be surmounted" (*Reflections on Exile* 137). In a major point, Nye separates the two stanzas with the longest line in the poem: "Please forgive everyone who has not honored your name" (line 10) to justify her composing the poem. Then, she continues describing the good Arab:

> You who would not kill a mouse, a bird.
> Who feels sad sometimes even cracking an egg.
> Who places two stones on top of one another
> for a monument. Who packed the pieces,
> carried them to a new corner. For whom the words
> rubble and blast are constants. Who never wanted
> those words. To be able to say,
> this is a day and I live in it safely,
> with those I love, was all. Who has been hurt
> but never hurt in return. (lines 11–20)

By addressing the good Arab in the second stanza, Nye intends to bring to the fore the real Arab's positive values. She uncovers the face of the Arab whom Americans have little knowledge about and the media and politicians portray as a warmonger, unfriendly, warlike, and anti-American, using him to justify the violation of human rights and discourse of hatred post-9/11. For example, in a *CNN* interview on September 11, former United States Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger said, "There is only one way to begin to deal with people like this, and that is you have to kill some of them even if they are not immediately directly involved in this thing" ("Eagleburger Discusses Terrorist Attacks" para. 5). Considering this premise, Nye's poem is a sincere attempt to correct the stereotyped image of Arabs and help Americans distinguish the good from the evil. In the context of the post-9/11 "citizen-patriot," Fadda-

Conrey identifies the "good Arab" as one who constantly succeeds to distance themself "politically, religiously, and often even physically" from the bad one and adopts the modern notion of neo-Orientalism to criticise the implications of "fundamentalism, terrorism, and cultural stagnation" ("Arab American Citizenship in Crisis" 536). Thus, with Nye's conceptualisation of the good Arab, she distances herself from the bad Arab in the Arab world and in the United States. On the other hand, by using the collective pronoun "we" in the last two lines of the first stanza, the speaker distances themself from the labelling of Arabs and identify themself with the Western mainstream. Moreover, Nye points out the complexity of Arab Americans' formation as a minority group within the multiple-citizenship United States framework.

In "Une Suele Nui a Marrakech" ("A Sole Night in Marrakech" in English), published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005), Handal demonstrates how the conflict between the good Arab and the bad Arab emerges and develops in a solo moment:

> It's springtime but I return to my hotel room,
> turn on my lantern, eat honey pastry, *kab el ghazal*,
> drink mint tea, later *arak*,
> watch lights dim against my bare feet,
> start to count and lose count
> of the wild shape of darkness,
> the marionettes and war games,
> tiles hiding the shadows
> of those I no longer want to see,
> and the *abayas* piling by my bed side. (lines 13–22)

Handal's critique is developed and directly related to a discursive self-representation of post-9/11 Arab American multicultural identity. The expanded racial state practices have undermined the Arab American status regardless of their citizenship, which has had a great impact on their identity formation. Despite the beauty surrounding the speaker in springtime, they use the conjunction "but" to indicate the opposition of their residence in a hotel room, which refers to

their life in diaspora. In a direct reference to Handal's Arabic identity, the detailed description of the moment is interwoven with elements of the Arabic culture: "*ka bel ghazal*, mint tea, and *arak*."[20] The continuity of the sentence indicates the writer's intention to create a discourse that rejects the opponents' discourse promoting the image of the bad Arab. Although "tiles hiding the shadows / of those I no longer want to see" (lines 20–21) reveals Handal's refusal of the image of the Arab terrorist, the pile of *abayas* in the last line reveals her refusal of the image of the fundamentalist Arab, symbolised by the Muslim woman wearing a hijab. Fadda-Conrey states that deconstructing the transitional identities is a predominant factor in understanding the us/them binary in post-9/11 national discourse, in which the notion of the Other exists within American borders ("Arab American Citizenship in Crisis" 535). For centuries, the notion of "them" was associated with the Arab world in the East, but the attacks positioned the notion on the marginalised Arab American minority inside the United States. This dramatic shift has created a conspiracy theory and "a culture of suspicion and paranoia" that heightened the pressure of labelling in order to distinguish the American from the un-American. Fadda-Conrey believes that "the use of racialized religious, ethnic, and gendered body markings (including skin color, hijabs, prayer caps, and beards)" were prevalent to measure the extent of loyalty, national allegiance, and affiliation within the United States and even more within one minority group (e.g., Christian Arab and Muslim Arab, Muslim Sunnah and Muslim Shia). Moreover, they contributed to inflaming public opinion and increasing the marginalisation of this group in a way that placed this group under the microscope's lens in an attempt to impose more control and to monitor behaviour (Fadda-Conrey "Arab American Citizenship in Crisis" 535). Thus, Handal's

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[20] *Ka bel ghazal* is flat peach.
Arak is a Levantine spirit of the anise family.

poem, in a sense, endeavours to safeguard national security by identifying the enemy and distinguishing the good Arab from the bad one.

Where Hammad's speaker stands in a third space, Handal and Nye's choice to displace themselves indicates the three writers' ability to identify the binaries and the continuation of pre-9/11 racialisation, which is very much tied to Arab national history and suborned to the American ideological framework. Besides their ability to adopt the notion of the good Arab, the poets conceptualise a vision of an American national unity that results from acknowledging differences in the aftermath of national trauma. In this context, the writers seem to have internalised orientalist images and utilised them in ways that could be seen as furthering the interests of American imperialism and military oppression in the Arab world and the Middle East. In contrast, Hazo's choice to displace himself does not indicate an intention to identify the binaries or distinguish between the good and bad Arab. In "September 11, 2002," published in *And the Time Is: Poems, 1958-2013* (2014), his speaker plays the role of the outsider narrator in two sections. The first depicts the scene before and up to the beginning of the attacks, and the second depicts the horrors afterward. The poem starts with a detailed description of the hawk in an anticipating moment, which again shows *The Mu'allaqat*'s poetic influence on Hazo:

> The hawk seems almost napping
> in his glide.
> His arcs are perfect
> as geometry.
> His eyes hunger
> for something about to panic,
> something small and unaware. (I. lines 1–7)

The hawk represents independence, free will, and freedom. It also represents manifestation, evolution, and transformation in the American culture. Most important, it has a strong connection with the American politicians and their ability to take action at the right time. Moreover, it

represents their militant attitude and advocation of decisive vigorous action, especially in supporting war or warlike policies. Yet, the hawk in Hazo's poem "seems almost napping," directly referencing the National Security Agency's and American politicians' inattentiveness to the drastic upcoming attacks. In the second section, Hazo's speaker narrates the horrors that occurred:

> "My God,
> people are jumping!"
> Of all
> the thousands there, we saw
> those few, just those, freefalling
> through the sky like flotsam from a blaze…
> Nightmares of impact crushed us.
> We slept like the doomed or drowned,
> then woke to oratory, vigils,
> valor, journalists declaring war
> and, snapping from aerials or poles,
> the furious clamor of flags. (II. lines 8–19)

In these lines, the pronouns "we" and "us" reflect the speaker's intention to create indefinable binaries and his tendency to disavow the "Arab American" label. In the post-9/11 context, Fadda-Conrey believes that the implications of the political strategies employed after the attacks (including the foundation of some institutions to enhance national security, such as the Department of Homeland Security, the National Security Enter-Exit Registration System, and the USA PATRIOT Act) have isolated Arab Americans from other minorities and dismantled the Arab American community from within "through a pervasive guilt-by-association logic that frames the post-9/11 mandate of vigilant citizenship" ("Arab American Citizenship in Crisis" 535). Therefore, Hazo's poem initially captures a replicated embrace of a hegemonised construct of United States citizenship that affects many Arab Americans. It creates an urge for them to dissolve into the American mainstream and the related desire for an indefinable binary to distance themselves from any perceivable differences. This urgency is existential for Arab

Americans especially in the post-9/11 era. Overall, by drawing on their experiences of living in the United States and taking into consideration the following national trauma, the three poets discursively contest the notions of displacement and distinguishing the good Arab to highlight the complexity of American citizenship by defining/undefining boundaries and creating poetry about individual and collective Arab Americanness.

Despite the negative premises against minority discourse, this chapter considers American cultural, political, social, and historical developments which have provided the basis of an Arab American discourse that completely refutes the hegemonic narrations since the 9/11 attacks. However, this discursive revolution is not without its complexities. While it challenges dominant narratives, it also grapples with the internalisation of orientalist images. This internalisation risks damaging stereotypes and serves the interests of American imperialism and military oppression of people in the Arab world and the wider Middle East.

The Nature and Context of Arab American Discourse since 9/11

Examining the sociocultural, political, and historical imbrications in the aftermath of 9/11, this chapter understands the nature and context of Arab American discourse through implementing discourse analysis. Before introducing a sample of contextual Arab American discourse since 9/11, introducing discourse analysis theory is essential. Foucault attempted to formulate specific criteria for text analysis to enable the reader to understand the sociocultural, political, and historical dimensions of a text. In this context, discourse analysis brings forth larger ideas and themes. In *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (2014), Gee states that the main approaches to discourse analysis are descriptive and critical. The descriptive approach is concerned with the linguistic aspects and details that consistently convey

meaning, whereas the critical approach is concerned with the applied understanding of the linguistic information with a political bent that helps to understand how political powers work within societies using language (5–6). The second approach is embodied in literature as Foucauldian analysis to deconstruct what is thinkable and sayable.

Although Hazo, Handal, and Nye have never intended to introduce themselves as political poets, they have unintentionally embodied political implications in their poetry. Advocates of this have claimed that Nye's poetry about the Middle East since 9/11 can be viewed only as literature of "cultural enrichment." For instance, in "Touching Tender Spots" published in *Tender Spot: Selected Poems* (2015), Bonazzi states that Nye's poetry is not political and "she has never slipped into ideology" (17). The writer uses Nye's declaration in "Jerusalem" to support this claim where Nye declares "I'm not interested in / who suffered the most. / I'm interested in / people getting over it" (lines1–4). Moreover, Bonazzi believes that Nye's personal reflections have no political dimensions and they have merely provoked meditations in the reader's mind to understand the human experience (17). However, I contend that Nye's poetry embodies political implications, which have reflected Arab Americans' sociocultural existence. Nye's words in "Introduction" to *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002) reinforce this suggestion when she admits:

> … but there were those deeply sorrowful headlines in the back-ground to carry around like sad weights: the brutal occupation of Palestine, the war in Lebanon, the tragedies in Syria… acts of terrorism, both against Arabs and by Arabs, the rise of fundamentalism, violence in Egypt, upsets and upheavals, and later the Gulf War… a series of endless troubles. (xiv)

Nye's reflection on the traumatic political events suggests the political dimensions assimilated in her poetry. Certainly, Nye's narrative redirects these implications and illustrates how they shape minority discourse.

In "Before You Can," published in *Everything Comes Next: Collected & New Poems* (2020), Nye attempts to include political dimensions in her human experience by making a comparison between her Jewish and Arab friends:

> My Jewish friends are kind and gentle.
> Not one of them would harm another person
> even if they didn't know that person.
>
> My Arab friends are kind and gentle.
> Not one of them would harm another person
> even if they didn't know that person. (lines 1–6)

On the human level, both parties have noble qualities because they are each "kind and gentle." Nye comments on what these two parties are actually doing, which is ironically inconsistent with their noble human qualities despite the common factors between them:

> My Jewish friends have never taken my house,
> my land, herded me into a cell, tortured me,
> cut down my tree, never once.
> My Arab friends have never built a bomb.
>
> We respect each other as equals.
> We look somewhat alike.
> We laugh similarly.
> We have never said the other should not exist. (lines 9–16)

In the last stanza, the poet unleashes the reader's imagination to understand the dimensions of this human conflict and poses her questions: "So where is the problem exactly? / Let's be specific. Who and where and what / is the problem exactly?" (lines 17–19). At the end of the poem, Nye resorts to motivating the reader to answer these questions without giving clear answers: "You have to know / before you can fix it" (lines 19–20). By reaching a deep understanding of the political and social scenes of the Palestinian-Israeli crisis, the answer to Nye's question is that the cause of this human conflict is primarily political. In this context, Nye has implicitly adapted a political discourse referring to the hegemony struggle to extend greater political, economic, and sociocultural influence.

Whilst Nye's political implications in "Before You Can" refer to political hegemonic agendas, she embraces a postcolonial discourse in "Everything in Our World Did Not Seem to Fit," published in *Everything Comes Next: Collected & New Poems* (2020). It is noted that postcolonial studies, which began with theorists including Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi, originally did not consider English literatures produced by English-speaking people from around the world. Rather, Said, Fanon, and Memmi's works paid more attention to the colonisers' literary productions that were produced in the colonised countries. Hassan argues that postcolonial studies, which were applied to the Arab world by Said (in the Levant), Fanon (in Algeria), and Memmi (in Tunisia), took into account the literature written in English or French by Western writers. In fact, the main reason to inaugurate the field of "postcolonial studies" was to deconstruct and refute the literary discourse of the colonisers (45). On the contrary, Nye has embraced a postcolonial discourse with political indications in "Everything in Our World Did Not Seem to Fit." Haunted by the horrors of the occupation experience, Nye expresses her astonishment at the realisation of the main cause of this human tragedy: "Once they started invading us, taking our houses / and trees, drawing lines, pushing us into tiny places. / It wasn't a bargain or deal or even a real war" (lines 1–3). Then, Nye tends to take the reader to a new political horizon when she implicitly refers to the Balfour Declaration: "To this day they pretend it was" (line 4).[21] Moreover, the writer refers to another human tragedy — the Holocaust — practiced against the Jewish people by Nazi Germany and its collaborators in the genocide of several ethnicities, among whom were six million Jews, driven by a barbaric political agenda to extend greater influence over the European countries during WWII. Explicitly, Nye shows sympathy: "We were sorry what happened to them" (line 6). At the same time, she absolves

[21] In 1917, the British government issued the Belfour Declaration to support the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.

herself and all Palestinians of this brutal crime: "but / we had nothing to do with it" (lines 6–7). In fact, Nye's lines embrace wisdom and maturity marked with a witty surplus of her phrasing. Nevertheless, Nye's poetry combines a rich human experience mixed with political dimensions.

Nye's experience is connected to and engages her Arabic legacy. In other words, she gives voice to Arab culture and tradition. In contrast, Hazo's experience is different for his Americanness, which pushes him to create a new space for his voice. For instance, in "Mediterranean Update," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), Hazo portrays his speaker as an outsider observer from France:

> French television flashed
>   a raid by F-16's in Gaza
>   followed by a sacrificial bombing
>   in Jerusalem.
>   The detonated bodies
>   sprawled alike.
>   "Same intent,"
>   I said, "but different weapons."
> . . .
> Three hours east by air,
>   oppressor and oppressed were being
>   filmed in battles we would watch
>   while dining later in Antibes
>   or sipping cappuccino by the pool. (lines 17–24, 42–46)

Settling in France, a colonial country, Hazo voices the political tension in the Middle East. His response to such pressure voices a diasporic consciousness that suggests anxiety despite his luxurious surroundings.

In his turn, as an ethnic writer, Hazo has tried to incorporate the challenges of the production and reproduction of United States hegemony by exploring how those challenges work in America before and after 9/11. He depicts this challenge in "Welcome to New York," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005). He wrote the poem in two parts. He wrote the first part on June 24, 2001, before the attacks, and he wrote the second part on September 11, 2002, a

year after the attacks. In the first part, the speaker introduces his sparrow, who preens her feathers in a pool mirroring the World Trade Centre: “My sparrow preens in a fountain / pool that mirrors the World / Trade Centre upside down” (I. lines 1–3). Hazo uses the World Trade Centre to symbolise United States economic hegemony and to refer to the American Atmosphere before 9/11. Moreover, Hazo chose sparrows based on their representation in Homer’s *Iliad* (written in the eighth century BCE), in which a prophecy stated that the war would last for nine years, represented by a snake swallowing eight sparrows and their mother. The sparrow here represents the alienated immigrants in the American community who will face more oppression and marginalisation in the following years. The prophecy predicts a long war that may last for years, a war that broke out in 2001 and continues. In the third stanza, Hazo reveals more about the marginalised immigrant, who dreams of becoming visible and significant in the American community: “she struts her two cents’ worth / of insignificance and wants no more / than to be seen” (I. lines 12–14). Eloquently, Hazo criticises the hegemonic community that ignores migrants as a main component of its population and considers them insignificant. This White, prejudiced community hardly realises other races’ existence until they become a threat to it:

> Since no one
> notices what’s small unless it turns
> into a threat, Gullivers stroll by
> and overlook my sparrow. (I. lines 15–18)

In the next stanza, Hazo introduces himself in the scene as “I,” or his alienated speaker, an isolated member of the hegemonic community:

> I’ve come out here to smoke
> my pipe.
> Since smoking is forbidden
> in New York except in “designated
> areas,” (I. lines 22–26)

In the designated area, all marginalised migrants who share the same concerns and who are insignificant gather:

> … I greet my fellow outcast
> in the free and unforbidden air.
> And there
> we stay, undesignated as we are. (I. lines 26–29)

Hazo concludes the first part of the poem with the Biblical story of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace. Their story that is related to immigrant literature. The hopeless sparrow represents Eve, the peaceful speaker represents Adam, and both represent the oppressed migrants. In the second part, which is dated a year after the attacks, Hazo depicts the change in the scenes before and after 9/11. The writer precisely uses the collective "we" to represent Arab Americans and travels in time to draw a comparison between their lives before and after the attacks: "In just one year we've traveled / from the flying snow of faxes, / memoranda, jiffy notes —" (II. lines 1–3). The image of a life full of productivity suddenly changes to an image of death and destruction:

> clouds of spume the color
> of gun-metal and swirled
> to the sun in volleys of smoke —
> cartwheeling bodies flailing
> by sealed or shattered windows
> to battering, smattering rest — (II. lines 4–9)

In this part, Hazo's sentences continue to the last line, where he uses the full stop to enforce a dramatic commentary. The poet employs the enjambment here to encourage the reader to read without a break to reach the end of the image. This literary technique is preferable to create tension and add complexity to the image. Moreover, the writer summarises the dramatic actions of more than a year in a few lines. He portrays life before, during, and after the attacks with fluidity:

> … then "Patriotic
> Travel Mugs" and "God-Bless-

> America Hotel Discounts"
> and "NYPD Authentic Caps"
> and "Lapel Flags Priced
> from $ 9.99 to $ 99.9
> with Genuine Diamond Settings." (II. lines 23–29)

In fact, Hazo's collective pronoun "we" transcends the words of a witness who narrates a story to describe a personal dilemma Arab Americans face. El Said comments on this dilemma in her article titled "The Face of the Enemy: Arab-American Writing Post-9/11" (2003). The writer believes that although Arab Americans are Americans by nationality or upbringing, they bear the face of the enemy due to their Arabic legacy. According to El Said, Arab American writers have interacted with the society they live in, but unconsciously, they wear the face of the enemy, as Hazo states: "Since no one / notices what's small unless it turns / into a threat" (I. lines 15–17, 200–01). Throughout the poem, Hazo expresses a deep construction of his unique identity, which turns into a source of conflict. Nevertheless, this construction was echoed in the literature produced in the Arab world before the attacks. In 1995, the idea of bearing the face of the enemy was exposed in Qabbani's "We Are Accused of Terrorism":

> We are accused of terrorism
> If we dare to write about the remains of a homeland
> That is scattered in pieces and in decay
> In decadence and disarray
> About a homeland that is searching for a place
> And about a nation that no longer has a face (lines 1–6)

The link between Hazo's "Welcome to New York" and Qabbani's "We Are Accused of Terrorism," which was written in Arabic and then translated into English, portrays the extent to which baring the face of the enemy has become a mutual theme in Arab and Arab American contemporary literary traditions.

Nevertheless, the attacks that brought down the World Trade Center redefined Arab American discourse, leaving no place for the Other. United States foreign policy defined

boundaries, dividing the world into "friends" and "enemies," "good" and "evil." While Hazo narrates life before and after the attacks in New York, Amerika, Handal narrates it in another part of the world. In Ramallah, Palestine, Handal tells the story of an Arab in 1999 and three years later. In fact, Handal portrays her national sensibility in "Detained," published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005). Her passive character symbolises those who are unjustly detained and oppressed all over the world:

> Over a cup of Arabic coffee
> back in nineteen ninety nine,
> on a balcony in Ramallah,
> we spoke of the *situation*,
> how we survive, *we don't*, you said. (lines 1–5)

In the first stanza, Handal's speaker narrates a very intimate romantic story on a balcony over a cup of Arabic coffee. Yet, Handal's decision to italicise "situation" reflects the core of the tension between the Arab World and Israel and the Arab World and America from one side and Handal's sensitivity to literary involvement with political issues from another side. Three years later, Handal's "I" depicts the image of Arabs from the Westerner's perspective. With a very descriptive commentary, Handal shows Arabs imprisoned in the image of the perpetrator before and after 9/11, the situation that "we" as Arabs and Arab Americans could not change:

> Three years later
>
> you are detained…
> I imagine a cell as tall as you —
> five foot eleven inches,
> as wide as you —
> twenty-one and a half inches, (lines 12–17)

Handal reveals her national sensibility and political radical views at the end of the poem to justify what happens between the Palestinians and Israelis:

> just remember what they
> have done to themselves —

> that the darkness they have planted
> in our bones will cripple their bones,
> that detainment is their life sentence,
> that their blood staining our graves
> is a stubborn witness. (lines 30–36)

In “Detained,” Handal’s national projections and literary responses to displacement offer new perspectives on postcolonialism, politics, human experiences, and human rights struggles. In “On Writing and Return: Palestinian-American Reflections” (2001), Majaj states that Arab American writers implement returning to Palestine as a multidimensional “pragmatic response” in which different contexts intersect (113–14). From this premise, postcolonial discourse emerges as a pragmatic response to the intersection of the four contexts (postcolonialism, politics, human experiences, and human rights). In this context, postcolonialism offers new perspectives and tools which help in analysing and articulating the complex intersections of national identity, displacement, politics, human experiences, and human rights struggles. It provides insights into colonial histories continuous impacts on contemporary issues, as reflected in the poem.

In the context of political tragedy, Handal’s “Echoes: A Historical Afterward,” published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), is another example of this discourse. Throughout the poem, Handal depicts a debate between reasons and truths:

> The reason is they’ve been killed
> The truth is you’ve been too
>
> The truth is you are now without a home
> The reason is they’re in your home
>
> The reason is they’ve convinced themselves you left
> The truth is you only went to safety
>
> The truth is they never let you back
> The reason is they needed to protect their tribe
>
> The truth is you are part of the same tribe
> But no one speaks about that

> The reason is it's easier to be a threat
> How else can they justify the killing (lines 1–12)

The lack of punctuation and the internal enjambment throughout the poem emphasise that Handal's emotions and thoughts flow freely. Moreover, Handal intentionally uses anaphora to build up tension. On one side, the repetition of "the reason" and "the truth" at the beginnings of the lines adds musicality to the poem; such repetition is often used in political speeches to create a sonorous effect, such as Churchill's heroic WWII speech: "We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields, and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender." While Churchill's anaphoric repetition conveys a message of resistance and determination, Handal's repetition clarifies what the truths and reasons are. On the other side, all the tension in the poem is oriented around the anaphoric repetition and the word "killing," which is used in the first and last lines to create unity in the poem. Although Handal has striven to bring Arab politics to the American literary tradition in the form of a human experience full of suffering, anti-Arab extremists might hold Handal's "Detained" and "Echoes: A Historical Afterward" against her as an Arab American representative. Some might claim that Handal is justifying terrorism and the attacks of 9/11. Salaita believes that many Arab Americans fear tackling the Palestine–Israel crisis and American support to Israel because they do not want to be interpreted as being against the war on terrorism ("Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism" 152). Although the Palestinian and Israeli crisis is essential in post-9/11 Arab American discourse, it is important to distinguish between its implications in Arab American literary tradition and how the fundamentalists abused it to promote their terrorist discourse. Such a discourse turned the United States and its allies against the Palestinian issue

and linked it directly to terrorism. Moreover, the attacks of 9/11 distracted the international attention from the Palestinian issue and gave more attention to Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is worth noting here a common factor between Hazo's "Documentation" and "Mediterranean Update," Nye's "Before You Can" and "Everything in Our World Did Not Seem to Fit," and Handal's "Detained" and "Echoes: A Historical Afterward," which is the Palestinian and Israeli crisis. Palestine's presence is essential in the writers' poetry, due to its significance for them as Arab American intellectuals, to convey the message of peace from one side and, due to their extended roots in the Levant and the Arab world, from another side. Moreover, Palestine occupies an important place in the entire Muslim World, as it is the first Qibla to which Muslims were commanded to pray. From this premise, the writers tend to expand the scope of their discourse beyond the Arab American community and extend it to a larger group, namely American Muslims. At the same time, the biblical image of Palestine as the Holy Land is prominent in American literature. Therefore, they narrow their scope to address Americans, Christian Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans but exclude Arabs who do not read Anglophone literature.

On the other hand, Salaita asserts that Arab American writers share common concerns with their counterparts in the Arab world, and the prominent difference between them is that most Arab American writers write in English ("Vision" para. 18). Therefore, the writers' insistence to write in English exposes their willingness to confront the embargoed Arabic literature in the American literary tradition, as Said pointed out in his article "Embargoed Literature" (1995). In his critique of Orientalism, Said claimed that Arabic literature is unread and embargoed in the West for geopolitical reasons that link political powers to geographic spaces (99). Said noted that the misrepresentation of Arabs in the American literary tradition is

different from that of the British and French. According to Said, the misrepresentation in the American tradition was based on assumptions and limited reading sources, such as Harold W. Glidden's essay "The Arab World," published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in 1972. Said criticised Glidden's portrayal of over 100 million people citing only four reading sources (a book on Tripoli, one issue of the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*, the periodical *Oriente Moderno*, and a book by Majid Khadduri) (*Orientalism* 48). On the contrary, the misrepresentation of Arabs in the British and the French experiences were based on an expanded era of colonisation of and direct interaction with the Arab countries.

In fact, the Palestine–Israel crisis and the 9/11 attacks have provoked contradicting feelings of anger, pain, grief, sadness, and defeat as well as resistance to conveying knowledge about the Other. Most importantly, they have provoked Arab American writers to confront both past and present prejudice against Arabs. The three writers' spirits and imaginations expanded their consciousness to help them understand what it meant to be an Arab in the United States and thereby empowered them to produce a unique discourse to refute the neo-Orientalist hegemonic discourse. Despite Said's interpretation of Arabic Literature as an embargoed literature, one might claim that due to the United States' vast geographical area, the American community is content with being preoccupied with what is happening inside American lands and ignoring what is happening outside it. Walker states that ignorance is the first enemy of the American community and that it leads to alarming levels of racism and make Americans feel anguished and powerless over the increased number of refugees from war-torn regions in the Middle East, Africa, and, recently, Afghanistan. According to Walker, ignorance is "a ferocious enemy for its silent, constant, unacknowledged presence" (para. 10). Regarding American Orientalism, Alghaberi states that the American misrepresentation of Arabs is always politicised and for

decades was associated with the historical conflict between Arabs and Israel. The post-9/11 era brought even more disrupted images of the old ones besides the invasion of Iraq, the war on Afghanistan, and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Additionally, Hollywood movies such as *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004) and *Sleeper Cell* (Doueiri et al., 2005) promoted the neo-Orientalism discourse (141). These films highlight American media's readiness to highlight everything relevant to American politics, whether inside or outside the United States, and emphasise the role of the United States' enemies rather than its allies. In this context, Arab American writers have no choice but to embed certain political issues in their writing from the United States and the Arab World and to play a significant role in interpreting and humanising Arab Americans and Arabs in general.

It is worth drawing attention to the relationship between literature and politics. In this context, a literary text's aesthetic can result from the conflict between the political powers that wish to control it and those that resist them. According to Said, literature always has the ability to manifest the tension between power and resistance ("The Text" 5). Thus, drawing from their understanding of the relationship between literature and politics, Arab American writers have aesthetically exposed the hidden tensions within their society. Precisely, Arab American poets have realised the problematic nature of Arab American poetry and its association with politics (see my interpretation on page 20). Over a century, the poetic contributions from the Arab world and these writers' Arab-American counterparts have tackled the relationship between poetry and politics. Both parties have expressed similar concerns that remain as subjects of intense debate. For instance, Nye objects to United States foreign policy in the Arab world in "He Said EYE-RACK," published in *You and Yours* (2005). The significance of the capitalisation in "EYE-RACK" falls under two categories. The first is literary: the transcription of how Americans

pronounce *Iraq*. The second is metaphorical, related to the quickness of the breakout of the War on Terrorism during Bush's administration. Nye criticises the United States intentions and justifications in free verse:

> Relative to our plans for your country,
> we will blast your tree, crush your cart,
> stun your grocery.
> Amen sisters and brothers,
> give us your sesame legs,
> your satchels, your skies.
> Freedom will feel good
> to you too. Please acknowledge
> our higher purpose. No, we did not see
> your bed of parsley. (lines 1–10)

The irony that Nye depicts is hidden under the manifestation of destruction and covered by the intentions of reformation and persuasion of freedom. The deceptiveness of the brotherhood discourse in "sisters and brothers" may be alluding to bargaining national treasures with freedom in White superiority as Arabs are perceived to be incompetent in democracy, which is seen as needing to be imposed by force.

Whereas Nye's interpretation of the United States' obsession with the idea of freedom is reflected in a political deceptive discourse to promote freedom, Handal's interpretation is interwoven in a romantic story. Freedom is this mirage that Arabs desire to obtain outside their homelands' borders. In "I Never Made it to Café Beirut; Nor, I Heard, Did You," published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005), Handal narrates a romantic story filled with human struggles caused by politics and politicians. The two lovers flee to the borders, fearing Hezbollah, Saddam, Bush and the Israelis:

> You told me that I should wait
> at the Lebanese border. You told me not
> to fear the Hezbollah, the gunshots,
> the missiles or grenades, told me

> that I would not see the shadows of corpses
> in the stained grey clouds, would not see
> the refugees and the UN trucks waiting for God.
> You told me that no one would
>
> be singing war songs, or speak of
> liberation, Saddam, Bush, the Israelis. (lines 1–10)

In the midst of this increasing tension in seeking freedom, poetry emerges as a consolation and comfort:

> You insisted, meet me at the Lebanese border.
> Told me to bring my favorite poems
> of Baudelaire and Gibran, my dreams
> wrapped in my black hair, my questions —
>
> the ones you could not answer at that time,
> the simple facts — your real name, age, nationality —
> and also why the night was held in siege,
> why the souks were so quiet, the mountains
>
> so quiet and the dead still struggling.
> And why I had to meet you at the border. (lines 13–22)

The poem, which addresses issues of mass migration, violence, civilian deaths, belonging, lack of freedom, identity, human struggle, disappointment and trauma, essentially illustrates the relationship between the crises of politics and the aesthetic created by poetry. The multidimensional open-ended poem and unanswered questions find balance in poems by Baudelaire and Gibran. In fact, Handal manages to offer an evocative description of this balance to politicise literature.

In "Verdict," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), Hazo traces the history of verdicts in the United States, starting with the father of the nation, George Washington, and ending with Donald Trump, and highlights one major incident in their verdicts. The poet starts the poem by encouraging his reader to think about politics as a dirty game that will never be clean and decent:

You wait for politics to wipe
  its nose and wash its hands
  of him, but nothing happens.
You look for help from history.
Then you remember how
  a predecessor won every state
  but one before resigning
  in disgrace. (lines 1–8)

Hazo encourages his audience to study history to find out that politicians are clever manipulators and greedy for power. He carries on:

        Had he won
  Massachusetts, Richard Nixon
  and George Washington would be
  paired in unanimity forever.
You're left to read the dice
  of democracy's crapshoot.
Oratory died with Kennedy.
While defecating, Johnson met
  with Secretaries of State
  and Defence.
        Ronald Reagan
  brought Hollywood to Washington. (lines 9–20)

By investigating certain political and historical moments, such as Richard Nixon's failure to win the election in Massachusetts, the Continental Congress's consensus decision to appoint George Washington after his military victories in the American Revolutionary War, John Kennedy's reputation as one of the greatest orators for his inspiring speeches, Lyndon Johnson's tendency to conduct formal meetings in his private time, and Ronald Reagan's previous career as an actor, Hazo creates an image of the varieties of United States politicians. While Hazo's "Verdict" mentions certain United States politicians and directly refers to their names, in "Order of Battle," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), he indirectly refers to them as "trappers" to describe the game of politics:

Trappers say traps are truly
  traps when no one thinks

> they are: spiked pits covered
> with fronds, a saw-toothed jaw
> levered to snap at a touch,
> the smile that lulls the victim
> while the rapist bides his time.
> Unlike attackers, trappers
> wait and wait until escape's
> impossible. (lines 1–10)

For the poet, the politician's deceptive "smile" may mislead "the victim while the rapist bides his time" (lines 6–7). As the Palestinian and Israeli conflict is always a priority in United States foreign policy, it is in the midst of Arab American literary tradition. Hazo's portrayal of Palestine as the girl and Israel as a rapist is repeated in Arab American literary tradition. Nevertheless, one of the main issues that has bedevilled and jeopardised the Palestinian and Israeli conflict is the brutal 9/11 attacks. According to the writer, the "attackers" are not clever enough to abuse the conflict and justify their crime. On the contrary, they shift the United States' attention to and engagement with the Middle East.

Acts of terror in the name of Islam, particularly the 9/11 attacks, and terrorist operations in the West, led to the outbreak of a phenomenon that is known today as neo-Orientalism. Whereas Orientalist discourse was used to justify colonialism, neo-Orientalist discourse is used to justify imperialism and promote the War on Terror to maintain political hegemony. Arab American communities — more precisely, Muslim Americans — have been targeted in the war on terrorism waged by the United States. On one side, they found themselves racially cast out from their old cultures. On the other side, they experienced institutional minority exclusion and political domination in the American culture. In his UN speech, Colin Powell addressed the United Nations Security Council on February 5, 2003, an act that he regretted and described as "a blot" on his career two years later. Powell claimed that the United States had concrete evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, which turned out not to exist. The United States'

concrete evidence was a description of a recorded conversation between defected Iraq army officers about a UN inspection visit to Iraq (Borger paras. 1–7). The conversation gave the Bush administration what they wanted to hear after their failure to protect American national security on 9/11. They could initiate war against Iraq, as victory was possible, and they could increase the president's and the ruling party's popularity. In her criticism of American political leadership's policies after the invasion of Iraq, Nye documents the colonialist Western legacy in the collective Arab memory in "He Said EYE-RACK," published in *You and Yours* (2005):

> … On St Patrick's Day
> 2003, President Bush wore a blue tie. Blinking hard,
> He said, "We are not dealing with peaceful men."
> He said, 'reckless aggression'.
> He said, 'the danger is clear'.
> …
> … He said, 'We are
> against the lawless men who
> rule your country, not you.' Tell that
> to the mother, the sister, the bride,
> the proud boy, the peanut-seller,
> the librarian careful with her shelves. (lines 10–14, 17–22)

The writer's concern regarding American interference and hegemony cannot be read as anti-democratic. On the contrary, it is the intellectual's concern regarding the human rights struggle and the destruction resulting from this military act. In 1930, Rihani gave a public lecture in New York in which he stated: "the politicians of Europe and America cannot right the wrongs of the world. They have done enough already to make this international task an official impossibility" (qtd. in Hajjar, "Introduction," *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani: The Humanist Ideology of an Arab-American Intellectual and Activist* 2). Nye shares the same concerns as Rihani and his criticism of Western hegemony, which are considered as an extension of Arab American legacy on one side and have developed Arab American discourse on the other side.

Hazo reflects on the abovementioned situation in “For Which It Stands,” published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005) and in “Verdict,” published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020). In “For Which It Stands,” he writes:

> The President
> proclaims we’ll be at war forever —
> not war for peace but war
> upon war, though hopefully not here.
> Believers in eternal re-election
> hear his pitch and pay. (lines 10–15)

In his critical interpretation of the war, Hazo warns everyone will support this war and re-elect Bush, preventing them from facing the consequences. The most precious cost of any war is civilian deaths on both sides. However, Hazo’s criticism in “For Which It Stands” is inseparable from his irony in “Verdict.” In “Verdict,” he ironically writes about George W. Bush, “The lesser Bush excelled / in cheerleading” (lines 21–22). As the American president who launched the first global war on terrorism, Bush was the greatest supporter of this war for the aforementioned reasons.

Handal’s spiritual journey in “American Camino,” published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), empowers the prevalent voice of Arab American discourse:

> In Indianapolis, I revisited Kurt Vonnegut’s *A Man Without a Country*: *Here’s what I think the truth is: We are all addicts of fossil fuels in a state of denial. And like so many addicts about to face cold turkey, our leaders are now committing violent crimes to get what little is left of what we’re hooked on*. (90–91)

The writer quotes Kurt Vonnegut’s collection of essays responding to contemporary politics, *A Man Without a Country: A Memoir of Life in George Bush’s America* (2007), to involve an engagement with elements of politics alongside a human experience.[22] Handal reflects on the controversial relationship between the United States and the Arab world in the era of Bush’s

[22] Kurt Vonnegut (1922–2007) was an American writer well known for his satirical works emphasising the contradictions of the modern world.

administration, which aimed to achieve increased control over the Middle East rather than mutual interests which had been the previous objective. She agrees with Vonnegut that American leaders are committing crimes to pursue humble victories to control the oil. Nevertheless, due to the diversity of Arab Americans, members of the Arab American community responded differently to the invasion of Iraq: on March 19, 2003, Iraqi American Shias at the Karbalaa Islamic Educational Centre in Dearborn, Michigan were supportive of the war and declared that they wanted America to kill the dictator Saddam Hussein. Ten years later, a *USA Today* report showed that 64,000 Iraqi Americans in Michigan mirrored the diversity of the Arab American community and the splits of the Arab world. Although some initially supported the war, others now are against it (Warikoo paras. 1–7). Mainly, Shias who were oppressed under Saddam's regime supported the war, while minority Christians and Sunnis did not.

In fact, the nature and context of Arab American post-9/11 discourse have been engaged with issues that cannot be easily refuted through debate or criticism. Contemporary Arab American literature has stood up to reject the deceptiveness and contradictions of the dominant neo-Orientalism discourse. Indeed, Arab American writers have striven to produce intellectual and political knowledge to refute any imperial power. In their response to the emergence of neo-Orientalism, the three selected poets have freely exposed their concerns despite their pride in being adopted citizens of the United States. At the same time, this exposition led them discuss other controversial issues in addition to the concerns they share with their counterparts in the Arab world, including exclusion and racialisation within the American community.

Racialisation

While race studies concern the barriers non-White immigrants face, immigrant narratives continue to portray the United States as a White nation that inadvertently participates in immigrants' exclusion and marginalisation. These narratives were never exclusive to Arab American literature but were created with the beginnings of minority literature, the oldest of which is Black American literature. In her literary criticism, Morrison comments on racialisation in the American community as a basic constructional feature: "Race . . . now functions as a metaphor so necessary to the construction of Americanness that it rivals the old pseudo-scientific and class-informed racism whose dynamics we are more used to deciphering" (47). Undoubtedly, racialisation has been rooted in the American discourse throughout history despite equality slogans and racial assimilation promoted by the United States. In February 2022, Russia launched a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Ukrainian crisis highlighted double standards towards other races, especially Arabs and Muslims. In an NBC report, Kelly Cobiella, an American journalist and NBC correspondent, comments on the massive refugee movement from Ukraine live from Poland borders: "just to put it bluntly, these are not refugees from Syria, these are refugees from neighbouring Ukraine . . . they're Christian, they're white, they're very similar to people living in Poland" ("NBC Journalist's Racism in Reporting on Ukraine"). In a CBS NEWS report, senior foreign correspondent Charlie D'Agata said, live from Kyiv, "but this is not a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European city where you wouldn't hope that's going to happen" ("Journalist's Racist Comments towards Arabs and Afghans Spark Online Uproar"). In fact, both reports reveal essential racial discourse involving Arabs and Muslims despite all the deceptive claims of racial equality. Considering this fact and the historical and

political contexts, I argue that in Hazo's, Handal's, and Nye's work, the poets navigate the profound racialisation they have experienced. By examining their work, in this part of the thesis, I discern how these poets respond to and address the complex interplay of historical and political factors that shape their experiences of racialisation.

Featured in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), Hazo incorporates his sense of racialisation in "Notre Dame du Lac," "National Prayer Breakfast," and "The Wounds of Honor." He portrays himself and his ethnic group as foreigners in the second part of "Notre Dame du Lac":

> Why
> do we gawk like foreigners
> at residence halls no longer
> ours but somehow ours
> in perpetuity?
> We visit them
> like their alumni — older
> but unchanged. (II lines 7–14)

By narrating the story of a journey back to campus, the poet expresses his feeling of displacement, which makes him question the reason for his uncertainty. While the implications are direct in "Notre Dame du Lac," they are allusive in "National Prayer Breakfast":

> Conventioneers from thirty-seven
> countries throng the banquet
> hall to hear the message.
> A clergyman asks God to bless
> the fruit and rolls.
> The president
> speaks up for Reagan, Martin
> Luther King and having faith
> in faith. (lines 1-9)

In a convention that representatives from thirty-seven countries attended, the shadow of racialisation still existed in their speeches. Hazo mentions Martin Luther King's role as a pioneer, as he was an activist seeking to achieve civil rights and racial equality in the United States. It is this shadow that conceptualises the cultural politics of diaspora and shows America is

not a promised land for Hazo or other Arab Americans. Diaspora works alongside racialisation to portray a more cautious understanding of Arab American ethnic identity, which Hazo portrays when he writes about the victims of Alzheimer's disease in "The Wounds of Honor":

> And where but in the minds of exiles
> do their countries stay alive?
> Nothing but knowing what we know
> enlivens us to meet the envy
> of the never satisfied, the wiles
> of the ravenous for glory or the jealousy
> of those imprisoned by their own
> abundance. (lines 14–21)

These lines offer a paradigmatic illustration of the implications of racialisation. The first reading of the poem suggests how a person diagnosed with Alzheimer's feels, but Hazo's intentional use of the word "exiles" and notion of the unforgettable homeland in "countries stay alive" suggest the immigration experience. Moreover, it situates the experiences of mobility in migration and exile, which suggest cross-border movement and involve the search for identity. The notions of exile and self-realisation that reside in the speaker, position them in opposition to those who are envious and never satisfied. Those who seek power use "the wiles / of the ravenous for glory or the jealousy / of those imprisoned by their own / abundance" (lines 18–21), a classification more applicable to American politicians and White supremacists. In fact, the notion of Otherness is unavoidable in the poem, and Hazo's speaker is considered powerless. Yet, Hazo suggests the key to transcend exile in the next lines: "Between the mind / reflective and the mind presumptive / waits the mind attentive and composed" (lines 22–24). Hazo's notion of decolonising the mind is central to ethnic studies. Salaita states that Arab Americans' concern with decolonising the mind is comprehensive and includes other minorities because they share the same concerns and issues ("Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism" 165). From this perspective, Hazo's

illustration of decolonising the mind intersects with the tenets of contemporary ethnic studies to constitute imperative patriotism and transcend racialisation.

Hazo's conceptualisations of racialisation are allusive and implicit, but Nye prefers to articulate the ramifications of racialised politics and discourses in a very explicit way. In "It's Good to Sit Down with a Racist Every Now and Then," published in *Tender Spot: Selected Poems* (2015), Nye's speaker narrates a very short story in free verse. The dialogue between the speaker and the main character, who plays the role of the antagonist racist, highlights the racialised discourse used against the Arab speaker:

> When he says, *Your people don't like to work, do they?*
> stare at his belly, excess folds of fat around the middle
> which must be making it hard for blood to get to
>
> the brain. Consider his red T-shirt with little lion monogram
> and three neat buttons. As he calls the waiter over
> to interrogate him about the broth in the enchilada sauce, (lines 1–6)

The antagonist's question in the first line indicates an overgeneralised, stereotypical racialised discourse to promote the image of Arabs as lazy and a burden on all societies. Moreover, the question includes "us" and "them" discourse to create boundaries separating out "your people" (line 1). Nevertheless, Nye's speaker remains self-contained to answer this offensive, arrogant question. Despite the short dialogue between the two speakers, the detailed description of the antagonist's appearance and "belly" creates a vivid image in the reader's mind contrary to what he claims. However, the way he interacts with the waiter and the use of the word "interrogate" emphasise his discourse of superiority:

> *Is it meat-based or not*, and becomes incredibly ruffled
> when the waiter says *Yes*, secretly laugh. You never liked that
> sauce either, now you know why. *They never stop working.*
> *They work so hard.* (lines 7–10)

Nye's speaker is self-confident and reconciled to paying attention to every single detail before giving a firm answer to defend their people: "*They never stop working / They work so hard*" (lines 9–10). The conversation continues in the same context, in which both parties never meet: "when he says, *My people try so hard to be nice to your people, / but your people can't accept it*, say what your father / taught you to say, *I think you need a little more information*" (lines 16–18). Throughout the dialogue, Nye attempts to say that overgeneralisation and racialisation stem from ignorance and lack of information about the Other. According to Nye, racism against Arab Americans reveals ignorance within some American communities, and Arab Americans must display confidence to refute the associated allegations.

In this context, Handal believes that racialisation is constructed deep in American culture. It urges minorities to adhere to their ethnicity and mobilises their feeling of marginalisation and Otherness. In her introduction to *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology* (2015), Handal agrees with the American anthologist Shron Zukin, supporting her claim that for many Americans, "culture" mainly means "ethnicity." She states that:

> … in a society like America that forces one to think of color, origin, and religion, one is driven back to his/her culture or "ethnic' group. Apart from this social reality, which, directly or indirectly, forces the notion of ethnicity as a means of self-definition. (43).

She conceptualises this interpretation in "Strangers Inside Me," published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005):

> Outside, the quivers of winter,
> a sudden moistness, a slow darkness.
> Outside, strangers looking for themselves
> in the silent motion of my handwriting.
> I stand at the corners of night
> hoping that violets will remain purple in winter. (lines 1–6)

The image of the strangers reflects the speaker's feeling of Otherness and difference, which makes them seek security and peace in "the corners of the night," an abstract image that highlights the sense of alienation. The speaker's prayer for violets to remain purple in winter indicates a wish for something impossible to happen. Symbolically, violets represent faithfulness and fidelity. In *Violet America* (2013), apart from politics, Arthur states that the use of violet as a colour is interlinked with assumptions of regional sensibility and literary divisions within the American literary canon. The colour that results from combining red, which is the colour of the Republican Party, and blue, which is the colour of the Democratic Party, is preferable in multicultural America ("Introduction" xviii). Therefore, the speaker's prayer mirrors racialisation, represents a wish for acceptance, and maps the relationship between place and identity as well as the real world and the imaginative world. The speaker's sense of exile and diaspora urges them to create their own country:

> There is a country on my tongue
> a small world between my heartbeats.
> Strangers inside me that understand
> the strangeness of strange things,
> that understand they are not strangers
> to each other but it seems strange to
> others that they belong together, as if
> we can refuse ourselves ourselves. (lines 7–14)

The outside world is full of strangers and depicts the speaker's feeling of Otherness, but the inside world is full of the feeling of strangeness, which reflects the divisions within the Arab American ethnic group. Two dominant qualities that Arab Americans gained from their life in the United States is the individual freedom and the competitive nature of the American community, which helped create unity within Arab American ethnicity. The divisions within the Arab American community have arisen at two levels: the entire entity, which empowers Arab Americans politically and culturally, and internal subdivisions, which might threaten national

security. Taking these divisions into consideration, Handal's poem reflects her ability to shed light on the problematic nature of being an Arab American and her insistence to challenge divisions within one ethnic group by creating a unified entity: "that understand they are not strangers / to each other but it seems strange to / others that they belong together" (lines 11–13). Philip Metres reflects on these abstract concepts and their impacts on Arab Americans. As an Arab American, the writer believes that he can articulate the post-9/11 racial ramifications:

> My every utterance felt immediately political and connected intimately to how fellow Arabs and Arab Americans might be treated. Perhaps I could, I thought, say what they could not say… I know that I have certain rights as a citizen to speak my mind. Many first generation Arab Americans and noncitizens do not share that confidence and live in terror of losing the hold they have on life here. ("Carrying Continents in Our Eyes" 41)

The concept of individual freedom that Philip Metres and Handal share helps them stand up against racialisation and injustice in the American community. At the same time, it emphasises a fundamental understanding of Arab American qualities. In *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (2007), Salaita states that it is problematic to speak of Arab Americans as an individual entity due to their diversity:

> Arab Americans are Muslim (Shia, Sunni and Alawi and Isma'ili), Christian (Catholic and Orthodox, Anglican and Evangelical, ad Mainline Protestant), Jewish, Bahai, dual citizens of Israel and twenty two Arab nations, multi-and monolingual, progressive and conservatives, assimilationists and nationalists, cosmopolitanists and pluralists, immigrants and fifth-generation Americans, wealthy and working-class, rural and urban, modern and traditional, religious and secular. (1)

According to Handal, acknowledging the Arab American community's diversity is fundamental in deconstructing Arab Americans as a collective unified entity, which culminates in creating a comfort zone for them as a minority. In the same context, Lawrence Joseph's "Sand Nigger,"

published in (2013), highlights the complexity of Arab Americans' individuality in racialised America:

> outside the house my practice
> is not to respond to remarks
> about my nose or the color of my skin.
> "Sand nigger," I'm called,
> and the name fits: I am
> the light-skinned nigger
> with black eyes and the look
> difficult to figure — a look
> of difference, a look to kill —
> a Levantine nigger
> in the city on the strait
> between the great lakes Erie and St. Clair
> which has a reputation
> for violence, an enthusiastically
> bad-tempered sand nigger
> who waves his hands, nice enough
> to pass, Lebanese enough
> to be against his brother,
> with his brother against his cousin,
> with cousin and brother
> against the stranger. (lines 72–92)

The idea of strangeness is indivisible from the idea of racialisation in Joseph's poem and Handal's as well. Both poets deconstruct the Arab American community as a postcolonial structure and reality. From this premise, the divisions within the community appear as a new genealogy of racism and racialisation. Therefore, by being part of their critique, the writers take a much stronger position than creating boundaries and opposing them. Notably, they make poetry that appeals to their Arab American present.

In fact, in the post-9/11 era, Arab American literature has depicted a phenomenal intersection of stereotypical racial and neo-Orientalist discourses that have been shaped by the ramifications of hostility against Arabs. Unlike other minority groups, Arab Americans have been characterised by a unique characteristic of racial classification within the American

community, as they are excluded from minorities of colour as well as white ethnicity. Such presentation has prompted Arab American writers to understand and express this contradiction in their poetry to voice Arab American identity within the American multicultural community and positively interact with the common concerns of Arab Americans. Majaj believes that the implications of Arab American racial liminality became especially critical after 9/11, a period that reflects the American community's failure to accommodate an essential component, ethnic pluralism (*Transformative Acts* 75). Moreover, Salaita observes that after the attacks, "Arabs and Muslims became major targets of racial profiling, ethnic discrimination, and human rights violations" ("Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism" 152). The exclusion of Arab American ethnicity included critical events over a long history of racialisation. Among those events is what Naff recorded in 1911, when the American Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization encouraged courts to "reject applications for first papers from 'aliens who were neither white persons nor persons of African birth and descent'" (qtd. in Majaj *Transformative Acts* 75–76). This encouragement was followed by a series of cases in United States courts known as "prerequisite cases," in which some people's naturalisation was challenged and others' requests were rejected because of their ethnic affiliations and their classification as "White." Those cases contributed to the exclusion of entire ethnic groups, supported the pre-existing racialisation, and made it more difficult to identify the meaning of "whiteness." As a result, the courts sought to establish a judicial system to classify white immigrants that takes into account their cultural backgrounds, national origins, skin colour, facial features, and other classifications that reflected racialisation (Majaj *Transformative Acts* 75–76). Nevertheless, defining Arab Immigrants remained problematic, as they "were scientifically identified as Caucasian," but at the same time, "their popular perception as non-White was so persuasive," making the courts take the popular

perception into consideration and emphasising the political implications of defining "whiteness." In the 1940s, the courts declared that Arab immigrants are defined as White and non-White. The court's declaration considered several questions, namely whether Arabs have "white" skin, whether Arabs are Asian or Caucasian, whether whiteness is specified by special elements including race, geography, colour, culture, or religion, and whether an actual relationship exists between Caucasian identity and whiteness. The answers to these questions reflect the extent of the contradiction in the American community on one hand and the policy of racism on the other hand in an era marked by xenophobia and concerned with American identity (Majaj *Transformative Acts* 77–78). Taking that matter into consideration, Hazo, Handal, and Nye have provided examples of the difficulties marginalised groups face in confronting racialisation, drawing on their personal experiences and awareness of it as minority writers. Throughout their work, these three writers have sought to pursue justice and equality for their populations built on their understanding of intersectionality.

According to Salaita, in theorising any ethnic identity, an urgent need arises to investigate the history of marginalisation and continuous prejudicial attitudes in the host culture. In his book *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today* (2006), Salita contends,

> The origin of American racism is a combination of European colonial values and interaction with Blacks and Indians; the racism became uniquely American as the relationship among White settlers and slave owners and those they subjugated evolved from a seemingly one-sided display of power to a complicated (and usually discordant) discourse of oppression and resistance, capitalism and egalitarianism, stereotype and self-representation. (5–6)

The writer traces the history of Anti-Arab racism, which has been a phenomenon in the United States since the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the contextual factors in the

post-9/11 backlash emerged as fundamental in formulating the social attitudes to understand how Arabs are treated and classified in the United States. The United States' rapid imperial and military expansion in the post-9/11 has spurred scholars in ethnic studies to draw attention to Arab American literature and its critical ethnical studies despite the political, institutional, and intellectual challenges. Awad and Amayreh classify discrimination against Arab Americans under two categories, the perpetrator and the victim, which are widely represented in post-9/11 narrative tradition. Based on correlational and experimental studies, the writers state that the pervasive and consistent negative stereotyping of Arab Americans in the media has helped create institutional discrimination (such as employment and housing discrimination), which is called overt prejudice, old fashioned prejudice, or racism. According to Awad and Amayreh, although overt prejudice still exists, more modern forms are practised under the umbrella of individualism and Protestant work ethic values. Such prejudicial practises are justified to promote negative views of Arab Americans and other ethnic minorities (64–66). Therefore, Arab Americans have experienced both forms of prejudice, which appear to heighten when a threat arises to American national security.

In addition to being a turning point, the attacks redefined Arab American literature to adopt a more holistic view of political, social, and cultural realities. In "Postscript," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002), Nye portrays media pressures against Arabs in the United States and how they are victimised and targeted for misrepresentation and racialisation. The poem is composed of four parts, with the first two revealing Nye's poetic voice and the last two allowing her to address her anonymous Arab readers: "I wish I had said nothing. / Had not return the call. / Had left the call dangling, a shirt from one pin" (I. lines 1–3). Nye's

speaker blames themself for taking that call and enabling the media's constant distortion and misrepresentation of Arabs:

> Or if I had to say something,
> only a tiny tiny thing. A well-shaped phrase.
> Smoothed off at the edges like a child's wooden cow.
> That nobody would get a splinter from. (II. lines 1–4)

The speaker makes a wish for a stable statement that invalidates misrepresentation attempts:

> No one has a deep wish to quote you accurately.
> They want a good *story*.
> It is not your story really, it is theirs.
> So they do not care if they run the four sentences you *said*
> (one that you really *said*, then three loose ones you answered
> their chatty questions with)
> into one sentence as if you said all that
> *together*. Like a *speech*.
> It sounds good to them.
> They do not care
> how it sounds to you. (III. lines 1–11)

In the third part, Nye intends to address her readers by using the personal pronoun "you" to indicate the Arabs. In contrast, the writer uses the pronoun "they" to address the Other. This intention highlights the significance of both pronouns in identifying binaries and structuralising a symbol of difference in the "us" and "them" division. The attacks of 9/11 have created a need to identify rather than cross boundaries, and Arab Americans' hybrid identity is challenged today, as the world is divided into "us" and "them." In her essay "The Face of the Enemy: Arab-American Writing Post-9/11" (2003), El Said states that the attacks have not ruined only the World Trade Centre; they have redefined Arab American identity and supported the apogee of Orientalist confidence:

> In the midst of this new schism, Arab-Americans, who are a melange of Arab and American, become trapped in an attempt to redefine their identity, and reconstruct a hybridity that seems impossible in a world that is divided into 'we' and 'them.' (3)

However, it is noted that the italicised words in Nye's poem, "*story*, *said*, *together*, and *speech*," emerge to create a meaning. Identifying these words and collecting them in one sentence as "the *story* you *said together* makes a *speech*" reflects a fundamental realisation of the importance of the collective discourse of minorities in creating overgeneralisation by the dominant majority, thus mobilising racialisation and resulting in exclusion. In addition, Nye italicises another line in the last part, "Will hate yourself for forgetting / *this is what reports do*" (IV. lines 6–7), to emphasise the role of the media in creating the sense of marginalisation. However, Nye's speaker believes that it is literature that can defend the victimised Arab:

> … Write it down.
> Always write it down. Say it slowly. Say it
> the way you learned words. Say it
> as if words count.
> One two. The shoe still has
> a buckle. (IV. lines 12–17)

The poet encourages the readers to revive and synthesise their responses so that they can produce their own literature and create a discourse to refute neo-Orientalism discourse. In the last two lines, Nye alludes to the nursery rhyme "one, two, buckle my shoe," which was originally describing a regular day of shoemakers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The actual message behind this allusion is to motivate the readers to synthesise and get ready to work.

In "The Warrior," published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005), Handal considers paradoxes and evokes unanswered questions in a prose poem:

> It was Wednesday, I remember. Maybe it was Thursday. I had arrived early, early enough to drink some good wine alone with a man I thought we all should fear and for a second forgot. Then they arrived. Nothing in me had changed, even after the wine, even after I saw a goat and corpse cut open side by side. Some say this place is cursed, every drop of water sinks the earth. Strange the things one thinks about at moments like this — was I a stranger to the lover who saw my curves and scars, kissed them then slept like a deserter? Strange what comes to you in the dream-shadows of

> God — children you saw once in Nablus or Ramallah, who told you the hour the dates will grow in Palestine. Then they arrived. Announced —she died yesterday, but I heard she died a year ago, later that evening I found out she will die tomorrow. An then I heard him say, *shut up, there is only one way to fight a war. Become the other.* I cross my legs and take his face apart trying to find a way to remember this moment otherwise. (11)

The poem explores a traumatic moment that creates confusion and uncertainty: "It was Wednesday, I remember. Maybe it was Thursday" (11). Handal's uncertainty exceeds the timeline to include humanity. The main character is the perpetrator and should be feared by Handal's narrator but "for a second forgot." Despite the violence surrounding the scene, Handal's speaker still calls him "lover" and sympathises with him to describe the way he sleeps as a "deserter." The writer succeeds in depicting ambiguity and uncertainty by repeating "Then they arrived," without giving any clues for who they are. Announcing the death of an ambiguous female character is confusing for the readers as well. It could be the death of humanity, the death of Palestine as a free state, or the death of a civilian. The victimised image of the perpetrator is essential in the poem and misleading at the same time. However, the title resolves the conflict in favour of the warrior. Thus, during uncertainty, Handal voices the perpetrator to justify violence as a reaction: "*there is only one way to fight a war. Become the other*" (11). The constant loop of uncertainty is endless in the poem, and Handal intends to give no answers: "trying to remember this moment otherwise" (11). Handal fears no nationalist shame in acknowledging the perpetrator's commentary of the story. In fact, she is intending to go against the domestic mainstream. Salaita believes that the fear of supporting terrorism and being arrested by United States officials has prevented many Arab Americans from justifying the attacks of 9/11 and engaging Palestine: "Arab Americans, and many others, are under the impression that speaking too loudly against the war on terror or American support for Israel is a viable cause for

suspicion" ("Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism" 152). On the contrary, Handal encourages the reader to think outside of the box through unbiased lenses and aims to highlight the significance of uncertainty in Arab American literature. From this perspective, she explicitly discusses Palestine with no fear of accusations of anti-Americanism or anti-Semitism. Importantly, Handal tackles the theme of the paradox of identity, which is problematic for Arab Americans and draws attention to the fact that an area of study needs to be investigated after the attacks. Salaita states that the constant absence of critical studies after the attacks cooperates in producing neo-Orientalism discourse, on one side. On the other side, it encourages Arab American intellectuals to speak collectively in defining paradoxes ("Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism" 153). Therefore, Handal's poem urges readers to consider the other part of the story — in which the perpetrator is the victim — in order to reject the terrorism accusations employed by the domestic environment in the United States. Simultaneously, it assures the accusations of dual sympathies.

In the same context, Hazo's dual sympathy urges him to create a unique zone of in-betweenness. In "Do You Read Me?," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), he raises a rhetorical question for his readers without giving any answer. The poem opens with an interpretation of the significance of understanding the Other:

> It's what communicators ask
> to learn if they are being
> understood.
> Because to read
> means more than seeing or hearing,
> the verb reverberates. (lines 1–6)

As an Arab American intellectual, the writer encourages readers to make an effort to understand the paradoxes without showing any sympathies with either the victim or the perpetrator in a special case different than Handal's. In fact, his neutral stand remains unclear at the end of the

poem when he repeats the same question, "Do you read me?" (line 26). Hazo's intention is crucial to evoke empathy from the reader. Significantly, he lights up unspotted areas to experience the difference. However, in "When Being Rude Seems Right," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), he uses his speaker as a representative of Arab Americans so that he can develop an understanding of Arab American mentality: "His opinion of beards? / "They hide / the face"" (lines 17–19). According to Hazo, the distorted image of Muslim fundamentalists, who are symbolised by the "beards," hides the face of the true Arab. The poet creates more tension in the poem by giving answers in short lines. Moreover, the short lines create a sense of disjointedness throughout the poem:

> Mocked and dismissed because
> he offends, he says, "Each day
> we're here to be offended."
> His thought on war?
> "Everyone
> loses."
> And peace?
> "Really?"
> And life?
> "It's what we're missing." (lines 28–32)

In these lines, the poet depicts an image of a passive victim so as to develop an understanding of the action as a reaction without justifying it. The victimised Arab, who is inferior in culture and intellect when compared to the American, is subject to constant racialisation and discrimination but is still convinced that there is no ultimate victory in any war. Hazo ends the poem with a very humanistic point of view and, again, without taking any sides despite the public willingness to dehumanise the Other. The poet illustrates the dangers inherent in negative ethnic imagery.

As people of colour, Arab Americans started to see themselves from the White racialised perspective in post-9/11 literature, and Arab American poets strove to redefine and depict exclusion and victimisation in their poetry. In their poetry, they attempt to articulate that they are

victims of marginalisation and victims of terror as well. Where Hazo intends to distance himself and uses a character to reveal Arab Americans' feelings of racialisation, Hammad explicitly uses her poetic voice to illustrate these victimised feelings in "First Writing Since" (2001):

> thank you to the woman who saw me brinking my cool and
> blinking back
> tears. she opened her arms before she asked "do you want a hug?"
> a
> big white woman, and her embrace was the kind only people with
> the
> warmth of flesh can offer. i wasn't about to say no to any comfort.
> "my brother's in the navy," i said. "and we're arabs". wow, you
> got double trouble." word. (IV. lines 18–23)

Hammad's insistence to ignore capitalisation throughout the poem indicates an ability to reject the imposed ideologies and her quest to eliminate differences. Importantly, it is noted that Hammad implements multicultural theory in "her embrace was the kind only people with the / warmth of flesh can offer" (lines 20–21). Postcolonial theorists, such as Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, developed multicultural theory by critiquing colonial narratives and advocating for the representation and empowerment of marginalised groups. In this sense, multiculturalism appears to oppose marginalisation and refute racialisation. Drawing from their postcolonial realities, Hammad, Haza, Handal, and Nye implement postmodern theory to employ a contemporary political, cultural, and social American present. In other words, Arab American writers developed an essential understanding of the contemporary struggle between the racist and the racialised so that they could conceptualise the struggle of power that is core to misrepresentation and stereotyping in defining the Other. In the first part of "First Writing Since" (2001), Hammad adopts both theories:

> fire in the city air and i feared for my sister's life in a way never
> before. and then, and now, i fear for the rest of us.
>
> first, please god, let it be a mistake, the pilot's heart failed, the

> plane's engine died.
> then please god, let it be a nightmare, wake me now.
> please god, after the second plane, please, don't let it be anyone
> who looks like my brothers.
> ---
> more than ever, i believe there is no difference.
> the most privileged nation, most americans do not know the
> difference
> between indians, afghanis, syrians, muslims, sikhs, hindus.
> more than ever, there is no difference. (I. lines 10–16, 23–26)

The lines reveal Hammad's understanding of the struggle of powers: "please god, after the second plane, please, don't let it be anyone / who looks like my brothers" (lines 15–16). In this struggle of power, Hammad's speaker is frightened that the majority racists will triumph and the minority racialised will be labelled and excluded. The writer's insistence to repeat the word "difference" and "no difference" conceptualises her interpretation of the theories of multiculturalism and postmodernism. Although multiculturalism and postmodernism are two complicated sets of ideas, they intersect in their recognition of diversity and complexity, both challenging the idea of singular dominant narratives. Instead, they promote a more fragmented view of reality. On one hand, there is "the most privileged nation, most americans" (I. line 24). On the other hand, there are multicultural minorities that are collectively excluded in the racialisation discourse implemented by most Americans against different minorities: "indians, afghanis, syrians, muslims, sikhs, hindus," (I. line 25).

Where Hammad's image is concerned with issues of multicultural America and racialisation, Handal builds on multiculturalism, postmodernism, and decolonisation in her poem "Twenty Tattoos," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020). The title itself indicates the multicultural nature of America as a nation that embraces multicultural ethnicities. However, the first lines expose a sense of victimisation and racialisation that may challenge patriotism in a romantic image:

I asked you not to hurt me
the way history did

asked you if the moon will expire
if a helicopter and a bomb will fall again

if the light posts will light up, if we will find
what starves the lonesome inside (lines 1–6)

Handal's insistence to ignore capitalisation reveals her intension to resist imposed ideologies, on one side. On the other side, her commitment to capitalise the "I" reflects a unique ability to challenge stereotyping and overgeneralisation. Here, the romantic image overlaps with violence and racialisation. The sense of loneliness is essential in the image and unignorable. Then, the poem reveals a capacity of transcultural witnessing in an attempt to decolonise the mind over the passage of time: "the years we weren't allowed to enter / the mind we weren't permitted to unpack" (lines 7–8). Handal's speaker stands as a witness of the history. Moreover, the poet's choice to write the poem in the past tense indicates that her speaker experienced the events and has judged and evaluated them. From this premise, Handal does not intend to make any immediate relationship between her speaker and the readers, thus creating abstract boundaries and an indirect encounter with the Other.

Nye extends her interpretation of the theories of postmodernism and multiculturalism in "Eye Contact with a Squirrel," published in *Transfer* (2011). The poem consists of four stanzas that appear as fragments and have nothing in common except for the fact that they are narrated by one speaker:

It changes everything – the loneliness of the tree
where we buried Daddy's ashes – only part of them –
perhaps his brain – or dear right hand.
Everything moves with such regular frisk
in the altered world – jasmine twist of spring –
4 yellow iris on a stalk – he gave me that bulb –
I caried it in my purse –

it never bloomed before – now boom. (lines 1–8)

In her poetry, Nye creates a bond with the homeland that resides in her by involving her father. The presence of "Daddy's ashes" (line 2) buried under a lonely tree conceptualises Arab Americans' feeling of racialisation. The image serves as a metaphor for profound experience of alienation, fragmented identity, and the connection to tradition felt by Arab Americans. It also reveals their resistance against racism as well as the complex internal politics of minority. However, the image of loneliness in the first stanza is interrupted by the eye contact with the squirrel. Nye's poetic voice deconstructs the American community and reveals that racialisation is fundamental and "moves with such regular frisk / in the altered world" (lines 4–5). According to Nye, the second generation of Arab Americans has developed a great awareness of the implications of racialisation and discrimination and has become more intellectually and culturally competent to confront them: "he gave me that bulb – I carried it in my purse – it never bloomed before – now boom" (lines 6–8). In the next stanza, the speaker comments on a new scene:

For all who lost jobs last week,
here's a day that feels like a hollowed-out tree.
Where do you sleep, buddy-bud?
You leap for leftover applesauce cake
no one else will eat. (lines 9–13)

The scene depicts institutional discrimination that targets minorities and causes massive lost jobs. The speaker discusses the implications of this kind of discrimination despite the minorities' attempts to melt in the same pot with the American majority. In this stanza, Nye criticises the American system for excluding the Other. The applesauce cake that dates back to colonial times in the United States highlights the idea of colonialism and imperialism. According to Ojakangas, the applesauce cake is attributed to the Yankee culinary traditions of the early colonial era in the

New England colonies of the northeastern United States (239). In the midst of the glorious and flourishing America, Nye's poetic voice succeeds in creating a sense of racialisation against minorities who struggle to find a place and make their own living decently.

> I want to say: we're all richer than we ever were,
> having stared into so much, memory becomes
> the Dark Ages, we're older than Lincoln
> when he died. Help us, squirrelly-boy.
> We hump for scraps of language. (lines 14–18)

The third stanza reveals how the contemporary Arab American generation gained confidence and was empowered by knowledge. They developed a collective experience opposite to their ancestors who metaphorically lived in "the Dark Ages" due to their lack of experience in confronting the American community. Today, Arab Americans represented in the collective pronoun "we're" became older and stronger. However, the last stanza tackles a new scene:

> It's impossible to close a drawer. Trucks roar past.
> On 1-70 in Missouri, a FedEx truck in front of us
> flipped – all the boxes flew out, popped open.
> Radio drone – sin was mentioned – and I wanted some. (lines 19–22)

The fragmentation of the poem reflects Nye's implementation of postmodernism and captures the chaotic nature of contemporary life. The juxtaposition in "it's impossible to close a drawer" (line 19) with the dramatic image of the FedEx truck flipping and the boxes scattering, along with the speaker's desire for sin, creates a heightened sense of reality, introduces moral ambiguity, and adds an ironic tone. These images and techniques work together to evoke a sense of uncertainty, complexity, and irony, which are characteristic of postmodernism. Moreover, they emphasise the concepts of racialisation, isolation, and instability that oppose the concepts of wholeness and unity that the media tries to portray of American community.

From this premise, Hazo embraces fragmentations, diversity, and contradiction in "The United *Status* of America," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020). He avoids misleading the readers by italicising the word "*Status*" to call attention to an American reality. Throughout the poem, the writer puts emphasis on the power of language in creating thoughts and experiences through eight different clips:

> Smoking my pipe, I offered
> Halloween candy to a boy
> who focused on the pipe and asked,
> "What's that?"
> Next – a wedding
> where the bride had the date
> of her marriage tattooed
> on the back of her neck.
> Then –
> newscasts ranging from alarm
> to charm.
> Then – cars equipped
> to drive, stop, turn and park
> themselves.
> Then – round trips
> to the moon for three million per.
> Then – tracing ancestries back
> to Adam or part way.
> Then –
> students who print their names
> because they never were taught
> to write them.
> Then – a third
> grader who said that poetry
> means "putting your best words
> together with feeling in them."
> That made up for everything. (lines 1–27)

Hazo shares with Nye the intention to adopt fragmental images that depict the diversity and multiplicity of the American community, on one side. On the other side, the writer employs paradoxes to illuminate reality. The mature speaker smoking the pipe and the candy boy, "drive" and "stop," and "turn" and "park" all reveal the diversity of the United States. However, the

image of the "students who print their names / because they never were taught / to write them" (20–22) highlights a racial institutional practice against them as a minority. Hazo's use of the passive voice is intended to create a dramatic effect and an emotional distance between the readers and the speaker. In the last scene, as a writer and an intellectual, Hazo highlights the significance of literature in uniting paradoxes and bringing together the scattering of the community, as poetry is the supreme means in doing that.

In fact, Hazo, Handal, and Nye developed a conscious discourse to document racial practices within the United States. They have also reached a degree of awareness to critique these practices, both at the level of United States community and at the level of the multiethnic Arab American community. This critique has gone through several stages: realising and expressing racialisation; deconstructing it, analysing it, and realising its causes; and creating a discourse to confront it and raise social awareness of its dangers in threatening national security and American citizenship.

Interestingly enough, the representation of Saudi women in Arab American poetry reveals racialisation within the Arab American community. Simultaneously, it is part of the misrepresentation of Arabian women in Orientalist discourse. According to Suliman Muhammad Ali Muhammad El Sagheer, the term "Arab American" refers to all immigrants or people descended from any of the 22 Arabic speaking countries, including Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (161–62), creating more divisions within this ethnic group and more diversity. The fact that the three selected writers are all of Levantine origin reveals that, while they may have a particular interest in the Levant and its people, they are not representative of all Arab American

writers or the diverse experiences and perspectives of Arab Americans more broadly. Additionally, the image of the oppressed marginalised gender in a masculine society remains predominant in media-produced Western discourses and reflected in literature to promote political agendas. This image is related to the representation of Eastern women in Orientalism discourse that conceptualised the Arabian woman as inferior to Arabian men and bounded by many restrictions resulting from a combination of Islamic culture and Arabic traditions in the first place. However, in the second place, Western discourse has evaded Saudi women's individuality. In fact, three characteristics significantly distinguish the experience of Saudi women from that of other Arabian women, owing to various sociocultural, religious, and geopolitical dimensions. During the colonial era and prior to the discovery of oil on its territories, Saudi Arabia did not attract the attention of colonial powers due to its insignificance and lack of natural resources. As a result, Saudi Arabia has never been subjected to colonial control, thereby avoiding the imposition of outside cultures on its people. Additionally, Saudi people have never been compelled to abandon their cultural traditions, customs, or religious practices. Most importantly, the Two Holy Mosques in Makkah and Medina position Saudi Arabia at the centre of the Muslim world, and Saudi women recognise the significance of their Muslim identity. Nevertheless, Arab American writers have failed to portray a neutral image of contemporary Saudi women. In this part of the thesis, I argue that the representation of Saudi women in Arab American poetry intersects with the Orientalist misrepresentation of exotic Eastern women. In "A Definite Shore," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002), Nye takes a journey within a journey to search for something spiritual and transcendental. In this journey, she introduces the pluralism of Arab individualism and reflects on how she feels about Saudi women:

> All we want is to land safely again,
>
> we who calculate our luckiness, who worry
> that the pocket must be growing a hole.
> The bread seller of Aleppo
> wanted only to sell his bread. And the Saudi women
>
> who said, "Tell them we *are* oppressed, but *not* stupid,"
> had just that message in mind. (lines 7–13)

The collectivity that Nye's speaker emphasises in the poem intersects with the diversity of her speakers to create unity in displacement. In the midst of a frightful flight, Nye's speaker stands with "the bread seller of Aleppo," and together, they have the same concerns and fight the same battle. Their battle is mainly economic and financial to provide a steady decent income and fight against poverty. However, "the Saudi women" do not share those same concerns with them because their battle is social, cultural, and gender motivated to portray a picture of an unequal society. According to Nye's speaker, Saudi women can firmly say that their mind remains theirs despite the social oppression. This idea is prominent in Saudi female poetry in the pre-9/11 era. Mittal argues that Saudi female writers understood their common issues and addressed them in their writings. This cultural awareness had been evident since the 1990s (Mittal 634). For instance, Thurayya Al-Urayyid is a Saudi poet who writes in Arabic and English, and some of her Arabic poetry has been translated into English.[23] Her poetry revolves around rebellion against gender oppression and normative Saudi female identity, and she uses tradition and myth to illustrate Saudi women in contemporary contexts. Nye's "A Definite Shore" is interwoven with Al-Urayyid's "In the Stealth of Stillness," published in *The Poetry of Arab Women* (2015), in which both writers portray a positive image of stereotyped oppressed Saudi women.

> My body standing between me and myself,
> how can I transcend it?

[23] Thurayya Al-Urayyid (1948–) is a Saudi poet and thought leader who deals with controversial contemporary cultural, social, educational, and literary issues.

> When the fog of silence fills my eyes,
> how can I still see?
>
> When I listen to my echoes, my silence,
> the fear of death gripping me —
> is my soul killing me with my own voice
> or centuries of forced silence choking my voice?
>
> Will the mystery remain hostage to my intuition —
> deluded in the myth of my past and fables of the future?
>
> Is my birth and my death
> an abridgement of my life? (lines 14–25)

The writers' positive conceptualisation of the oppressed Saudi women is subject to the influence of the negative stereotype of the female in Orientalist discourse. Even with their appreciation of Saudi women's individuality, the writers ignore Saudi women's growing participation in various sectors. In "37. Driving Campaigns: Saudi Women Negotiating Power in the Public Space" (2020), Tsujigami believes that contemporary Saudi women have participated in an official capacity and their participation is not merely cosmetic:

> the appointment of female Consultative Council members had an impact on Saudi political decision making. Women's issues were no longer exotic myths, but institutionalized as public, political, and social matters. (344)

According to Tsujigami, contemporary Saudi women are empowered to negotiate power and space to reform existing political, sociocultural, and gender norms.

Hazo's portrayal of Saudi women also falls into the contagious framework of the oppressed exotic inferior. "Who Promised You Tomorrow," published in *And the Time Is: Poems, 1958-2013* (2014), presents connotations of the writer's questions about the concepts of existence and humanity. In one of the scenes, Hazo's speaker conceptualises the Saudi woman:

> Right here in Cannes
> On the Fourth of July, you watch

a cornucopia a-swelter in the sun.
A Saudi wife, enrobed
and cowled like a nun, passes
a Cannaise in her isosceles
and thong. (lines 18–24)

Although it is summer in Cannes and people enjoy the sun, Hazo's speaker presents the Saudi woman completely covered, in contrast to the Cannaise, who is freely exposing her body. The two images are presented on two scales. According to the speaker, the Saudi woman cannot attain individuality, which is why she is introduced as "A Saudi wife" (line21). In fact, there is an illusional presence of a male in her portrayal as a wife and an underestimation of her existence as an independent entity without a husband. The portrayal embodies an image of inferiority to and dependence on men. In addition, the portrayal of women as enrobed, cowled, covered, and veiled indicates more than a religious habit. It indicates an exotic status irrelevant to and separated from its surroundings. Both women, the Saudi wife and the Cannaise, represent the contestation between the Saudi traditional norm and Western modern norms. In postcolonial theory, these are condensed aspects identified with postcolonialism, including exoticism and inferiority. Besides their ramifications for anything Arabic and Islamic, Denman and Hilal argue that 9/11 fuelled the accelerated violence, suspicion, and fear aimed at Saudi Arabia and its people. The writers state, "Osama bin Laden, a former Saudi himself and alleged 9/11 mastermind, has become a personification of the Western public's distrust in anything Arab, Islamic or Middle Eastern" (303). The image of the covered Saudi wife is intertwined with the image of Islamic fundamentalism to create clear boundaries in neo-Orientalist discourse. In this context, Hazo's poem shows that the rift between Western and Arab cultures has deepened in the aftermath of 9/11.

In the introduction to her edited anthology *The Poetry of Arab Women* (2015), Handal understands the uniqueness of Saudi women's challenges as part of the Arabian Gulf countries. In it, she writes that women from the Arabian Gulf countries have their own complications and struggles. Besides fighting the same battles that other Arab women have to fight, Saudi women have their own "historical, religious, political, and cultural" battles (27). In this context, a Saudi female member of the Saudi Shura (Consultative) Council, Dr Latifa Al-Shaalan, states that Saudi women have faced internal and external challenges for many years. However, these challenges have not prevented the reform of society and empowerment of its female members (Toumi paras. 3–5). Accordingly, contemporary Saudi women have understood their distinguished contexts, as their soft empowerment shows.

However, in response to the consistent findings regarding the Orientalist portrayal of oppressed, inferior women of the East, Arab American writers have failed to present a wider depiction of contemporary empowered Saudi women. In the post-9/11 era, the Saudi female contribution is gradually increasing to create a cultural discourse and form a contemporary Saudi economic and historical narrative that Arab American poets have been unable to realise or conceptualise in their poetry. The three selected writers fell under the influence of Orientalist discourse in this area. They have failed to acknowledge contemporary Saudi women's independence.

Arab American Discourse and Trumpism

The prejudicial stereotype of Muslims and Arabs stood out significantly in the Trump administration and was widely represented in media. In "Terrorists Are Always Muslim but Never White: At the Intersection of Critical Race Theory and Propaganda" (2017), Corbin

believes that Trump's public speeches are preoccupied with anti-Muslim discourse to publicise his policy of White supremacy. Corbin provides two reasons for understanding these Islamophobic and xenophobic discourses. The first reason lies in the cognitive embodiment of the stereotypical image in the subconscious as the image of the "Muslim terrorist." The second reason lies in the bias toward the superiority of the White race and the denial of the terrorist label. The article asserts that these two reasons played a very major part in Trump's publicity, which was based on "flawed ideologies and aspirational myths" (455). In other words, Trump's administration intentionally promoted him by relying on two crucial policies, one of which was a preexisting policy toward ethnic minorities. The other policy was built on the mythical ideals of the superiority of the White race. The writer concludes that although both false narratives were encouraged by Trump's administration and simultaneously constituted Trump's publicity, they may have jeopardised United States national security. In "Snake and Stranger: Media Coverage of Muslims and Refugee Policy" (2017), Meghan Stone, an academic and political activist, argued that the negative representation of Muslims and Arabs in American media has promoted these false narratives. Stone conducted qualitative and quantitative analyses of the news presented by three major networks — CBS, Fox, and NBC — from 2015 to 2017 and discovered that 75 percent of the news about Muslims and Arabs mainly concerned the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or al Qaeda. Moreover, Stone's analysis states that more than 50 percent of global refugees are Muslims, a fact that contributed to the implementation of new controversial refugee policies, such as Trump's "Muslim ban."[24] In fact, it is believed that Islamophobia and xenophobia flourished in Trump's era, which is considered to be the most hostile since the 9/11 attacks due to the Trump administration's ideology of treating refugees as a burden and a threat

[24] "Muslim ban" was a controversial executive order made by former United States President Donald Trump on January 27, 2017. It is also known as "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States."

to national security (Yoder 346). Alternatively, strict policies could potentially lead to significant waves of illegal immigration, impacting economic, social, and security aspects.

Moreover, Trumpism caused the collective trauma expressed by minorities despite growing public support for refugees in the American community and the simultaneous, radical changes of Biden's ideology.[25] Since his election as President of the United States, Biden has sought to form a government that uses multiethnicity as its slogan. This multiethnicity began with Biden's selection of his vice president, Kamala Harris, of Black and Asian roots, and continued with his appointment of the deputy director of the National Economic Council, Sameera Fazili, of Indian-administered Kashmiri roots, and most recently the assigning of Debra Anne Haaland as the secretary of the interior, the first Native American to hold the post. Accordingly, the fundamental changes of American internal and external policies have been implicitly embodied in current Arab American literature to produce poetry that is uniquely positioned to support ethnic minorities.

By tracking the political changes since 9/11, scholars have shown the extent of their effects on the existence of ethnic minorities in general and the Arab minority in particular. In Christine Marks' interview with the award-winning author Mustafa Bayoumi, professor of English at Brooklyn College, about his views on Arab American life during the Bush, Obama, and Trump presidencies, Bayoumi summarises the effects of the three administrations on Arab and Muslim populations in the United States. Marks and Bayoumi trace the changes of the three ideologies to the War on Terror since 9/11. After the attacks, Bush started the Iraq war and declared the "Global War on Terror." Regarding the labelling, Obama's changes were more "cosmetic" when his administration "preferred to talk about 'war on violent extremist' or the

[25] Trumpism is a term used to describe the political ideology associated with former United States President Donald Trump.

'war on al-Qaeda and its affiliates.'" While Bush's domestic policy targeted Arab and Muslim communities by using many sweeping arrests, the FBI pursued the "Countering Violent Extremism" programme during Obama's era and extended it during Trump's era. The programme can be described as stigmatisation of the Arab and Muslim communities. It makes sense that this shift in rhetoric has affected the nature of Arab American literary discourse by including social, political, and cultural dimensions that reflect reality. In "Verdict," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), Hazo keeps pace with the radical changes in American politics throughout time, all the way to Obama and Trump:

> No one but Obama
> Chose targets for the drones.
> Trump's favorite presidential
> color?
> Sunlamp tan. (lines 23–27)

The poet draws a direct, sarcastic comparison between Obama's and Trump's policies. At the same time, Hazo introduces Obama's policy of using drones. Although drones have been significantly developed in the United States since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Obama was criticised for using them in current conflicts and was questioned about the ethics of using them in modern warfare, especially when they cause civilian deaths or miss their targets. In an article titled "My President Was Black" (2016), Ta-Nehisi Coates interviewed President Obama, who refuted the criticism of lethal drone strikes:

> The truth is that this technology really began to take off right at the beginning of my presidency… And it wasn't until about a year, year and a half in where I began to realize that the Pentagon and our national-security apparatus and the CIA were all getting too comfortable with the technology as a tool to fight terrorism, and not being mindful enough about how that technology is being used and the dangers of a form of warfare that is so detached from what is actually happening on the ground. And so we initiated this big process to try to get it in a box. And checks and balances, and much higher standards about when they're used. (para. 5)

In this interview, Obama was trying to justify his approach in adopting the drone strikes, ignoring the fact that they might cause civilian deaths. After assuming the United States presidency, Obama approved the first drone strike on January 22, 2009. The strike missed its target, and Obama was informed of civilian deaths, which reached a total of 117 in the eight years of his presidency (Moore paras. 1–3). In the poem, Hazo compared the developed, brutal technology of Obama's presidency to Trump's tan colour. Trump, who is ethnically identified as "White," is sarcastically described as orange. The satiric use of the colour is also a significant allusion to race in TV series such as *Orange is the New Black* (2013–2019). The representation of the colour indicates the overt racialisation that refutes racial equality. After the election of Obama in 2008 and his re-election in 2012, the United States community started to believe that they had overcome race and racism and that the United States embodied a colour-blind racial perspective. Nevertheless, incidents of racial oppression, such as the killings of Michael Brown (2014) and George Floyd (2020), showed that the United States has not moved beyond these issues, on one hand. On the other hand, Trump's speeches and actions revealed xenophobia and racism that he mobilised in his presidency. Some scholars and activists, such as Corbin and Yoder, have accused the former president of fuelling racism in the United States and stated that the myth of racial colour-blindness remains a myth in a racial society and that people of colour continue to experience individual and institutional discrimination. In his poem, Hazo criticises the concept of racial colour-blindness and argues that the illusion of a post-racial society is misleading, as racial minorities continue to experience racism.

In fact, Trump's support of the Israeli government and his admiration for Israel's wall as a model for his promised substantial wall along the United States border with Mexico provoked concerted efforts to highlight the problem's urgency with threats of the political power and its

policies. Similarly, Nye wrote "Big Bend National Park Says No to All Walls" (2016) in response to Trump's pronouncements regarding Israel and his intention to build the wall:[26]

> Big Bend has been here, been here. Shouldn't it have a say?
> Call the mountains a wall if you must, (the river has never been a
> wall),
> leavened air soaking equally into all, could this be the
> home
> we ache for? Silent light bathing cliff faces, dunes altering
> in darkness, stones speaking low to one another, border
> secrets,
> notes so rooted you may never be lonely the same ways
> again. (lines 1–9)

The poet depicts the problem from a humanistic perspective to overcome the geopolitical implications of building the wall. She personifies the park to create a collective resistance against Trump's political decision. All natural elements in the image, including the mountains, rivers, air, cliffs, dunes, and stones, form a unity in which ethnicity disappears. Throughout the poem, Nye develops an understanding of Trump's fundamental desire to build the wall, which is symbolically involved with his promoted policy of White supremacy:

> Santa Elena, South Rim, once a woman knew what everything here
> was named for, Hallie Stillwell brimming with stories,
> her hat still snaps in the wind. You will not find
> a prime minister in Big Bend, a president, or even a
> candidate,
> beyond the lion, the javelina, the eagle lighting on its nest. (lines
> 20–25)

In a democratic nation in which diversity is considered a fundamental component, Nye calls for breaking down borders. In Big Bend, which represents the United States, animals have free will to make their own decisions. They do not need politicians who inflame ethnicity and racialisation. In Big Bend, animals are capable of instituting democracy while "the eagle light[s] on its nest" (line 25), which is a reference to American politicians. According to Nye, Trump's

[26] Big Bend National Park is a United States national park bordering Mexico.

vow to build the wall represents superiority, racialisation, prejudice, and fear of the Other, and most important, it is anti-democratic.

Nye constantly reflects Trump's policies and support of Israel in her poetry. On March 18, 2016, the Arab American poet spoke about one of her poems, "Oh Say Can You See" (2017), at the Wisdom Ways Centre for Spirituality and Saint Catherine University (English, Theology, and Women's Studies Departments). The title alludes to the United States national anthem and symbolises a great, undefeatable United States, and the poem is a humanistic argument for Trump's foreign policy regarding Palestine:

> I'd like to take Donald Trump to Palestine,
> set him free in the streets of Ramallah or Nablus
> amidst all the winners who never gave up in 68 years.
> They'd like to make their country great again too,
> if only their hands weren't tied by the weapons
> our country buys. (lines 1–6)

The poet attempts to shed light on the United States military's support of Israel. Palestinians are killed and attacked by the Israeli army, to which the United States military provides assistance. According to Samiei, one of the prominent factors that led to the breakout of the phenomenon of neo-Orientalism is the course of *intifadas* (1148).[27] Therefore, in the context of the War on Terror, Israel, the only democratic state in the region from a Western perspective, is the United States' closest ally in the Middle East, and both countries confront the same enemies. Shesgreen discusses United States military assistance to Israel, its causes, and its effects. The writer tracks the radical changes in the United States administrations' stances since the 1979 Kennedy and Johnson administrations as a long-term commitment. Following his predecessor, in 2018, Trump declared that the United States would give Israel four and a half billion dollars a year in military

[27]The first *intifada* began in December 1987 and ended with the signing of the first Oslo Accords in September 1993. The second *intifada* began in September 2000 and ended with the resolution of all violent activities between the two parties, although no agreement was signed at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit in February 2005. These *intifadas* caused the death of more than 5 thousand Palestinians and almost 1.4 thousand Israelis.

aid (paras. 1–7). Israel uses this military aid to violate Palestinians' rights. Considering this fact, Nye encourages United States readers to understand the consequences of this support. Throughout the poem, the writer argues for the Palestinians' fundamental rights against United States foreign policy, especially under Tump's administration:

> … Let's talk about who belongs where,
> how a Jewish immigrant to Israel is treated better than someone
> who tended a tree for a hundred years. Who lies?
> Let's talk about lies. Give it a shout Don. They built a wall
> so ugly, kids must dream of flying over,
> or burrowing under, and it didn't solve anything.
> I'd wrap a keffiyeh around his orange head,
> tuck some warm falafels into his pockets,
> let him wander alleyways and streets, rubble and hope
> mixing together, nothing oversized, not tall towers,
> just beautiful tender life, mint flourishing in a tin can,
> schoolgirl in a fresh dress with a ruffle, mom and dad
> staring from the windows — Can you see us?
> Can you see any of us at all? (lines 6–19)

Nye's response to the United States wall emerges in three competing narratives rooted in Palestine. The first narrative involves the Palestinians' rights versus the Israeli immigrants, the second narrative revolves around United States politicians' deceptive speeches and unfulfilled vows, and the third is concerned with the wall's dimensions, geopolitical, humanitarian, and sociocultural. According to the writer, the wall reflects human rights violations and deprivations in the region. At its core, Trump's wall confuses citizenship with colour and questions United States citizens who define themselves by values and individualism instead of ethnicity and racialism. On a *Fox News* interview on November 2, 2017, Trump said, "One of the things that's come up pretty strongly is we want to have vision through the wall, because you want to see what's on the other side of the wall" (qtd. in Keith, para. 16). Notably, the statement reflects "us" and "them" discourse. Importantly, the three narratives suggest different responses to Trump's policies and practices, on one hand. On the other hand, they create possible decolonial discourses

and represent significant prioritising matters in Arab American literature. The poem provides readers an understanding of the three narratives as well as their dimensions. The repeated rhetorical question in the last two lines evokes Nye's response to Trump's racialised discourse and implements Fanon's conceptualisation of decolonisation, which concerns more than physical resistance to colonisation. By giving no answer, Nye aims to take the poem to a universal level.

Although Trump did not win the 2020 election, his domestic status seems to be shifting rapidly, and according to recent polls at the time of writing, he is favoured to return to the White House in the 2024 election. Trumpism has already overtly merged with White supremacy, neo-fascism, and gun-fetishising groups that target and infringe on minority rights. Hazo compares two worlds in "Worlds Apart," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), where the presence and the absence of Trump and Trumpism make a difference. In the first part of the poem, he portrays a part of the world where Trump and Trumpism do not exist:

> An American billionaire donates
>   a miniature sub and flies
>   expert engineers to Thailand
>   to offer free expertise.
> Divers from multiple nations
>   volunteer their services
>   to save twelve boys and their
>   soccer coach trapped
>   in a flooded cave for weeks.
> Knowing their lives could be
>   at risk, they drive regardless.
> One dies, but the boys and coach
>   are saved… (1–13)

The poet refers to the Tham Luang cave rescue, which took place in June and July 2018 in Thailand. The formative description of the first incident is accompanied by promotion of the image of United States capitalism, represented by the United States millionaire Elon Musk and

his contribution to the rescue process.[28] On the first scale, there is United States capitalism and its achievement in saving people's lives in comparison to other parts of the world, which Hazo introduces in the next part of the poem, on the second scale:

> Elsewhere?
> Mothers
> stranded in Texas or Mexico
> weep for children sundered
> and lost — assassins gun down
> concert goers or third graders
> with weapons of war — hundreds
> of refugees in flight from Libya
> drown near Sicily — Trumpism
> trumps Trump — Israeli
> snipers near Gaza target
> three unarmed boys
> protesting at the border, killing
> all three, their catch for the day. (lines 14–27)

In this part, the poet tends to criticise Trump's policies. Hazo mentions certain cities in which Trumpism wins and people remain furious and committed to an increasingly right-wing agenda. The portrayed image in the second part completely contrasts with the image in the first part, in which Trumpism seeks to take people's lives and rights. Hazo highlights the tragedies caused by gun rights restoration, which Trump's administration supported based on the Second Amendment, which the administration considered a key part of America's greatness. Such tragedies have prompted a growing call for more gun control after several mass shooting in schools. Considering the migrants who are fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and Africa to make the perilous boat crossing to Europe, the writer draws attention to Trump's immigration policy, including illegal immigration. On several occasions, the former president described illegal immigrants as criminals and claimed they jeopardise the national security, urging him to

[28] Elon Musk (1971–) is an American, Canadian, and South African citizen who was considered the richest person in the world according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index and Forbes's real-time billionaires list in 2022. In 2023, Musk lost the top spot to France's Bernard Arnault

impose a travel ban prohibiting the issuing of visas to thirteen largely Muslim countries in 2020 and to put more restrictions on generating green cards and guest worker visas. In his speech at a CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) forum on 23 February 2018, Trump recited Oscar Brown Jr's "The Snake," first recorded in 1963, and encouraged his audience to "think of it in terms of immigration" before talking about the hazards of accepting Syrian refugees:

> On her way to work one morning
> Down the path alongside the lake
> A tender-hearted woman saw a poor half-frozen snake
> His pretty colored skin had been all frosted with the dew
> "Oh well," she cried, "I'll take you in and I'll take care of you"
> "Take me in oh tender woman
> Take me in, for heaven's sake
> Take me in oh tender woman," sighed the snake
> She wrapped him up all cozy in a curvature of silk
> And then laid him by the fireside with some honey and some milk
> Now she hurried home from work that night as soon as she arrived
> She found that pretty snake she'd taken in had been revived
> "Take me in, oh tender woman
> Take me in, for heaven's sake
> Take me in oh tender woman," sighed the snake
> Now she clutched him to her bosom, "You're so beautiful," she
> cried
> "But if I hadn't brought you in by now you might have died"
> Now she stroked his pretty skin and then she kissed and held him
> tight
> But instead of saying thanks, that snake gave her a vicious bite
> "Take me in, oh tender woman
> Take me in, for heaven's sake
> Take me in oh tender woman," sighed the snake
> "I saved you," cried the woman
> "And you've bit me even, why?"
> You know your bite is poisonous and now I'm going to die"
> "Oh shut up, silly woman," said the reptile with a grin
> "You know damn well I was a snake before you took me in
> "Take me in, oh tender woman
> Take me in, for heaven's sake
> Take me in oh tender woman," sighed the snake. (lines 1–30)

Trump used the poem on numerous occasions to warn against refugee admissions into the United States, justify embracing the travel ban policy, and energise his supporters and political party.

Ironically, the poem was written by a Black civil and social rights activist to celebrate the Black culture and repudiate racism (Merrifield para. 8). In this context, the snake in the poem symbolises the White man's greed and colonial ambitions. However, Trump used it to symbolise the challenges that exist beyond the refugee crisis and to present himself as a national hero. Metaphorically, characterising refugees and immigrants as "snakes" is dehumanising, and it promotes White supremacy. However, to reform the United States immigration policy, the travel ban included a "zero tolerance" policy, which included arresting anyone attempting to cross the border illegally. By doing so, Trump's administration strove to increase border security funding, end the diversity visa lottery, and restrict family-based immigration. Importantly, Trump promised to build a substantial wall on the United States-Mexico border to stop illegal immigration. Despite Hazo's literary and intellectual ability to highlight Trump's controversial policies and his tendency to inflame racialisation, he realises that Trump's agenda has effectively divided United States citizens. Moreover, the writer criticises Trump's support of Israel. In an analytical article about Trump's relationship with Israel, Gilboa emphasises the special relationship that transcends the United States administration and the Israeli government. Trump, who described himself as "history's most pro-Israel United States president" in August 2019 and whom Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described as "the best friend Israel has ever had in the White House" in January 2020, took the Israeli side when he recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv. In addition, Trump adopted a radical approach when he cut the annual United States aid to the Palestinian Authority of five hundred million dollars to punish the Palestinians for refusing peace negotiations, and he closed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington when he claimed to facilitate peace in the Middle East (paras.1–26). In his poem, Hazo condemns the Israeli snippers' brutal practice

of shooting civilians, including children, medics, and journalists, although they were clearly unarmed and merely protesting along the border to support Palestinian refugees' declared right to return to their homeland in March 2018. One hundred eighty-nine Palestinians were killed between March 30 and December 31, 2018.[29] A *BBC News* article states that The United Nations Human Rights Council revealed one hundred eighty-three had been killed on protests days with live ammunition, including thirty-five children. Other reports have shown that members of the Israeli government were responsible for the killing of Palestinian civilians in the protests ("Gaza Protest Deaths: Israel May Have Committed War Crimes-U N" paras. 1–2). Nevertheless, Trump's administration constantly supported war crimes and crimes against humanity by supporting the Israeli government. Hazo intentionally divided the first part of the poem into sentences, giving readers a sense of comfort. In contrast, the second part's fluidity reflects the dramatic action that is developed to the last line of the poem. The tragedies Trumpism caused are shown to provoke reason and rage.

Regarding the refugee crisis, Handal's dedication to the issue is rooted in her poetry. Her monthly literary travel column, "The City and the Writer," for *Words without Borders* shows her active synthesis in creating a world without geographical borders, making exile a home for every immigrant, and developing the traditional understanding of ethnicity. In "Europa Nostra," the Italian equivalent to "Our Europe," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), she explicitly discusses the refugees' tragedies and their journeys to the unknown in a free-verse sonnet:

> Now that we are guests in our bodies, how do we survive?
> Zainab operated a boat to be close to the hundred
> and three members of her family who drowned.
> Bassem learned to speak a language with another alphabet.

[29] "The Great March of Return" was a series of protests that took place on the Gaza-Israel border every Friday from 30 March 2018 through 27 December 2019 against the Israeli displacement of the Palestinians and claiming the refugees' declared right to return to their homes. The protests, which independent activists started and Hamas then organised, were also against the United States recognition of Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel.

> Atiq gathered feathers from trembling snow.
> Bekim carried splintered glass across a hundred mountains.
> Bina stole prayers from forgotten bodies.
> Saba held the sound of the drums as if it were breaths.
> Chinelo kept the sun in a folded leaf under a mattress.
> Roya kept the shadow of the Caspian Sea in the man who needed
> her.
> Mykola dreamed a mystery turned cruel by another dream.
> Maybe the past is the beginning and return is staying absent.
> Meanwhile, when anyone says *toughen up*,
> look at them until they fade. (lines 1–14)

Handal randomly chooses nine models and narrates how they try to survive the tragedies they face. In the last two lines, the poet criticises everyone for their negative attitudes towards the refugees. The writer uses the sonnet form to examine the tension between two worlds: the world of the refugees, symbolised by the nine characters, and the world of the international community, symbolised by everyone else. In fact, throughout the poem, Handal manages to summarise the crisis of refugees who undertake treacherous journeys from various parts of the world torn apart by war and persecution, hoping for a better future. However, their hopes remain dreams in the real world. She draws more attention to the crisis in "Borders," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020), in response to Trump's executive-ordered Muslim ban:

> This is not evening. This is not beauty or a sentence. This is not the moon chanting or the scarlet blue. This is not rain or lies tearing down. This is not a suitcase or a fleeing day. This is not Arabic jazz or a city of lights. This is not a mind wiping a past. This is not a muted mouth or a dare. This is not a praise outlining a body about to commit a cry, a cry about to define a life, a life about to contract chaos to wind itself of the fever in its memory. There is no consolation, just furies shivering in our spines and what we hoped we'd never have to see. (41)

In a prose poem, Handal writes ten sentences, placing "not" in every sentence in front of every idea to tell her readers exactly what she is referring to and trying to negate. The poem was also published in *The Missing Slate*'s "Poems Against Borders" on February 23, 2017. In a collection

of nine poems, Handal's three poems comprise the lion's share: "Borders," "Your Mystery is the Milky Way," and "Midnight Train to Georgia." The collection is a human response to the political actions concerned with the constriction of the borders and its ramifications.

However, for some the American dream still exists, and for many ethnic minorities the United States is perceived as the land of prosperity and possibility and the cradle of democracy. This is true despite various factors, the most important of which being the division of national identity. The January 6 attack on the United States Capitol Complex demonstrates the vulnerability. On this day, supporters of Trump stormed the building to prevent the United States Senate from certifying the results of the presidential election and confirming Biden as the 46th elected president. The events of January 6 reveal that Trump's policies succeeded in dividing United States citizens and institutions. Moreover, in *The Washington Post* article entitled "'Welcome to Our World': Muslims See Disparities and Dangers in Jan. 6 Probe" (2021), Allam interviewed Maya Berry, executive director of the Arab American Institute, who said that the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists is still used to decode the January 6 investigations. In addition, Berry said that Arab and Muslim Americans have paid a very high price on institutional and individual levels (paras. 22–23). Despite these challenges, Arab American intellectuals have found themselves imperatively engaged in drawing a more refined picture of United States "greatness" but from their own lens.

In a dialogue with Fady Joudah, Philip Metres believes that Arab American poets in Trump's era became braver than ever before. They became more engaged with American internal policies in characterising the American literary mainstream with diversity ("At the Borders of Our Tongue" 113–14). Nye satirically depicts the divided United States in "United,"

published in *Poets.org* in 2016, on the occasion of Election Day on the Fourth of July. Ironically, the poet uses irrelevant titles for the mottoes of the states:

> When sleepless, it's helpful to meditate on mottoes of the states.
> South Carolina, "While I breathe I hope." Perhaps this could be
> the new flag on the empty flagpole.
> Or "I Direct" from Maine — why?
> Because Maine gets the first sunrise? How bossy, Maine!
> Kansas, "To the Stars through Difficulties" —
> clackety wagon wheels, long, long land
> and the droning press of heat — cool stars, relief.
> In Arkansas, "The People Rule" — lucky you.
> Idaho, "Let It Be Perpetual" — now this is strange.
> Idaho, what is your "it"?
> Who chose these lines?
> How many contenders? (lines 1–13)

Nye highlights the significance of the mottoes in order to reflect how United States citizens became more deeply divided in Trump's era. She makes a political satire argument about a controversial issue to express and criticise Trump without speaking about him directly. The allusions of the mottoes are crucially effective in promoting "Great America," on one side. On the other side, they portray the United States in a competitive context that is far from united. Understanding these mottoes is fundamental in comprehending the internal divisiveness in Trump's era. Abramowitz and McCoy argue that Trump's 2016 presidential campaign embraced radical strategies to inflame racial, ideological, and cultural divisions. These strategies appealed to White working-class electorate yet marginalised the majority of White intellectuals and non-White electorate. Importantly, they reflected that the United States political polarisation is engaged with race and ethnicity and is anti-democratic. The writers believe that Trump's campaign revealed United States internal divisions that have been growing for decades due to prominent factors, including internal sociocultural, demographic, and political changes (137–39).

From this premise, the mottoes in Nye's poem mirror the outgrowth of racial, cultural, ideological, and political divisions within the United States.

In "What Seems, What Is," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), Hazo generates questions to locate United States "greatness" within a context of competing expectations:

> Not that it matters…
> Skyscrapers
> in Hudson Yards may dwarf
> the desert towers in the emirates.
> So what? (lines 1–5)

Hazo chose Hudson Yards as the largest development in United States history in order to symbolise United States greatness in comparison to other parts of the world. According to the writer, the United States manifestations are giants compared to "the desert towers in the emirates" (line 3). The lack of capitalisation is intended here to conceptualise the comparison between the two worlds in which the manifestations of prosperity look giants in the United States but dwarf in the Emirates. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) represents the parts of the world that had not undergone colonisation, nevertheless it achieved manifestations of prosperity and modernity. The comparison extends to include other aspects, such as cultural, political, and social, in which the United States is at the top of the competition. Then, Hazo gives more evidence of what United States citizens are capable of creating in their attempts to build United States greatness:

> Let rocketeers re-name the moon,
> establish malls on Mars
> and conjure floating cities
> in the sky. (lines 8–11)

Despite these manifestations of prosperity and modernity, the writer uncovers his own perception about the greatness of the United States in the next question:

What difference
will it make to killers in uniform
who boast of bombs that prophesy
extinction?
If soldiery's the norm,
then wartime killing will stay
the alibi for murder.
It seems
unending. (lines 12–20)

By using the word "killers" to describe United States soldiers, Hazo highlights the dark, brutal side of United States greatness, which is military expansion. In the poem's worldview, the United States' expansionist ambitions are endless and pose a threat to humanity on an international level. In the next lines, the writer conceptualises their ramifications on a domestic level in a romantic image:

As one who thinks
that love in all its bravery
can mock the follies of this world,
I see how disappearance
lets the unforgettable endure.
What lasts recalls what's lost…
My wife's smile was love
and bravery combined.
It made
our kind's unkindness something
to defy.
The world is less
without her.
And so am I. (lines 21–34)

The idea of loss and the melancholic tone in these lines depict the domestic environment. According to Hazo, United States citizens live in grief, and his interpretation of "disappearance" suggests a tendency to transcend this world, which is interlinked with the increased rates of suicide. The National Centre for Health Statistics of the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention report released on March 2022 indicates that America's suicide rates have steadily increased in modern history by 30 percent from 2000 to 2020 "NCHS Data Brief."

Thus, Hazo's poem reflects the flaws of United States society, despite all of the manifestations of prosperity. Undoubtedly, Hazo is critically engaged with deconstructing the idea of "Great America," and he portrays an imperfect United States from an Arab American's contemporary lens.

Handal deals with the divisive image of Great America in "Takes at the Bowery," published in *Life in a Country Album* (2020). The writer collects a group of poems under the title "Red White Blue: American Album" to reflect on her experience in the United States. The poem is made up of 11 separate scenes brought together by two factors. The first factor is the narrator, and the second one is the fact that the scenes take place in the Bowery district in New York City. Otherwise, the fragmentation of the different scenes conceptualises the complexity and diversity of the United States and is connected to the divisions between ambiguity and allusion. Notably, the fragments depict an imperfect United States. For example, in 'Take 1' and 'Take 7,' the writer highlights the absence of religion and spirituality in the secular United States:

> Is it an American god or the Egyptian one? What's the difference?
> Neither is ever there.
> …
> A foreigner abandoned Jesus last week for a pack of cigarettes —
> American Spirits. He named his dog Balzac then Elvis. (lines 1–2, 14–15).

Handal's illustration of the modern, capitalist, and multi-ethnic American community is interwoven with postmodernism. The lines suggest a sense of disconnection, where individuals abandon established beliefs and adopt new ones without a sense of permanence. This reflects postmodernism's tendency to challenge fixed identities and narratives, instead embracing plurality and hybridity. Postmodernism emerges as a dominant force shaping modern capitalist societies, where hybrid identities and cultural mixing are prevalent. Moreover, in 'Take 4,' the writer strives to uncover the apathy tendency of the American community that is associated with

capitalistic desires: “My brother listens to Sinatra in the other room as the stock market / crashes” (lines 8–9). Handal tries to shed light on the economic problems that Trump exploited in his presidential campaign, and this led to the implementation of radical policies such as “Muslim ban.” Throughout the poem, the writer tends to portray a flawed image that is opposed to the decisive image of Great America. In ‘Take 2,’ ‘Take 6,’ and ‘Take 8,’ she portrays various erotic scenes:

> We listen to “Funk me up” and go to a hardware store to find a
> wrinkled vowel. We quit happiness.
> ….
> My *Islam is Cool* t-shirt pissed you off, but you slept with me
> anyways.
> …
> Time making noise. Yes, we had abbreviated sex — and held on to
> the
> prelude. (lines 3–4, 13, 16–17)

The fragmented erotic images evoke a range of experiences and emotional complexity, possibly related to cultural or religious differences, as suggested by the “*Islam is Cool*” t-shirt. However, ‘Take 10’ underlines the excessive growth of racialisation, the promotion of White supremacy, and the absence of democracy in Trump’s era: “We forget the Arabs gave us algebra. That Thomas Jefferson kept a / Koran in his library” (lines 20–21). Whereas the 10 takes serve as a glimpse into the details of United States citizens’ lives, the last take works as Handal’s main claim. In ‘Take 11,’ Handal uses the literary device of hypophora to raise a rhetorical question and immediately answer it in the next line: “Why are all these takes different? / *Cause it’s New York City, asshole*” (lines 22–23). Certainly, the poet’s tendency to use inappropriate words increases the reader’s curiosity and reveals her strong emotional motives regarding the issues. It also mirrors New York dialect. The offensive language characterises the relationship between the speaker and the addressee. The poem articulates the issues of existing and deepening racial,

cultural, and ideological divides in the United States, and it mirrors the growing diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. Of course, this diversity is not exclusive to New York or Bowery; furthermore, the issues are integrated alongside Handal's deconstruction of Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again."

Indeed, contemporary Arab American writers have played an ongoing, key role in creating structured criticism for the dramatic changes in United States policies and post-9/11 discourse, as characterised by a series of engagements, including Trump's policies. In this context, Hazo, Handal, and Nye claimed that postcolonial subjects, such as Arab Americans, are politically and literary involved in the critical interpretation of Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again." In their interpretation, the writers believe that Trump's actions and policies are the real threat to national security and the cause of division in Americans' national identity.

This chapter proposed that in post-9/11 discourse, Arab American political poetry underlines the paradigm shifts of the geopolitical changes, and this is signified by repudiations to the stereotypical image of Arabs in American media. The images of Arab refugees and Muslim terrorists have encouraged the three selected writers to produce literature differentiating between the good Arab who holds a hyphenated identity and is part of the collective national identity of the United States and the bad Arab who constitutes a threat to national security. Drawing from their understanding of the notion of nationalism, the writers have striven to create literature that distances them from the drastic images and that aids in the implementation of the United States internal and foreign policies. In post-9/11 poetry, the works discussed in this chapter emerge from a moment marked by extreme racism and discriminatory stereotyping against Arab Americans. Faced with these challenges, Arab American writers were compelled into defensive state, yet they actively used their poetry to confront and counteract these prejudices. Despite the

fact that they were postcolonial subjects at the time of the effective embargo of Arabic literature (see my interpretation on pages 152–53), the writers have employed orientalist images that may serve and align with neo-Orientalism discourse. However, they developed an understanding of the ramifications of inflamed racialisation, especially in Trump's era, from multicultural and postmodern perspectives. I argued that the writers' critical interpretations investigate the nature and functions of the discourses of White supremacy and the slogan "Make America Great Again." In fact, Hazo's, Handal's, and Nye's poetry interprets the impacts of the United States presidential political changes and formulates frames, narratives, and critical interpretations in order to read the political scenes.

Reading these elements together provides a comprehensive view of how Arab American political poetry engages with and responds to post-9/11 geopolitical shifts and racial discourses. The chapter highlights how poets like Hazo, Handal, and Nye use their work to counter stereotypical images of Arabs in American media and to differentiate between the "good Arab" and the "bad Arab." This differentiation underscores their efforts to integrate into the national identity while resisting negative portrayals. The writers address the ramifications of racialisation, especially under Trump's presidency. Their poetry critiques White supremacy and nationalist slogans, offering narratives that decolonise the mind and confront justifications for War on Terror and military expansion. This approach emphasises the poets' role in shaping and interpreting political and social discourses, revealing their critical engagement with contemporary issues.

Chapter Three

Literary Synthesis in a Multicultural Community

Many Arab Americans have not been exposed to literature that reaffirms their cultural identity as Arabs, especially those of the younger generations. To form a cultural identity, an individual must feel a bond with their authentic culture and heritage. This feeling of belonging is reflected in actions and practices which make the individual associated with a cultural ethnicity. In addition, it contributes to distinguishing a group of individuals as a racial minority among the rest of the races in the American community. Therefore, the focus of this chapter is to critically examine the literary means of Arab American poets which contribute to creating a connected discourse. In this chapter, I argue that the three selected Arab American poets constantly synthesise different literary creative influences to redefine the Arab American ethnic identity in the United States and to help new generations develop bonds with their Arabic culture.

Chapter 3 deals with the synthesis of different influences and creative and literary strategies to redefine contemporary Arab American identity and literature. These works help new generations to form attachments with their heritage, starting from literary circles, the symbolism of colour, intertextuality, intersectionality, understanding the unique individual and cultural identity that constitutes resistance. Furthermore, the concept of the poet-prophet, similar to the Romantics, allows them to narrate the nation, redefine the community. In chapter 3, I argue that these diverse strategies can be applied in poetry because of its inclusive nature. I contend that the memory of war has made the writers write war poetry from a humanistic point of view, thus liberating poetry. I examine the authors' reactions to anti-Arabism as a function of discourses of superiority-inferiority and ne-Orientalism. Despite the health risks and difficulties that has arisen from anti-Arabism as health disparities and the absence of a special identifier of Arab American

patients under MENA categorisation that led to unreliable data on Arab Americans, Arab American poets have taken a pioneering role in promoting vaccines and raising awareness about the importance of adhering to restrictions to overcome the pandemic.

Synthesis from Different Literary Schools

By adopting different methods of literary schools, the three selected poets have succeeded in documenting and portraying the culture of the Arab world in the reader's mind in general, and in Arab American youths' minds in particular. For instance, Handal first published her edited anthology *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology* in 2001 to show the richness of contemporary Arab and Arab American women's voices. The writer tackles various topics, including how modern Arabic poetry has evolved, and the reality of contemporary Arab American poetry. According to Handal, Arab women poets have reflected their own concerns: "unjust degradation, marginalization, and oppression by the social system, and their boundedness by tradition," and Arab American women poets have also reflected their own struggles: "their inner and outer struggle for a personal identity, for self-realization, and their preoccupation with bipolarity, biculturalism, bilingualism" (*The Poetry of Arab Women* 12). As a feminist activist, Handal claims that although contemporary Arab American literature has become visible among other minorities' literature, Arab American women poets do not exist in the feminist discourse or in literary criticism (*The Poetry of Arab Women* 41). However, Majaj considers the publication of the anthology *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994) the foundation of Arab American feminist writing in English ("Arab-American Literature" para. 19). Nevertheless, due to the nature of America's racially diverse society, Arab American poets have found themselves forced to uphold

their ethnical culture as a means of self-expression. According to Handal, every minority "group hyphenates itself or they are hyphenated by society" (*The Poetry of Arab Women* 44). Arab American intellectuals have come to realise that in order to produce a distinctive literature, they must first gain a deep understanding of their Arabic culture and then establish a strong connection with the next generation.

By adhering to an ethnic culture, consciously or unconsciously, minority groups participate in creating their own marginalisation. In other words, intentionally or unintentionally, they tend to create literary and metaphorical boundaries in order to define themselves and their literature. For instance, Handal uses Nye as an example to simplify her idea of literary circles. Nye is defined as a Palestinian American poet in a small circle. The circle gets bigger to define her as an Arab American poet, then as an American minority poet. Finally, the circle includes Nye as an American poet in the American literary mainstream (*The Poetry of Arab Women* 44). Handal reflects on the overlap among these circles in "American Camino," published in *Life in A Country Album* (2020):

> Was I American when I bought cowboy boots on my way to my uncle's house in Lubbock, or when Naomi Shihab Nye told me about her walk with Edward Said to the Alamo?
>
> Was I American when I told her how I found myself in Scranton on
> Merwin's birthday, and wondered if Johnny Cash's *I Walk the Line* was inspired by Kostis Bezos' rebetiko song? (92)

In the small circle are Nye and Said, Palestinian American intellectuals, and their walk to the Alamo symbolises their journeys through history, culture, and heritage to discover knowledge.[30] The Battle of the Alamo took place from February 23 to March 6, 1836. It was one of the battles of the Texas Revolution in San Antonio, Texas. The battle's contextual significance lies in its

[30] The Alamo is a historic Spanish mission and castle originally known as the Mission San Antonio de Valero. It was founded in the eighteenth century and today it is part of the San Antonio Missions World Heritage Site.

representation of Texas's independence from Mexico. The Mexican Army's defeat and the brutality of the thirteen-day siege encouraged Texans to join the Texan Army to seek revenge, leading to the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, in which the Texans defeated the Mexican Army in eighteen minutes. This battle ended the Texas Revolution and the Mexican occupation and paved the way for the establishment of the Republic of Texas, which lasted until February 19, 1846 (Brear paras. 1–3). According to Brear, the Alamo represents the uniqueness and individuality of the Texan identity and organisations and stands against ethnic and racial discrimination which are frequently referred to in such contexts (para. 4). In the poem, the Palestinian intellectuals' walk to the Alamo reveals the individuality of their identity and emphasises a sense of cultural resistance drawn from the symbolism of the Alamo. Handal and her uncle are part of the bigger circle, Arab Americans. The circle stretches to include Greek musician Kostis Bezos, who inspired the American musical tradition, to symbolise American minorities in a bigger circle. The wide circle includes the White majority of European descent, embodied by Merwin, the birthday boy, and American singer Johnny Cash. Implicitly, Handal refers to a very important fact about the American literary tradition: that minority literature inspires and influences it. In other words, the small circle is at the core of the biggest one.

As a prolific writer whose writing has appealed to Arab American and mainstream American audiences, Nye manages to bring together her Arabic heritage and her American present in a deeply humanistic commentary. She believes in the evolving process of self-construction through gaining experiences and cultural exchange. In her poetry, the writer brings together various human experiences that contribute to understanding the self and open new horizons of inclusiveness. She has edited a group of anthologies, including *This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from around the World* (1996), in which she gathered translated poems from

68 countries written by 129 poets for young readers. In 2020, Nye published her latest collection of poems, *Everything Comes Next*, which she divided into three main sections: "The Holy Land of Childhood," "The Holy Land That Isn't," and "People Are the Only Holy Land." The collection reflects Nye's perspective on poetry's expressiveness, inclusiveness, and usefulness. In the collection's introduction, Edward Hirsch writes, "Naomi Shihab is an open-hearted singer who believes in poetry's verbal power to bring us together and care for each other, to recognize our sorrows and our sufferings, to heal our wounds and treasure our solitudes" (5). Nye has tackled these themes of poetry in "Half-And-Half," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002). She starts the poem with a message of acceptance and unity of humanity: "You can't be, says a Palestinian Christian / on the first feast day after Ramadan. / So, half-and-half and half-and-half" (lines 1–3). For Nye, Palestinian Christians live side by side with Palestinian Muslims. The unity of Nye's community that she depicts in her poem reflects her determination to resist any kind of discrimination from an intimate human perspective. She honours the diversity of experiences, cultures, and traditions. At the end of the poem, she writes:

> A woman opens a window – here and here and here –
> placing a vase of blue flowers
> on an orange cloth. I follow her.
> She is making a soup from what she had left
> in the bowl, the shriveled garlic and bent bean.
> She is leaving nothing out. (lines 19–24)

The poet places great emphasis on the concept of togetherness, where the act of making soup from what is left indicates the idea of the collectivity of the individuality, leaving nothing excluded. Majaj comments on these lines as: "The poem closes with a resonant image of inclusiveness" ("Arab-American Literature" para. 16). While the image of the open window depicts an image of hope, the image of the cooking lady "making a soup of what she had left" portrays Nye's perception of the inclusiveness of poetry.

Regarding Handal's idea of literary circles, Nye shares her point of view but with a different interpretation. In an article entitled "This is Not Who We Are" (2002), Nye reflects on the realities of her intersectionality: "I am simply an Arab-American in deep need of cultural uplift to balance the ugliness that has cast a deep shadow over our days" (para. 4). She explores this idea in "The Man Who Makes Brooms," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002). In "American Camino," Handal's social circles are narrated in an American setting, but Nye tends to narrate them in a very traditional Arabic setting:

> So you come with these maps in your head
> and I come with voices chiding me to
> "speak for my people"
> and we march around like guardians of memory
> till we find the man on the short stool
> who makes brooms. (lines 1–6)

Nye's poetic voice and Nye's speaker definitely do not belong to the same circle because every one of them embraces a different perspective of the world and belongs to another circle, in which they "come with these maps in [their] head" (line 1) and Nye's speaker "come[s] with voices chiding [them] to / speak for [their] people" (lines 2–3). Due to their diversity, each character carries different memories. Nye's use of the simile "like guardians" emphasises the idea that they belong to different circles, in which everyone is keen to protect their heritage. The partners meet when they find the gift of heritage "till we find the man on the short stool / who makes brooms" (lines 5–6), which suggests Nye's ability to narrate a light human experience in deep consideration and triggers the attitudes of individuals who belong to different worlds. Her poetic voice belongs to a visual and rational world that uses "maps" and merely cognitive knowledge, yet her speaker belongs to a very sensual and intangible world of "voices chiding me" (line 2). Moreover, this phrase indicates that Nye's circles are more humanistic and intersect in a humanistic heritage.

Hazo's contributions to reaffirm the Arabic culture in the diaspora are not limited to written publications. Rather, they transform the poetic movement into an institution that he founded and directed for forty-three years. The International Poetry Forum hosted more than eight hundred poets from around the world in public presentations. Moreover, Hazo translated several works from Arabic to English, including Ali Ahmad Said Esber's (Adonis) *The Pages of Day and Night* (2000), and from French to English, including Nadia Tueni's *Lebanon: Poems of Love and War* (2006). Watts believes that as a poet-translator, Hazo has the ability to add aesthetics to the translated literary work on one hand (paras. 14–15). This ability includes the poet's spiritual and linguistic fluency. On the other hand, it indicates that he is building a bridge to the Arab world, yet his illustration of the literary circles depicts the overlapping of these circles. Featured in *They Rule the World* (2016), "Forever Amber" narrates a complicated issue of intersectionality in a dialogue between a driver and a police officer in a very small incident:

> "This is
> a warning," he said, "because
> you ran an amber light."
> The incident reminded me
> how red, green and yellow –
> or rather amber – say it all.
> With green and red I have
> no argument.
> The only options
> are compliance or defiance.
> To stop on green or go
> definitely on red would make
> for total chaos.
> Yellow –
> amber, I mean – allows
> a chooser time to think. (lines 8–23)

For Hazo, the three colours, red, green, and yellow-amber, do not only function as an aesthetic feature to describe the traffic light; they also summarise the story of Arab Americans. They "say it all" (line 13) and reflect his artistic vision through a deep understanding of the symbolic

interpretations of colours. In fact, the representation of colour has gained attention in contemporary cultural and postcolonial studies. According to Harrow, the value of colour in poetry transcends mere aesthetics; it actively engages with poetic narratives and ethnical dimensions, requiring an appreciation of the explicit and immanent effects of colour (311–12). This understanding positions colour as a transcultural phenomenon in poetic narratives, exploring commentaries on exile, space, and place (Harrow 312). Harrow argues for a significant connection between yellow and green, contending that both colours challenge the postcolonial construct of the exclusivity of black and white (316). Building on this exploration of colour in poetry, Hazo extends the discussion by utilising colour to establish a connection between its value and his subjective experience. Hazo prefers not to choose red or green because doing so is "compliance or defiance" (line 17) and leads to "chaos." According to Hazo, yellow-amber represents Arab Americans' existence in the third space, which provides safety and "allows / a chooser time to think" (lines 22–23). From another perspective, yellow-amber is not a primary colour; it is formed by mixing red and green and therefore symbolises Arab Americans' dual identity. According to this premise, yellow-amber embodies resistance to the postcolonial construction of identity and gives the hybrid identity more space. In addition, Hazo's interpretation of the literary circles is colour-coded and interconnected.

In fact, the cultural, historical, and religious diversity of Arab Americans constitute a reality in contemporary Arab American literary tradition. Due to this diversity, Arab American poets have tended to use a postmodernist practice of intertextuality that mirrors diversity on one side and intersects with the paradigm of creative influence on the other side. In this sense, intertextuality embodies creativity in the text to highlight an insightful understanding of ideological systems. According to Indian American thinker Spivak, intertextuality is defined as a

"network of politics, history, society, sexuality" (*In Other Worlds* 12). Therefore, by employing intertextuality, Spivak believes that the writer highlights controversial issues in racialisation, gender, politics, and economics. Accordingly, writers who tend to use intertextuality implicitly aim to impose their identities, voicing the unvoiced and refuting the dominant culture. For instance, in Nye's "Our Time," published in *You and Yours* (2005), the poet creatively alludes to Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," published in *New Hampshire* (1923), and implicitly refers to Frost's "The Road Not Taken," published in *Mountain Interval* (1916), to reflect a contemporary political and racial crisis:

> Robert Frost wrote 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'
> in the middle of a searing hot July.
> …
> … So many readers have considered
> his two roads of another poem. (lines 1–2, 5–6)

Although Nye declares her main focus of the poem in the first line, which is to create a textual intersection with Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," she draws her reader's attention to another famous poem by Frost, "The Road Not Taken." For Nye, the road not taken as an Arab American is neglecting one of the two cultures. In the poem, Nye chooses to declare her Americanness, and the road not taken is ignoring her Arabic legacy: "We grew up proud of our country. / Forests of wonderful words to wander through – / *freedom, indivisible*" (lines 9–11). This choice was imposed on her as a daughter of a Palestinian immigrant who has lived most of her life in diaspora. The collective pronoun "we" engages Nye with members of the American community who are proud to be Americans and are proud to practice their essential right of freedom. In line eleven, Nye quotes President Kennedy's speech: "Freedom is indivisible, and when one man is enslaved, all are not free" ("Remarks of President John F. Kennedy at the Rudolph Wilde Platz, Berlin, June 26, 1963"). This is not the first time that Nye

refers to the privilege of freedom that she gained from her Americanness (see my interpretation on pages 106–08). In "Our Time," Nye also highlights the freedom of the poetic form, which empowers the poet to wander through and delicately express their confusing thoughts. When Frost's horse becomes confused and stops in the middle of the woods on the darkest night of the year:

> My little horse must think it queer
> To stop without a farmhouse near
> Between the woods and frozen lake
> The darkest evening of the year.
>
> He gives his harness bells a shake
> To ask if there is some mistake. ("Stopping by Woods on a Snowy
> Evening" lines 5–10)

Nye's horse is lost due to the American politicians' deceptive speeches represented by President Kennedy's: "Now my horse is lost in a sheen of lies" (line 12). In this line, the writer begins to draw her own conclusion before she moves back to Frost's words. In the last stanza, Frost reveals his own dilemma:

> The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
> But I have promises to keep,
> And miles to go before I sleep,
> And miles to go before I sleep. ("Stopping by Woods on a Snowy
> Evening" lines 13–16)

Despite the beauty of nature and how he feels in it, as a poet-prophet who has a mission towards his community, he should go on to refine and integrate before he sleeps forever. Yet, Nye's intertextuality implements irony: "*The world is lovely, dark, and deep. / We honour others as they sleep. // As they wake and as they sleep"* (lines 13–15). Despite the beauty of the world, "we" as Americans respect other people only when they are dead. The space before the last line creates a poetic field and indicates a space of silence to introduce a verbal irony. For Nye, Americans who promote freedom do not respect other people's rights when they are alive or

dead. However, Nye's allusion to Frost's "The Road Not Taken" reflects her understanding of Arab Americans' duality and part of their existence. This understanding is fundamental to Arab American literature and is repeated in its literary tradition. For example, Mohja Kahf's "The Passing There," published in *E-mails from Scheherazad* (2003), explores the children of immigrants' experience:

> It wasn't ours. It was golden.
> I remember raspberry bushes
> Way at the back, and rusted wire,
> Once a fence, a defunct now and trampled under
> By generation of children who belonged
> To this Indiana landscape in the seventies,
> …
> The man who owned the field was no Robert Frost
> Although he spoke colloquial. "Git
> Off my property," he shouted, "Or I'll –"
> The rest of what he said I do not care
> To repeat. It expressed his concerns
> About our religion and ethnic origin.
> He had a rifle. We went on home. (II. lines 1–6, 16–22)

Both poets' allusion to Frost's poem shows their intention to reaffirm their duality as a postcolonial mode and as a second-generation United States citizen who did not choose this road. On the contrary, the road was imposed on them. Majaj sees that Arab American poets' allusion to Frost's poem does not indicate adherence to only one world. Rather, it expresses their awareness of existing in the third space "at the point of crossing." Although Frost's character chooses one path, Arab Americans' experience reveals that it is "the passing between both that makes all the difference" ("Arab-American Literature" paras. 34–35) The idea of crossing points echoes Du Bois when he states, "One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (2). In fact, Nye's speaker in "Our Time" and Kahf's speaker in "The Passing There" illustrate Arab Americans' inner struggle to choose between two worlds and their ability to create a third space.

Whereas Nye's poem has interconnected lines with Frost's to shape Nye's poem and contemporary themes, Handal's intertextuality is interwoven in another poetic formula. In "Sense and Sensibility, Contemporary American Politics," published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005), Handal's theme intertexts with Jane Austen's theme of the politics of sensibility. In Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, first published in 1811, the politics of sensibility revolves around the emotional and sentimental nature of people in a merely romantic context. Nevertheless, Handal's allusion mirrors Austen's title and themes in a political context:

> We sensed that you made sense,
> but sometimes, we have to sense
> these things out,
> and wait for everyone else to
> come to their senses… (lines 1–5)

Throughout the poem, Handal comments on the danger of the excessive United States foreign policy and its effects on the intellectual's mind. She enhances the meaning of the poem and places more emphasis on the theme by using the poetic device "alliteration" in repeating the words "sense/ sensed/ sensible/ sensibility/ senseless/ non-sense." She also uses homophones in "since/ sense" for the same reason:

> I have since realized that
> no one is going to come
> to their senses
> and
> nothing makes sense… (lines 6–10)

In "Arab-American Literature: Origins and Developments" (2008), Majaj highlights the flourishing creativity of Handal's poetry book *The Lives of Rain* (2005). According to Majaj, the collection reflects Handal's ability to explore the realities of political conflicts. Moreover, it portrays how these conflicts create the physical violence of war and the intellectual violence against the spirit (para. 39). Throughout the poem, Handal uses the same distinction between

sense as reason and senses as perception that Austen uses. According to Handal, all that her reader needs is to be rational to understand the irrationality of the United States excessive policy.

In fact, a great part of Nye's and Handal's employment of the creativity of intertextuality relies on their intention to discuss the United States political hegemony in reference to them as Arab Americans. Salita believes that this intention is a result of "the political sensibility of the Arab American community" ("Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism" 149). On the contrary, Hazo tends to employ intertextuality to discuss everyday life experiences with no political intentions and as a form of a tribute to his Westernness. Hazo belongs to the second generation of Arab Americans, who tended to adopt the United States culture to gain acceptance and naturalisation. As a result of this Americanness, they engaged more with the Western culture. Hazo finds in Shakespeare's works a model to interact with to explore themes of human and social life. In "Shoe Horn," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), Hazo moves to discuss a serious issue after starting the poem with the significance and the description of the shoe:

> It has the curvature that ease
> ankles into heels until
> each foot feels fitted and shod.
> It looks plainer than a spoon,
> but it works. (lines 1–5)

These lines portray pre-Islamic poetry's influence on Hazo. In the *Muallaqat*, the poets follow a literary tradition in which they start the poem by describing a memorial site or a heroic horse before they move to the poem's main theme. Similarly, Hazo starts the poem with a poetic description of the shoe before creating a dramatic shift towards the main theme:

> Excuse the play on words…
> But serious trivia may not
> be as significant as thought
> when flanked with deeper issues. (lines 13–16)

Then, Hazo alludes to two main characters in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, first published in 1599: "Brutus was illegitimate. / Caesar / Was in fact his father" (lines 17–19). He does so to explore themes of betrayal and tyranny: "When Shakespeare's Caesar / utters, "*Et tu, Brute*" (lines 23–24). Hazo's allusion to Shakespeare indicates Shakespeare's universality. Clearly, Shakespeare holds a very special place in the English literary canon. According to Harold Bloom, Shakespeare's literary creative influence on poetry is inseparable from the Western literary tradition. Bloom believes that "pragmatically it is the aesthetic supremacy of Shakespeare that overdetermines our judgment of literary value" (xxiii). In this context, Shakespeare's poetic influence embodies a self-affirmation act in which Hazo and Arab American poetry in general look more appealing to Western audiences.

However, the concept of poet-prophet warrants some attention here because it is essential for understanding this discussion. Drawing from their understanding of their cultural identity, Arab American writers have taken on more responsibilities to adopt the concept of the artist as a prophet similar to the eighteenth-century Romantic poet-prophet concept. This understanding has encouraged them to work collectively to create new bonds with their ethnic culture by conveying historical, sociopolitical, and cultural knowledge. According to the Romantics, the poet, who has experienced melancholy and alienation, has an outstanding talent that enables them to create a divine world in their poetry. At the same time, they constantly suffer in the writing process. Arab American first-generation poet Gibran tackles the theme of the poet-prophet in his collection of prose poetry *The Prophet* (1923), too. From this premise, the three selected poets believe in the free spirit of the poet, which enables them to dig deeply in human suffering and to reflect on their political and social surroundings. In *The Neverfield Poem* (2005), Handal's interpretation of the free poet is depicted in an epic journey and in the midst of her search for beauty and truth:

And looked for the poet who wrote:
'Towards my heart,
The only town not captured yet.'
The poet who wrote lines
which entered my silence
and
did
not disturb the birds…

the poet I saw once…
but whose words have long been
in my mind, windows of invincible candles…

perhaps
when we will no longer be trapped
between life and living,
when we will be riding the train to
where stones are building fountains,
perhaps
then
I will find the poet… (16)

For Handal, the poet has a free spirit that authorises them to break everyone's silence and penetrate their privacy. Through poetry, the poet can light up candles for the person: "windows of invincible candles." In these lines, Majaj believes that Handal refers directly to Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish when she introduces him as a poet born "on the thirteen day of March / the birth of a poet" (54) ("Afterword" 58).

In fact, Darwish occupies a prominent place in the hearts of Arab poets, whether in the Arab world or in the land of diaspora, due to his poetic ability to describe human suffering everywhere. Nye includes his translated poem "The Prison Cell" in her first anthology *This Same Sky* (1996). In "Remembering Mahmoud Darwish," Nye writes that the poem inspires its reader to write about issues of inequality (para. 1). For the cover page of her collection of poems *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems from the Middle East* (2002), Nye uses a picture her husband, photographer Michael Nye, took of a Palestinian girl in a West Bank refugee camp. The girl

holds up a stone with Darwish's "I Long for My Mother's Bread" etched into it in Arabic (para. 6). For Nye, Darwish represents the role of the poet who expresses his readers' feelings and takes responsibility to reaffirm their Arabic identity. Nye honours his memory and describes his prominent role in "Endure," published in *Transfer* (2011), when she writes,

> Closed his eyes, though, holding one hand with the other,
> carrying the presence of blossom back to the page.
> For those who would never walk a field, never bend down,
> he found a way to carry the cry of a lost goat and
> the cry of a people, without stumbling. (lines 4–8)

Nye praises Darwish's poetic ability to sensualise his words. His words transcend the material world and make the reader feel and see new experiences. According to Nye, Darwish's role extends the literary mainstream to an honourable role as a "ruler, teacher, and prophet":

> His brilliance spilled in every
> language, though Arabic owned him,
> he became a perfect country
> moving through the world, wherever he was,
> and he its ruler, teacher and prophet,
> he its infinite dusty workers pausing with shovels
> to stare beyond the ruin they could see,
> to what they will always believe in. (lines 20–27)

In the poem, Darwish assumes multiple roles, including that of the "dusty workers" who shovel within his poetry to extract wisdom and knowledge. On multiple occasions, Nye emphasises the role of the poet in general. For instance, in "The Day," published in *You and Yours* (2011), she states,

> I missed the day
> in which it was said
> others should not have
> certain weapons, but we could.
> Not only could, but should,
>   and do. (lines 1–6)

According to Nye, it is the magical power of poetry that can confront weapons. While others use guns and tanks, poets should and do use words. At the end of the poem, Nye raises a rhetorical question: "What about all the other people / who aren't born? / Who will tell them?" (lines 14–16). Indeed, the poet-prophet takes upon themself the responsibility of reaffirming the nation's identity in poetic narrative. In his introduction to his edited book *Nation and Narration*, originally published in (1990), Bhabha writes,

> Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation – or narration – might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. (1)

In this sense, poetry is the literary practice that the poet-prophet explores to narrate the nation.

For Hazo, the poet can voice the human experience despite the sociopolitical, ethnical, or cultural barriers: "what the poet does is to create a place for wonder or for doubt or silence or for nothing" (qtd. in Orfalea and El Musa 118). Moreover, in "Filling My Pen for Action" and "The Mutineer," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005), Hazo shows that he believes in the venerable role of the poet to act in documenting history rather than merely expressing human suffering. Seamus Heaney introduces this role in "Digging," published in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), to declare his intention as a poet documenting history and the significance of his composed literature: "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests; snug as a gun" (lines 1–2). His reflection on the passage of time documented by his pen intersects Hazo's and evokes sentiments to the past "Through living roots awaken in my head" (line 27). In "Filling My Pen for Action," Hazo draws various images to conceptualise his vision:

> I thumb the plunger down
>   and siphon black ink up
>   the way a hypodermic needle

siphons plasma from a vein.
My ink of choice is ebony
because it promises to last.
…
Regardless, writing
what we think makes thinking
truer when we see it written down.
The bravest pages of a poem
or a book began as blanks
that craved the consecration of a pen.
And written words increase
in value over time. (lines 1–6, 16–23)

The first image conceptualises the poet as a surgeon, portraying their responsibility to help the patient survive, and the second image depicts their venerable role, which arises out of their understanding of the significance of poetry versus the passage of time. In the last stanza, Hazo emphasises the poet's communal mission:

… I watch my nib
change ink-blood into words
across this very page to show
why every word should be as sacred
as the final word I'll write. (lines 33–37)

In their public duty, the poet should be courageous enough to create and carry a sense of a literary community. This sense of communal responsibility is repeated in "The Mutineer":

It urges me
to take a flight to elsewhere
or make my creed defiance.
Meantime, I choose to mount
my mutiny in words…
Not much
as protests go, but something. (lines 22–28)

However, Hazo differentiates between the role of the poet-prophet and the protestor. Although both are mutineers and intend to refine their society in a peaceful manner, the poet-prophet's role is more peaceful: "Not much / as protests go, but something" (lines 27–28).

In fact, Hazo, Handal, and Nye have integrated various literary means, including intersectionality, intertextuality, inclusiveness, and expressiveness, which positioned them in the core of the American literary tradition and highlighted their ability to confront White supremacy. These means helped formulate their literary creativity and encouraged them to cooperate in adopting the concept of the artist as a prophet who is capable of reformation despite artists' diversity.

Superiority and Inferiority

One of original postcolonial theoretical concepts in Western critical discourse is deconstructing superiority–inferiority discourse with a focus on cultural opposition. Although contemporary Arab American poets have recognised the components and ramifications of superiority–inferiority discourse, they have resisted it to establish a humanistic discourse rather than cultural opposition. Salaita believes that relevant studies by contemporary scholars, including Eric Hooglund's *Crossing the Waters: Arabic Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940* (1987), Alixa Naff's *Becoming American: The Early Arab American Experience* (1993), Nabeel Abraham's "Anti-Arab Racism and Violence in the United States" (1994), Michael Suliman's *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (1999), and Nadine Naber's "Ambiguous Insiders: An Investigation of Arab American Invisibility" (2000), agree that the first and second Arab American generations strove to assimilate in the American community, although they maintained their Old World traditional legacy. At the same time, it is noted that despite their commitment to certain traditions, such as food, theology, child rearing, and family bonds, they failed to pass down a very essential characteristic for constructing their children's ethnical identity: the Arabic language. However, members of the third Arab American

generation developed a national awareness that made them proud of their ethnicity. This national awareness was motivated by the arrival of new Muslim-Arab immigrants who were politicised in the Arab world and who were forced to migrate mainly for political, economic, and religious reasons to the United States. They believed that in the United States, they could practise their religion and express their radical national thoughts freely. Thus, they did not fear revealing their ethnic, religious, and cultural identity. Therefore, the remarkable growth in the number of Muslim immigrants to the United States most certainly will reconstruct and redefine Arab American literature. They shared the same experience with the arrival of a wave of Christian and Druze Arabs. In fact, the three groups cooperated to innovate attentive movements, such as the "pro-Arab" or "revisionist" movements, to encourage Arab Americans' political and social participation. By the end of the twentieth century, Arab Americans and American-born Arabs succeeded in reviving their Arabic legacy and reconstructing their Arab American identity both creatively and intellectually ("Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism" 148–49). Drawing upon their identity as non-White, contemporary Arab American writers employ poetry as a tool to deconstruct the superiority-inferiority discourse. In this section of the thesis, I argue that Hazo's, Handal's, and Nye's selected works reveal an understanding of the superiority-inferiority discourse in the Arab American experience.

To give some insights into the Arab American experience, Sam Hamod's "Dying with the Wrong Name," published in *Dying with the Wrong Name: New and Selected Poems* (1980), reflects Arab Americans' early awareness of the discourse of American superiority. The writer emphasises the superiority discourse that Arab Americans have faced and that United States authorities have promoted for decades. The poem narrates an immigrant's journey to the United States, during which he is forced to "Americanise" his name in the immigration office:

> … A man
> in a dark blue uniform at Ellis Island says, with
> tiredness and authority, "You only need two
> names in America," and suddenly
> as cleanly as the air
> you've lost
> your name. (I. lines 14–20)

On one side, the officer's words indicate more than applying official regulations. Hamod's description of the way the officer addresses the immigrant highlights the discourse of superiority the officer implements: "with / tiredness and authority" (lines 15–16). On the other hand, there is the inferior Other, who has no choice but to lose their name. Moreover, Majaj believes that Hamod's poem not only highlights oppression practices against immigrants but also reflects Arab Americans' experience of losing their identity and history in a superiority-inferiority confrontation ("Arab-American Literature" para. 9). The poem also reveals that new immigrants, despite being aware of the discourse of superiority-inferiority, intentionally surrender in pursuit of naturalisation.

However, Nye discusses superiority-inferiority discourse in her poetry and addresses Said's postcolonial theory. In his own perception, Said's theory includes a privilege for the superior civilised West over the inferior primitive East to promote certain political, hegemonic, and military ideologies (*Orientalism* 26). Nevertheless, Nye puts her hybrid identity in the same context with the inferior Other in the second part of "Those Whom We Do Not Know," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002). The poet shows sympathy by enabling her speaker to support the supposedly inferior:

> I support all people on earth
> who have bodies like and unlike my body,
> skins and moles and old scars,
> secret and public hair,
> crooked toes. I support
> those who have done nothing large,

> sifter of lentils, sifter of wisdoms,
> speak. If we have killed no one
> in the name of anything bad or good,
> may light feed our leafiest veins. (II. lines 1–10)

Nye aims to resist the ideological notions of the inferior Other by supporting "all people on earth" (II. line 1). She takes superiority-inferiority discourse to a humanistic level by enhancing racial and human equality through insights on ethnicity in various "bodies," "skins," "moles," "scars," "hair," and "toes" and intellectuality in "those who have done nothing large, / sifter of lintels, sifter of wisdoms, / speak" (II. lines 6–8). The poem conceptualises a synthesis of an important development of ethics, human equality, and theories of decolonisation. This conceptualisation moves beyond Said's theory of deconstructing superiority-inferiority discourse to reconstructing a humanistic discourse. This shift in decolonisation represents a significant methodological change to prioritise liberation and creativity over merely comparing colonial ideologies and to overcome racial and hegemonic imperial discourses.

Handal goes deep into deconstructing superiority-inferiority discourse to emphasise the need to implement equality in society, literature, culture, and narration. She searches to provide justice and equality in "Even," published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005). The poet uses the technique of homonyms with the word "even" to confront superiority–inferiority discourse:

> Nothing is even, even this line
> I am writing, even this line I am waiting in,
> waiting for permission to enter
> the country, the house, the room.
> Nothing is even, even now
> that laws have been drawn and peace
> is discussed on high tables,
> and even if all was said to be even
> I would not believe for even I know
> that nothing is even — not the trees,
> the flowers, not the mountains or the shadows…
> our nature is not even so why even try to get even
> instead let us find an even better place

and call it even. (lines 1–14)

In a sonnet poem, Handal breaks with the traditional frame of the sonnet to trigger a desire to make a change. The free verse style resists the sonnet's traditional strict use of rhyme and stanza structure and reveals the poet's modernist and postmodernist literary tendency. The first two lines can be read as self-referential. Throughout the first eight lines (octave), the poet conceptualises the impossibility of providing equality while she is composing her lines "even this line / I am writing" (lines 1–2) or even while her speaker is queuing at the airport immigration office "waiting for permission to enter / the country" (lines 3–4). The repetition of the phrase "nothing is even" highlights the writer's awareness of the superiority–inferiority discourse from one perspective. From another perspective, drawing from this awareness, in the last six lines (sestet), Handal's speaker calls for something revolutionary: Stop trying to be equal ("why even try to get even"; line 12) because as a human right, equality is already a foregone conclusion. In contrast with Hamod, Handal does not surrender. On the contrary, she proposes the creation of a better world free of discourses that promote superiority, inferiority, and inequality. By doing so, the writer exceeds deconstructing superiority-inferiority discourse to produce a transcendent humanistic discourse.

Handal exceeds the operative tensions of the deconstructing inequality discourse by taking the poem to a humanistic level, whereas Hazo implicitly seeks to interpret the meaning of superiority and the criteria upon which one nation becomes superior to other nations. This implication can be traced in "High, Higher, Highest," originally published in *Poem-a-Day* on 5 April 2022. Hazo comments on the poem that misunderstanding the implications of human relations can be misleading for many ("High, Higher, Highest," para. 1). The implications also can be interpreted as a confirmation of Hazo's American identity:

> Viewed from space, the world's
> impersonal.
> France appears,
> but no Frenchmen.
> Then Germany,
> without one German.
> Regardless,
> the richest man on earth
> pays three hundred thousand
> for a ten-minute flight by rocket
> at three thousand miles per hour
> to see everything below
> from sixty-two miles straight up. (lines 1–13)

At its core, the poem designs a new proposed technique for the superiority-inferiority discourse. According to Hazo's speaker, the criterion of superiority-inferiority transcends racial and humanistic discourses to highlight a new criterion that focuses on economic and scientific supremacy. By applying this technique, the collective geopolitical differences, racialism, and powers vanished: "France appears, / but no Frenchmen. / Then Germany, / without one German" (lines 3–6). This allowed the economic and scientific power of the individual to emerge: "The richest man on earth / pays three hundred thousand / for a ten-minute flight by rocket" (lines 8–10). Obviously, Hazo is referring to Elon Musk's SpaceX project, which plans to launch cargo and people into space by 2029 to travel to Mars and start building a human colony (Torchinsky paras. 1–3). With this premise, Hazo implicitly interlinks economic and scientific powers with colonialism and imperialism. Gallaher et al. distinguish the differences between the two concepts. According to the writers, both imperialism and colonialism revolve around oppressing other nations. However, imperialism is a state ideology that (formally or informally) works from the centre to influence another state for political and financial reasons, whereas colonialism is a state ideology that refers to the process of one nation dominating another nation for political, financial, and settlement purposes (116). In this sense, Hazo redefines colonialism and

imperialism and draws on the deconstructing superiority-inferiority discourse from a contemporary context.

One of the ramifications of the superiority-inferiority discourse is the concept of superiority and inferiority complexes, which have undoubtedly contributed to developing the notion of anti-Arabism. Arab Americas have experienced continuous systemised marginalisation at schools, civil institutions, and workplaces due to prejudiced overgeneralisation resulting from superiority discourse. According to Said, the notion of anti-Arabism resulted from a long-term systematic discrimination, which Said described as a "cultural war" that embodies "appalling racist caricatures of Arabs and Muslims [that] suggest that they are all either terrorists or sheikhs, and that the region is a large arid slum, fit only for profit or war" (*Culture and Imperialism* 301). Indeed, anti-Arab discrimination significantly resurfaces whenever there is tension in the Middle East or in the political relationships between the United States and its allies in the region. Salaita believes that "racism is perpetually reinforced in some of the most seemingly benign institutions in the United States. Much of that racism is now directed at Arabs, although it is not exclusively devoted to them" ("Introduction" 4). Salaita provides personal experiences in which he inspired American exceptionalism among other White students at school. The school environment encouraged him to deconstruct his surrounding and draw his conclusion that racism explicitly exists across the United States. As an Arab American academic, Salaita theorises anti-Arab racism as a comprehensive phenomenon deeply rooted in the United States and manifested in the most important institutions. In his view, anti-Arabism cannot be separated from the other forms of racism in the United States, including anti-Semitism, because they are all linked to the United States capitalist system and the ways it interacts with the natural resources of the Arab world and

the Other in general ("Introduction" 4–5). From this premise, American racism is derived from European colonialism and its interaction with Africans and Indigenous people:

> the racism became uniquely American as the relationship among White settlers and slaveowners and those they subjugated evolved from a seemingly one-sided display of power to a complicated (and usually discordant) discourse of oppression and resistance, capitalism and egalitarianism, stereotype and self-representation. (Salaita "Introduction" 6).

The modern sense of colonialism began with the "Age of Discovery" in the early fifteenth century, driven by the desire to spread Christianity, control navigation, and acquire new wealth for Europe, which has evolved in the modern age into the United States launching military missions in various parts of the world, primarily in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, following the 9/11 attacks. Among the results were waves of immigration that ironically occurred while racism grew systematically in the United States. In other words, every ethnic group underwent social and institutional racial practices in which intellectual immigrants developed a racial attitude towards newcomers. At its core, anti-Arabism intersects with anti-Semitism and racism. Nevertheless, it embodies a more complicated concept of Islamophobia because most of Arabic culture has been influenced by Islamic culture, which explains why Islamophobia is directed to Muslims and non-Muslims such as Arab Christians. Salaita defines the notion of anti-Arabism as an institution that "engages in a constant dialectic with other types of racism (both American and European) as well as colonialism, capitalism, nationalism, exceptionalism, and religious fundamentalism." The writer makes a remarkable differentiation between the notions of neo-Orientalism and anti-Arabism in which neo-Orientalism implements a misrepresentation of Arabs to justify foreign policy when anti-Arabism indicates the effects of that misrepresentation ("Introduction" 10–14). In the post-9/11 era, Arab Americans have experienced both notions considerably. Khalaf claims that Arab Americans have not been

included in reliable data collected for health studies because researchers have not conducted a National Health study concerned with the Arab American community, especially during COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, Khalaf states the following:

> So, there are things other than financial that we are not getting. We don't know what our COVID infection rates are. We don't know what the percentage of our community is vaccinated because that data is simply not collected. It is beyond just financial detriment to our community. We have lost a lot of stuff… we don't even realize. (Hanania paras. 1–5)

Thus, Arab American intellectuals have developed an understanding of the notion of anti-Arab racism, in which Arab Americans are misjudged and excluded due to their skin colour or physical characteristics. Arab American writers have examined the continuous social injustice of distrust towards the whole group to define anti-Arab racism as refuting American racial practices against a "non-White" ethnicity residing in the United States. At the same time, the origin country of this "non-White" ethnicity is targeted due to political expediency. In *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (2007), Salita argues that contemporary Arab American writers' goal is not simply to seek tolerance but to intellectually synthesise and analyse the aftermaths of 9/11 within a political and historical framework (16). Importantly, the selected poets in this study have actively participated in confronting the institutional discrimination in which Arabs and Muslims in the United States were victimised following 9/11. In 2005, Nye published her collection of poems *You and Yours* to draw her readers' attention to understanding the struggle of being the Other and to invoke their sympathy. Among these poems is "Isle of Mull, Scotland," in which she narrates a story without revealing her identity as an Arab American. On the contrary, her speaker represents an ambiguous Other:

> Because by now we know everything is not so green elsewhere.
>
> The cities tied their nooses around our necks,

we let them without even seeing.

Not even feeling our breath soften
as clumps of shed wool scattered across days.

Not even. This even-ing, balance beam of light on green,
the widely lifted land, resonance of moor
winding down to water, the full of it. Days of cows
and sheep bending their heads.

We walked where the ancient pier juts into the sea.
Stood on the rim of the pool, by the circle
of black boulders. No one saw we were there
and everyone who had ever been there
stood silently in air.

Where else do we ever have to go, and why? (lines 1–15)

The first line states the main theme of the poem, which is that it "is not so green elsewhere" (line 1), and reflects that contemporary Arab American writers require courage to dismantle the issue of anti-Arabism that has been widely promoted since 9/11. On a diasporic journey, Nye's speaker reveals how the Other feels in a racial context and a symbolic representation of anti-Arabism. The writer establishes a moment of uncertainty. The reader cannot be sure whether the cities are cities of departures or destinations that make the speaker flee. The image of "the cities tied their nooses around our necks" (line 2) could be a personification of the ideology of racism and policy of marginalisation that are practised against minorities in racial communities. In this context, Nye's speaker is writing the history of diaspora and anti-Arabism: "No one saw we were there" (line 12). In "Dispatch from the Land of Erasure" (2018), Philip Metres believes that White supremacy is fundamental to American thinking and being (para. 21). In fact, the idea of being invisible is derived from the notion of inferiority to the Other, and in Nye's interpretation, invisibility causes endless displacement: "Where else do we ever have to go, and why?" (line 15). Philip Metres states that Arab American writers must write the history that brought them to

the United States (para. 6). From this perspective, Nye's poem not only evokes a broader memory of Arab Americans but also conceptualises a yearning for a new world. This exploration is punctuated by a rhetorical question, both of which are products of the prevailing sense of anti-Arabism.

Handal also criticises the unjust practices and policies against Arabs in the United States in her poetry. For example, in "Ephratha," a poem published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005), Handal's speaker creates a soliloquy to reveal their inner concerns as the Other[31]:

> Poem
> I ask you, why,
> does the street have a name I can't pronounce?
> Does our vocabulary invent us, our accents
> resent us? Must we come to a halt
> and try saying our name without feeling?
> Try praising our poets without fearing? (lines 19–24)

The soliloquy uncovers the speaker's struggle with the institutional marginalisation practices in the United States, which is represented by the speaker being unable to pronounce the street names and speaking English with a different accent. In these lines, Handal's speaker describes how Arab Americans struggle to reveal their ethnicity without fear and how they are oppressed and prevented from celebrating their culture. It is worth noting that some critics have linked anti-Arab sentiment to patriotism and loyalty to the United States. According to Bayoumi, "different studies from the University of Illinois at Chicago, Harvard, and Purdue have each concluded that the more positively one feels about the United States, the more likely one is to harbour anti-Arab feelings" (6). In truth, many Arab American intellectuals and activists have proved their loyalty to the United States, committed to defending Arab Americans' rights, and adopted a critical perspective of the United States government due to the Arab discrimination. For example, in 1980, James Abourezk and James Zogby founded the ADC (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination

[31] "Ephrath" is a biblical reference and is the former name of Bethlehem.

Committee to empower Arab Americans), promote the Arab's rich cultural heritage, and encourage balanced policies in the Middle East.[32] Similarly, Handal uses her poetry to encourage other Arab Americans to integrate into and understand Western culture, despite the pervasive anti-Arabism. In "Ephratha," Handal's speaker addresses Poem and asks rhetorical questions:

> Poem
> are our memories filled with pale notebooks,
> fading paint, falling walls
> to understand this place must we understand its howls,
> to understand its howls must we understands its verses,
> to understand its verses must we understand agony? (lines 29–34)

In this poem, Handal's speaker theorises about the existing prejudiced against minorities. The use of collective pronouns (e.g., "we" and "our") engages the speaker with the collective diasporic minorities who share the same memories of war and destruction in the Old World and eliminates the spaces and boundaries between them to raise a question regarding what it feels like to be oppressed in the present Western context. Undoubtedly, "to understand this place" indicates that the speaker is an outsider striving to belong. In the narrative produced, the howls and agony from their current situation are meant to encourage Arab Americans and other minorities to understand the oppressive Western ideology. Although Handal's poem does not expose systematic oppression, it invites readers to see oppression in a wider context. Therefore, this practiced oppression of minorities is part of the state's plan to pave the way for its ideologies to maintain authority and sovereignty. However, Handal's speaker does not call for a revolution; they call for understanding and integration.

Nye and Handal's poems attempt to convey the agony of the oppressed in a Western context, whereas Hazo criticises the violation of human rights in Israel and condemns anyone

[32] James Abourezk (1931–2023) was an American attorney and Democratic politician of Lebanese descent who was elected as the first Arab American senator in the United States.
James Zogby (1945–) is an American scholar and lecturer of Lebanese descent.

who supports its policy in his poem “Intifada,” published in *Inclined to Speak: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Poetry* (2008). “Intifada” is the Arabic cultural equivalent for “uprising.” In English, the word means “shaking off.” The first and second Palestinian *intifadas* aimed to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The writer’s insistence to use the transcription of the word *intifada* indicates his intention to motivate his readers to sympathise with the oppressed and to confront the experience in an Arabic/Middle Eastern context, along with provoking cultural resistance.

> Singly at first, then doubly,
> then slowly by the tens or twenties,
> then steadily on…
> Interviewed
> about the deathcount in Ramallah,
> one sergeant said, “We’ll kill
> them all, but we’ll never
> forgive them for making us do it.” (lines 1–8)

The poem sheds lights on the Israeli government’s brutality by showing that it deals with civilian deaths in Ramallah as just numbers. The fact that the writer leaves the third line open reveals that the number is steadily increasing. Moreover, the sergeant’s statement reflects how politicians utilise media to mislead the audience and deceive the international community. The statement also indicates irony, where the killer will not forgive the victim for making them murder. The statement rephrases the late Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir (1898–1978) to victimise the Israelis and gain positive responses from the international community. This repeated deceiving representation creates a discourse enabling the Israeli government to practice more human violations.

> Later he aimed his Uzi at a boy
> armed with a stone and a slingshot.
> One general claimed his soldiers
> fired only rubber-coated bullets.
> When asked about the difference

> to the dead, he frowned and shouted,
> "Their leaders and parents use
> these children as human shields." (lines 9–16)

The abovementioned lines document the death of Faris Odeh, a Palestinian boy who was killed on November 8, 2000, after throwing stones at an Israel Defence Forces tank. The image of the soldier armed with an Uzi and the "boy armed with a stone and a slingshot" (lines 9–10) is a shocking contrast. On a power scale, the two weapons are unequal. On the one hand, the sergeant and the general symbolise White supremacy, and their words indicate a discourse that radiates mobilising violence, racialisation, imperialism, colonialism, anti-Arabism, xenophobia, and oppression and that justifies the notions of violence and anti-Arabism. On the other hand, the civilian deaths and the dead child symbolise the inferior Other who are merely unarmed and oppressed. The contrast also represents the discourse of "us" and "them" and places the two parties in opposition. In the poem, Hazo examines the notion of anti-Arabism in another context and criticises the United States government's foreign policies that support its first ally in the Middle East. Nye's "Isle of Mull, Scotland" and Handal's "Ephratha" tackle the notion of anti-Arabism in the diasporic lands, whereas Hazo locates it in his homeland to suggest that the notion of anti-Arabism is mostly based on ideological reasons both inside and outside the United States.

However, war poetry provides contexts for exploration of the Arab American life and experience. The *Safar Barlik* (1912), WWI (1914–1918), the 1967 Arab Israeli War, the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Gulf War (1990–1991), the War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11, and the continuing political unrest in the Arab world contributed to shaping the memory of war in Arab American poetry. In this context, Matsuda believes that war memories play an essential role in shaping the traumatised life: "every crisis

generates not only its own misery, but its own historical memory. Many of these memories come from conflicts, some forgotten or erased, but also relentlessly remembered by survivors" (336). War poets such as Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967), Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), and others served during wartimes and have enriched world literature with their vivid experiences on the battlefields and depicted what war can do to the psyche and body. Even though Hazo, Handal, and Nye have not lived the experience of war themselves, they have transcended the individual pain and traumatic memories to produce literature that compassionately conveys the human voice for the unnoticed. Besides their poetry about the conflicts of the Arab world, they played a vital role in helping to bring humanity together in crucial times. In the context of decolonisation of the mind, Salaita believes that Arab American concerns reach beyond the Arab American community ("Ethnic Identity" 165). Therefore, the writers have intended to uncover the inhuman effects of war. They combined gritty realism and romantic notions to create a poetic synthesis. In "Kolo," published in *The Lives of Rain* (2005), Handal responds to the Bosnian War.[33] The suffering in Bosnia was a human tragedy for the people of Bosnia, but Handal's poem voices its global implications.

> In the Balkans
> a woman breastfeeds, hums a low tune, combs her hair,
> laments hanging on the village trees, she tries to forget
> the rapes the refugee camps the slit throats
> of Srebrenica, tries to remember the blink of her own past passing,
> days dancing the *kolo*, each torture unsung in that violet swaying.
> (lines 1–6)

It is worth noting here that Handal narrates the story from a third-person omniscient point of view in order to allow the reader to understand the character's thoughts and feelings. The image

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[33] The Bosnian War (1992–1995) was an international armed conflict and part of the breakup of Yugoslavia. The forces of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and those of Herzeg-Bosnia and Respublika Srpska, proto-states led and supplied by Croatia and Serbia, were the main belligerents. During the war, around 100,000 people were killed, over 2.2 million were displaced, and an estimated 12,000–50,000 Bosnian women were raped by Serb forces. The *kolo* is a cultural traditional dance performed in a circle at social ceremonies.

of the woman breastfeeding in the midst of the brutal chaos depicts a traumatic moment. The portrayal of the female body in the second line challenges the sexualised image of rape in the fourth line. The reader responds to the female body breastfeeding with a sense of intimacy, motherhood, love, and innocence, which contrast with the image of rape that sexually exposes the female body. The sexualised context suggests a sense of fear and shame and introduces women as merely objects, which is in contrast with the first image that introduces women as a source of life and birth. Moreover, the woman's attempts to calm her baby down while the village is covered with destruction convey her detachment from reality. The fluidity in the line representing the horrors of war and massacres — "the rapes the refugee camps the slit throats" — embodies the abundance of these memories, on the one hand; on the other hand, it reveals an inability to resist them or put them in order. However, the woman's attempt to escape the horrific present to remember the happy days when she was dancing the *kolo* indicates denial and a tendency to create a virtual world that is incommensurate with the brutality of the torture.

> Unsung, the slow movement of a foreign language
> on the lips of an émigré, the sailing of cruel memory in water drops
> drying on the cover of a book with Cyrillic letters.
> Unsung, the swallowing of sentences by soldiers
> after they have killed…
> She imagines those who have left, the search for lost relics,
> silverware in ordinary antique stores in Paris London Chicago
> looking for anything an exile leaves
> except the song unsung beneath the tongue of the sea wind… a
> *kolo*. (lines 7–15)

After describing the massacre in the homeland in the first stanza, the speaker starts to depict another scene in the host countries. Handal's speaker portrays the immigration journey. According to the speaker, it is a cruel journey mixed with memories from the battlefields of soldiers and dead bodies. The intersectionality between language and the immigration process in "foreign language / on the lips of an émigré" (lines 7–8) and "the search for lost relics" (line 12)

embodies a loss of identity. The open line in “after they have killed…” indicates the massive number of massacres that cannot be counted. Furthermore, it indicates the narrator’s desire to forget the horrors and move back to speak about the woman. Although she is still residing in the homeland, she thinks about those who have fled. Throughout the poem, Handal sheds light on the most disastrous ramifications of the war: civilian deaths, human rights violations, women’s rights violations, mass immigration, identity struggle, antique theft, cultural bleach, exile, and displacement. At the end of every stanza, the *kolo* appears as an unreachable dream for the speaker. The rich post-war experience has enriched the speaker’s geographical imagination and enables them to move between spaces and encourages the imagination process. The interaction between history, space, identity, immigration, memory, and imagination redefines war poetry and geographical location. In this context, Handal’s poem represents the Bosnian War as a global concern, not as a domestic one.

In the context of global crises, Nye responses to another post-war crisis in “Landmine Kills 10 Girls Collecting Firewood,” published in *Tender Spot: Selected Poems* (2015). On Monday, 17 December 2012, ten Afghani girls were killed by landmines remaining from the Soviet occupation.

> So cold in Afghanistan. You could bend wherever you are
> to find a scrap to burn. You could huddle in a cave as
> wind sears the stone. Sometimes they traded scarves,
> purple for blue,
> preferring a different pattern,
> lifted by something small.
> They hadn’t lived long enough
> to figure out what was going on. (lines 1–8)

While Handal sheds lights on massacres, immigration, human rights violations, and other post-war ramifications, Nye draws a picture of the tragedies caused by landmines as a post-war tragedy. Nye’s poem strives towards anesthetising violence as a fundamental mode to provoke

the reader's imagination. The writer documents the incident besides portraying Afghani women as being hopeless and voiceless victims. The image of the girls trading scarves "purple for blue" conceptualises their transition from childhood to maturity, to wearing blue, which represents the Afghani burka, and their surrender to this reality. Nye attentively introduces the theme of the plight of Afghani women under the Taliban regime in post-9/11 poetry. In "Burka Women," published in *An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind: Poets on 9/11* (2002), Gerald Wheeler also deals with the same theme:

> Imprisoned behind adobe ruins,
> their fingers scarred & swollen
> from shelling nuts & beatings
> by religious police for sneaking
> daughters to secret reading lessons (lines 1–5)

Both writers' representation of Afghani women is characterised with a humanistic concern for the Other. Taking Said's interpretation of Orientalism into consideration, although Wheeler's representation is true to life, it is a constructive stereotype about the Orient and a veiled form of imperialism to justify hegemony in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. On the contrary, Nye's representation is genuine humanism and a spontaneous response to the 2012 incident.

However, Handal's interest in the Bosnian War and Nye's in the Soviet landmines in Afghanistan and their ability to distance themselves from the crises of the Middle East and the Arab American community thus serve to humanise the crisis, regardless of the ethnicities and religions that are used to fuel war. For Hazo, too, war poetry is not exclusive to Palestine and the Middle East. In "Inbred," published in *The Next Time We Saw Paris* (2020), the writer criticises the brutal human tendency to kill and raises a solitary voice against war. At the beginning of the poem, Hazo's speaker makes a comparison between humankind and other species:

> Finches arrive in bunches.
> They helicopter down and hover

like hummingbirds before
they peck in order at the feeder —
each to his ration.
        No one
fights.
    A wild but definite
civility prevails until
each finch is full. (lines 1–10)

According to the speaker, the wild world is more civilised compared to the human world:

        To share
and share alike is worlds
away from all our public
massacres or wars we wage
for warfare's sake.
        It seems
we are the lone species
that kills its kind by choice. (lines 11–18)

Hazo's speaker seeks to provide a collective understanding of war trauma and its impacts on humanity. The speaker manages to evoke an imaginary image and links it to a landscape of nature. This image was formed in the speaker's imagination from post-war trauma. However, he succeeds in portraying it as a vivid image for the reader to draw the comparison. Proceeding from this premise, Hazo intends to criticise humankind for its inhumanity by creating war resistance poetry. Philip Metres believes that war resistance poems liberate poetry, make it active, and challenge the old culture of poetry which is "mostly a culture of the book" ("Lang/Scapes" 120). The writer asserts that war resistance poetry creates its own pressure and "transient pages to voice the growing wariness and outrage" at the war (120). It has the power to challenge the powerful. In his study, Philip Metres proposes that politics, history, and trauma are crucial to war resistance poetry. Accordingly, the poet's poetic diction translates the horrors of war and political discourses into visible language and landscapes. However, it is not merely an extension of the political discourse. It provides a new narration of the nation by offering vital

examples in which the local and the global interlink and converse with each other (120–22). In Hazo's "Inbred," the writer's poetic diction to describe the brutality of the war extends to oppose all wars without limitation and blames humankind as the first decision maker in the outbreak of all wars. Then, Hazo engages space war, as space has become a viable and critical site for alliances and hostilities:

> Lately we've invaded space
>   and set our sight on Mars.
> Will we return our malice
>   in the stratosphere and be
>   as lethal as here?
>   The first
>   murder on the moon will tell us. (lines 19–25)

In these lines, Hazo's speaker introduces space as the final frontier of war and brings a new political materiality to the poem. Undoubtedly, space has become a new battlefield for supremacy and warfare. Along with Russia, China has achieved remarkable development. It has made significant progress and rapid advancement in military capability over the United States in outer space. Nina Armagno, director of staff of the United States Space Force, states that China has succeeded in being a real threat to the United States in the field of outer space and has moved the battle from earth to space ("China" para. 7). In the last stanza, Hazo sheds light on the fact that space has become a militarised domain, especially for advanced countries with access to space. The writer has employed space conflict based on human colonisation of Mars and depicts the brutality of human beings toward one another. The horrible power of their brutality is not exclusive to their brutality on earth. It extends to space and shows that violence is natural in humans.

Throughout history, war poetry has occupied the collective imagination of Arab Americans. Wars and political tension around the world have contributed to the maturation of

Arab American writers and critically encouraged them. Handal's "Kolo," Nye's "Landmine Kills 10 Girls Collecting Firewood," and Hazo's "Inbred" reflect the diversity of war experiences and create unity in resisting war. In this section, I argued that Hazo's, Handal's, and Nye's interest in humanity without alienating themselves from any party means overcoming individualism and provides a comprehensive picture of war that engages humanity. Therefore, they have succeeded in looking at major conflicts as a whole and do not seek to personalise them.

The Representation of Familial Relationships and the Poets' Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis

Cultural awareness and self-realisation have always been essential to motivating cultural synthesis. By developing them properly, ethnic minorities can establish good communication skills within the small community of their families and other minorities and within the big community of the United States. Hanberger believes that to acquire cultural synthesis, an individual must develop cognitive skills such as cultural and multicultural awareness, which are reflected in attitudes and behaviours. Accordingly, cultural and multicultural awareness work as empowering strategies to achieve cultural synthesis. According to Hanberger, employing multicultural awareness and multicultural appreciation facilitates cultural synthesis (177). Understanding the notion of cultural synthesis interlinks with cognitive notions such as cultural and multicultural awareness. Developing cultural synthesis is an evolving process that begins with cultural awareness and understanding the significant role of cultures in shaping collective and individual behaviours. From this perspective, this section discusses the way Arab American poets have developed appropriate intercultural communication within their families as the first step to determining the practice of cognitive and affective skills that participate to create

continuity between generations and reflect in their behaviours and practices, which results in appreciation and good communication between cultures. For this reason, they have strived to produce literature that bridges the gap between generations. Their work has gone beyond receiving the legacy of their ancestors to serving as a link between their past and present. Therefore, they excelled in transmitting the experience of their ancestors while improving it to suit their present and the future of their children.

Throughout the ages, families have played a significant role in preserving traditions, cultures, values, and identities, especially for immigrant families. Within their individual contexts, immigrant families work intentionally or unintentionally to adhere to their old culture by practicing religions, rituals, languages, habits, customs, storytelling, and traditions. As the main component of the Arab American ethnic group in the United States, Arab American families have played an essential role in creating a bond with their motherland and a supportive environment for its members emanating from their sense of stability and family warmth. Kayyali highlights the extensive interconnectivity of Arab American extended families that culturally identify them from other American families. From another perspective, this interconnectivity has its pros and cons. It can create an ideal atmosphere for living or it may generate negative pressure on its members according to specific circumstances and times (66–67). This dichotomy contributed to the three selected poets realising the importance of family, which they reflected in their poetry. Their realisation exceeds the mere presence of their parents or grandparents to build a bridge to the next generations. For instance, Hazo weaves a combination of an elegy for his Lebanese mother with a celebration of his newborn grandson in "Seeing My Mother in My Grandson," published in *A Flight to Elsewhere* (2005).

> Alive, she'd be in her nineties.
> Dying on Wilkins Avenue

> and buried from home, she never
> saw forty.
>   Six decades back
> I crept downstairs to see her
> coffined in our living room… (lines 1–7)

In an individualistic Western culture, Hazo attempts to find togetherness in his family members and his memories that serve as a protective shelter. The writer creates an extended chain that runs across four generations: the mother, the speaker, the son, and the grandson. As an autobiographical poem, the memory of the dead mother "buried from home" (line 3) tells the story of Hazo's mother, who might have failed to form close relationships outside of her family due to language and cultural barriers. The image of her coffin in the living room gives a sense of isolation and loneliness and reflects an absence of surrounding support except from the speaker, who "crept downstairs to see her" (line 6), which creates an emotional bond between them. In an investigation of emotional closeness in Arab American families, Abdelghani and Poulakis find that in the absence of similar cultural support, immigrant parents tend to receive excessive emotional support from their children and from each other, whereas their American-born children are more comfortable interacting with their surroundings in the United States (para. 4). Generally, Arab American families are strongly connected, especially when it comes to special events such as weddings, births, and funerals. Kayyali believes that the interconnections of Arab American family life did not change after 9/11 (58). In the poem, Hazo contextualises family closeness in Arab American parents' attitudes across four generations and draws on the continuity of their tradition in the following lines:

> Today, through me to my own son
>   and through my son to his,
>   I'm witness to a resurrection.
>   The baby's
>   brows and lashes are hers.
> So is the roundness of his face

and ever so slightly, the smile… (lines 8–14)

The fact that the baby inherited his great grandmother's physical features ("brows and lashes") and spirit ("the smile") alludes to the intention of the speaker to preserve their cultural and religious traditions. Disregarding the diversity of Arab Americans for historical, religious, and geopolitical reasons, Kayyali states that Arab American families strive to preserve certain Arabic traditions related to "food, dress, language, religious practices, and moral values" (58). In this context, Hazo's poem sheds light on Arab American families' development and provides a portrait of the family bonding that helped shape the continuity of their tradition.

However, Nye has discussed the implications and significance of the presence of her grandmother, *sitti* Khadra, and her father, Aziz Shihab, in her poetry. On this she states,

> My grandmother, who died two years ago at the age of one hundred and six, was a splendid wizard of humanity. People loved her and gravitated toward her. She was very wise, funny, and very verbal. She was a big talker and a great conveyer of tales. My father certainly carried that spirit of hers and I feel that I carried it to the next generation: a feeling of loving to talk and tell, whatever impulse that is, and sometimes it is a dangerous one. (Majaj "Talking with Poet Naomi Shihab-Nye" para. 5)

According to Nye, literature is more than composing poetry and narrating stories, and the presence of her grandmother and her father exceeds mere cultural representation. It is a dangerous mission. It is taking the responsibility to acquire certain cognitive skills to build cultural synthesis. For example, in "My Grandmother in the Stars," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002), Nye recreates a sense of belonging to her cultural background to keep her traditions alive in the United States:

> Where we live in the world
> is never one place. Our hearts,
> those dogged mirrors, keep flashing us
> moons before we are ready for them.
> You and I on a roof at sunset,

> our two languages adrift,
> heart saying, Take this home with you,
> *never again,*
> and only memory making us rich. (lines 12–20)

In these lines, the writer emphasises the importance of her grandmother in inheriting family traditions. According to Nye, this inheritance is what empowers the Arab American identity: "only memory making us rich" (line 20). In both poems, Hazo's "Seeing My Mother in My Grandson" and Nye's "My Grandmother in the Stars," the depiction of the family structure can be described as matriarchal, where the female senior member plays a predominant role despite the fact that Arab American family structure is patriarchal. Kayyali draws attention to the change of Arab American family structure. The writer believes that Arab American family structure was patriarchal. Kayyali uses Joseph's definition of patriarchy as "the privileging of males and seniors and the mobilization of kinship structures, morality, and idioms to legitimate and institutionalize gendered and age domination" (qtd. in Kayyali 67). However, Arab American families today have witnessed a remarkable change, and Arab American mothers tend to have central roles in their families by guiding children's decisions even as adults, "Implying a continuation of authority that dovetails with the age component of the definition of patriarchy" (Kayyali 68). Nevertheless, it seems that the patriarchal family structure has not lost its influence among Arab Americans. In "My Father and the Figtree," published in *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (2002), Nye depicts the significance of her father's heritage in building her experience:

> For other fruits my father was indifferent.
> He'd point at the cherry trees and say,
> "See those? I wish they were figs."
> In the evenings he sat by our beds
> weaving folktales like vivid little scarves.
> They always involved a figtree.
> Even when it didn't fit, he'd stick it in.

> Once Joha was walking down the road
> and he saw a figtree.
> Or, he tied his camel to a figtree and went to sleep.
> Or, later when they caught and arrested him,
> his pockets were full of figs. (lines 1–12)

Nye's father, the fig tree, and the folktales work as cultural representations in the poem. The fig has been cultivated in the Holy Land for more than five thousand years. Goor traces the history of the fig in the Holy Land from ancient times to the present day. The writer states that the first fruit tree mentioned in the Bible is the fig tree in the story of Adam and Eve and their seduction by Satan: "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (*King James Bible*, Gen. 3.7). Goor holds that various Biblical commentaries conclude that the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden is a fig tree. It is the tree with which Adam and Eve were spoilt, and they used its leaves to hide their shame (124). From this perspective, Nye employs the fig tree in the poem to work as a transporter of cultural knowledge through generations. Her father's attempts to involve the fig tree in the folktales, even if it is irrelevant, may indicate his intention to use it in the same meaning. In this regard, Nye states,

> the fact that my brother and I went to sleep every night of our lives as children with our father's folk tales, his Joha stories ringing in our ears, had a deep and a biding effect on me. I saw them as lullabies and, of course, the stories would always change and we would go along with his new additions and omissions. (Majaj "Talking with Poet Naomi Shihab-Nye" para. 10)

Nye's father understood the importance of storytelling and narrative in maintaining memory. Consequently, he strove to employ the oral tradition to encourage his children to appreciate their Arabic culture. In Nye's poem, her father, the fig tree, and folktales function as cultural representations of the Arabic culture and knowledge transporters to enhance cultural synthesis.

In addition, this section aims to draw attention to the significance of poetry in creating continuity of the Arab American family besides constructing cultural synthesis. In this, Nye states: “I had the feeling that I was bridging something” (Majaj “Talking with Poet Naomi Shihab-Nye” para. 4). Nye appears to be aiming to write as a parent from an intimate human perspective to remind the younger generation to engage actively with their families. In “Dear Mediator,” published in *Transfer* (2011), she understands the significance of adult children in creating harmony during conflicts within the family:

> I had a terrible night.
> You won’t believe what was happening.
> A lion was biting my face.
> Scratching my cheeks with its big paws.
> I called to your father for help.
> He was sitting across the room.
> I don’t know where the lion came from.
> Help! Help! I cried.
> Your father didn’t move.
> He stared in that vague way he had.
> Get him off me!
> He just sat there.
> The lion was growling.
> The lion was about to do further damage.
> Honey I know he’s been dead for two years
> But I have to divorce your father. (lines 1–16)

In these lines, Nye depicts the strength of persistent memories. The deceptive image of the husband’s motionless presence at the beginning of the poem indicates the speaker’s resignation to the memories that bring them pain and sorrow. The lion’s attacks embody the ferocity of these memories. The fact that the husband is dead, which is revealed at the end of the poem, and the speaker’s desire nonetheless to obtain divorce indicate a strong desire to overcome the past and its painful memories. In the midst of this conflict, the speaker triumphs in making the decision to overcome the memories and involves their child in this fateful decision. Besides the role of the young generation within the family, they play a more important role as a mediator between the

same generation and between two generations. In comparison with the United States national average, children of Arab Americans live with their parents longer due to the expectation that adult children would continue to live at their parents' home until they marry (Kayyali 60). Due to the interconnection between Arab American families and their children, Nye named the first section of her collection *Everything Comes Next* (2020) "The Holy Land of Childhood." Majaj believes that Nye's literary productions have been groundbreaking regarding engaging children and addressing them in depicting the Arab American experience, although there is a need for more children's literature ("New Directions" 134). In "Dear Mediator," Nye portrays the Arab American family as a place of conflict rather than a safe haven. In contrast, in "Boy and Mom at the Nutcracker Ballet," featured in "The Holy Land of Childhood," Nye narrates an intimate conversation between a mother and her child to portray a unique Arab American experience:

> There's no talking in this movie.
>   It's not a movie! Just watch the dancers.
>   They tell the story through their dancing.
> Why is the nutcracker mean?
>   I think because the little boy broke him.
> Did the little boy mean to?
>   Probably not. (lines 1–7)

The conversation reveals an intimate relationship between the mother and her child and fosters a sense of security and positive self-esteem. In Aroian et al.'s study on four hundred and fifty-four Arab American adolescents from immigrant families over a three-year period, the researchers conclude that mothers who are keen to maintain a good mother–child relationship cause a remarkable improvement in the relationship and a reduction in children's behavioural problems (533). In other words, mothers' awareness of the need to maintain an efficient relationship with their children contributed to raising a generation that struggles with fewer behavioural problems and that is characterised by confidence and high self-esteem.

Handal understands the challenges, needs, and struggles of Arab Americans in "The Thing about Feathers," published in *Poet in Andalucia* (2012). The poem depicts a cross-national migration journey:

> We kept only the keys,
> letters, and photos —
> everything stayed behind.
> when we left the house.
> That can happen when
> a nation changes overnight,
> when those you know
> turn into
> a gate of feathers —
> and the thing about feathers is,
> they know what's been missed. (lines 1–11)

Throughout the poem, Handal's speaker, who is escaping the ethnopolitical conflicts and sociopolitical pressures in their region, continues to preserve their tradition. In the midst of a traumatic moment, the speaker strives to hold on to traditions and cultural meanings represented by keeping the keys, letters, and photos. Handal's speaker creates a personal image while also speaking in a collective voice:

> I pretend
> never to have
> seen a body midair,
> a father's hands
> planted on the ground —
> after all
> what we don't admit to
> never happened.
> But I couldn't
> change that day in Murcia,
> when water brought light
> to the door:
> I am seven
> it is the day before our departure,
> the day my father
> gives me a notebook,
> and I tell him,
> *there is where I'll keep my country*. (lines 23–40)

The image of the “father’s hands planted on the ground” symbolises the origin of the family tradition and the firmness of its roots. The image is repeated when the father gives the speaker a notebook, and they in turn promise to preserve their homeland and its cultural legacies saved inside. The cultural meanings that the speaker brings with them from their home country stimulate the family contexts and facilitate the immigration process. Before all, these cultural meanings are critical in understanding immigrant family traditions because they have a powerful influence on its members. Handal’s poem emphasises that traditions and cultural meanings that empower Arab American family members. Therefore, she tends to utilise her experience to stimulate the young generation in “Phenomenal Daughter,” published in *Poetry* (March 2021).

> She told me, Mama, I want to see the world. I told her, Go. When she returned she said: I saw barefoot women carry water from village to village, saw men limp from border to border, saw children disappear in tunnels that lead to freedom, or so they hoped. I saw families who lost everything, even what they dreamed they’d have one day. Saw history hide its shame in the huts of poor people. And one night, I saw girls count stomachs swelled up like small balloons, while boys played with empty soda cans. They were so hungry. I saw madness. I told her, what a terrible world. She told me, It’s also in that world that I saw the sky speak to the wind, the wind to the sea, the sea to the waves, and the waves to rising souls that sang with voices so clear, everything took flight. Mama, you have to be brave to see. In their phenomenal eyes, I saw a promising world. (613)

In a prose poem, Handal introduces the young generation fully aware of intercultural differences. In the poem, the speaker encourages the daughter to move back and forth between cultures to acquire knowledge and use her personal judgement. Despite the tragic images of the outside world that the daughter depicts, she can appreciate its beauty where the mother is influenced by her cultural experiences and expectations. In fact, the daughter is capable of identifying and understanding cultural differences, which can help celebrate cultural diversity.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic created the largest health concern in modern human history. Social distancing, restricted movement policies, and lockdown strategies significantly disturbed almost all countries and territories. The impact is far reaching, however, due to limited options for socialising during quarantines and lockdowns, literature provided a remedy during the pandemic. *COVID-19 Social Study* published a report revealing that the arts are vital for healing and mental health, especially during the pandemic. The report suggests that participants who have spent thirty minutes daily on arts activities, such as reading literature, have probably maintained good mental health and greater life satisfaction ("How the Arts Can Improve Mental Health, especially during the Pandemic" paras. 1–2). On the one hand, literature combines aesthetics and imaginative pleasure in times of stress, grief, and self-isolation, such as the COVID-19 lockdown. On the other hand, it mirrors real-life events, which contribute to provoking the writer's imagination and individual awareness. At its core, literature is influenced by all of the writer's social, economic, political, geographic, and healthcare surroundings. For example, many Arab American writers documented the COVID-19 pandemic in their literature. Zeina Azzam reflects on the apparently magical impact of art during the pandemic in "Coronavirus Spring," published in *The New Verse News* (2020):

> If sickness comes
> I want to be like the wise tulips,
> store energy in my heart bulb
>
> and come back after a hard winter,
> dressed in bright turbans
> of orange and yellow and red. (lines 14–19)

Azzam finds inspiration in the tulips that stay in the dark earth during wintertime and then burst through with life to overcome her anxiety and fear of contracting COVID-19. The image of nature coming back to life after winter is repeated in modern literature. Azzam alludes to T. S.

Eliot's masterpiece *The Waste Land*, published in 1922, in which Eliot reflects on the ramifications and ruins of WWI. In the first part, "The Burial of the Dead," Eliot ironically describes life in nature after winter:

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain.
> Winter kept us warm, covering
> Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
> A little life with dried tubers. (I. lines 1–7)

The image is characterised by the gloominess of a dead land and dull roots even though it is April, when nature should be full of life, with flowers blossoming and trees bearing fruit. According to Eliot, life took on a more perilous character for people following WWI. In the midst of these ruins and cruel memories, the forgetful snow gives life to dried tubers. Eliot's commentary of the image is gloomy, pessimistic, and melancholic and provokes a chaotic impression of life after WWI. In comparison, Azzam's commentary of the image is optimistic and realistic. Azzam's illustration of "the wise tulips" contrasts with Eliot's "dried tubers," demonstrating that each writers' reflection on nature formulates their method to overcome critical moments in the history of humanity. The tragedies caused by the pandemic and by WWI are essential in both commentaries.

More than a year after the beginning of the pandemic, Hazo published his collection of poems *The Next Time We Saw Paris* on November 16, 2020, eight months after the first COVID-19 activity restrictions on March 12, 2020, in the United States. The collection offers insights into everyday experiences, and "Life at a Distance" precisely highlights life during social distancing and lockdown experiences from a Romantic point of view due to the emphasis on the beauty and freedom of nature.

> We've all been self-imprisoned
> for a week and warned of worse
> to come.
> Robins, finches
> and sparrows peck and perch.
> It's sunny but chilly today.
> It's pretending to be Spring. (lines 1–7)

For Hazo, self-isolation is like a prison and full of doubts and expectations of the worse. He employs nature as a Romantic feature in which he finds consolation and a solution for this global human tragedy. According to the Romantics, nature is pure, represents freedom, and a source of renewal and rebirth. The collective pronoun "we" puts Hazo's speaker with everyone else in comparison with the "robins, finches, and sparrows," who are free to move in nature. Therefore, the speaker's allusion to spring embodies a wish for springtime, when flowers blossom and nature is full of life again after winter. From Hazo's perspective, the general human experience and self-isolation during the pandemic contrast with freedom in nature. This tendency toward unity between the speaker and nature characterises the poem with Romantic characteristics before it becomes more materialistic in the following lines:

> We number six hundred
> Pennsylvanians less than yesterday.
> It's even worse in Michigan.
> The whole country's a target.
> To date there's no defense. (lines 8–12)

The poem documents the tragedy caused by the death of many people around the world before the discovery of COVID-19 vaccines: "To date there's no defense" (line 12). Then, the speaker highlights the social-distancing policies and their effects on people's lives:

> My neighbor's wife stands
> alone in her back porch
> with her dog.
> She waves.
> I wave. (lines 13–17)

The last image highlights the lack of social engagement, emotional and social challenges of social distancing, and self-isolation adherence through the neighbor's wife standing "alone in the back porch" (line 14). At the same time, the characters' waves at the end of the image reflect their adherence to the imposed restrictions despite their disproportionate effects to people's psychological and social well-being. The image also highlights a moment of ambiguity when the characters utter no words and just wave their hands, which provides the reader with a novel situation in modern history. Regarding social restrictions, in "Recovering from the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Focus on Older Adults" (2020), published in *Journal of Aging and Social Policy*, Morrow-Howell et al. state that during the pandemic, social isolation and loneliness negatively impacted physical and mental health (528). Taking this study into consideration, the poem illuminates the themes of loneliness and social isolation that were already seen as a public health concern due to their deleterious impacts on physical, cognitive, and mental health.

Whereas Hazo's speaker undergoes the individual experience during social distancing and self-isolation experiences, Nye overcomes the individual experience to take a pioneer role, promoting COVID-19 vaccination through poetry in "Dear Vaccine" after the first coronavirus vaccines were released in December 2020. The writer celebrates that vaccination has been an efficient tool in the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic:

> Save us, dear vaccine.
> Take us seriously.
> We had plans.
> We were going places.
> Children in kindergarten.
> So many voices, in chorus.
> Give us our world again!
> Tiny gleaming vials,
> enter our cities and towns
> shining your light.
> Restore us to each other. (lines 1–11)

Through the imaginative language of poetry, Nye presents the vaccine as a vivid character who has a superpower to steer readers toward an understanding of the vaccination's ultimate significance. Khubchandani et al. conducted a comprehensive and systematic national assessment of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in the United States. In a sample of 1878 adult participants, 22 percent of the participants reported COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy. The study shows that racial and ethnic minorities had higher vaccine hesitancy in group comparisons due to a variety of factors that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, such as lower health awareness and education among ethnic minorities. In addition, racial and ethnic minorities also had the most COVID-19 infections in the United States. Nevertheless, scholars believe that culturally competent strategies have played a prominent role in enhancing public health practices and scientific research. According to scholars, these strategies were promising in improving healthcare and engaging ethnic minorities to extend the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines (274). Regarding the Arab American minority, Dallo et al. believe that Arab Americans face barriers to health care and discrimination that negatively affected COVID-19-related testing and treatment due to their special ethnic identification as non-Hispanic White (1108). According to Alsharif, the United States 2022 Census data had seven categories for race and ethnicity: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, White, Hispanic or Latino, and non-Hispanic or non-Latino. This realisation, along with the lack of public health data on the Arab American community, encouraged Dr Raed Al-Naser, a critical care medicine specialist at Sharp Grossmont Hospital in San Diego, to conduct his own study on the Arab American patients with COVID-19 symptoms he was seeing in the ICU. According to Dr Al-Naser, the lack of public health data on Arab American patients is because of their identification as White COVID-19 patients. Through his study, he discovered

that Arab American patients constitute around 15 percent of White COVID-19 patients and about 30-35 percent of COVID-19 patients in the ICU. Dr Al-Naser believes that his study exposed the invisibility of the Arab American community in the public health data due to the lack of identifiers (paras. 1–8). Dr Nadia Abuelezam, an epidemiologist and assistant professor at Boston College's Connell School of Nursing, has studied Arab Americans' health disparities. In 2020, Dr Abuelezam published her study "Health Equity During COVID-19: the Case of Arab Americans," which concluded that Arab Americans are at high risk of COVID-19 infection, complications, and death due to various factors, including exposure to anti-Arabism, xenophobia, and other institutional exclusion practices, prevalent health issues such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension, lack of social support for new immigrants, and vaccine hesitancy. According to Dr Abuelezam, another social factor that must be considered is that Arab American homes are more likely to be multigenerational, which makes older people within these homes more vulnerable to and at-risk of infection (455–56). However, in her poetry, Nye overlooks the controversiality of the issue of ethnicity and its relationship with vaccination hesitancy and infection rates within the United States. The poem helps promote COVID-19 immunisation programmes despite ethnicity controversiality, health inequity, and the long-term effects of the vaccines in order to increases awareness of their importance. Moreover, the poem refutes misinformation, myths, misperceptions, and conspiracy theories about the vaccines by highlighting the vaccines' positive effects and their potential to save humanity's future.

In fact, Azzam's "Coronavirus Spring," Hazo's "Life at a Distance," and Nye's "Dear Vaccine" are part of a wider liberal call to confront the spread of misinformation, such as Trump's racial "China Virus" label that helped fuel anti-Asian sentiments and encourage racialisation. On March 16, 2020, Trump used this racial label for the first time on his X

(formerly known as Twitter) account to describe COVID-19. Since then, on different occasions, Trump has used variations of this epithet, including “the Chinese virus,” “China Virus,” “China Plague,” and “the Chinese plague,” which embodies the controversial discourse of superiority-inferiority, where White America is supposedly superior to “coloured” China. Furthermore, it illustrates the discourse of racialism, in which the American identity is in opposition to the Chinese. Both discourses are important in understanding Said’s postcolonial theory and neo-Orientalism. Trump’s label has contributed not only to promote misleading information about the COVID-19 vaccines, but also to suggest fear of foreigners and a sense of victimhood to justify foreign policies. From this perspective, the writers’ works stand up to promote the vaccine programmes and deconstruct Trump’s racial discursive narrative. The writers’ illustration of the pandemic emphasises that the threat and spread of COVID-19 can be controlled through behavioural changes.

In contrast, American minority writers have prominently documented the narrative of social distancing experience in their poetry. Similar to Hazo and Nye, Juan Felipe Herrera’s “Social Distancing,” published online on *Poets.org* (2020), responds to the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing experience. The poem underscores the importance of uncertainty in American minority literature, highlighting how ambiguity enables the writers to express their unique racial identities. In collaboration with Anthony Cody, Herrara organises the poem in a distinct arrangement that imposes the theme of uncertainty regarding social distancing:

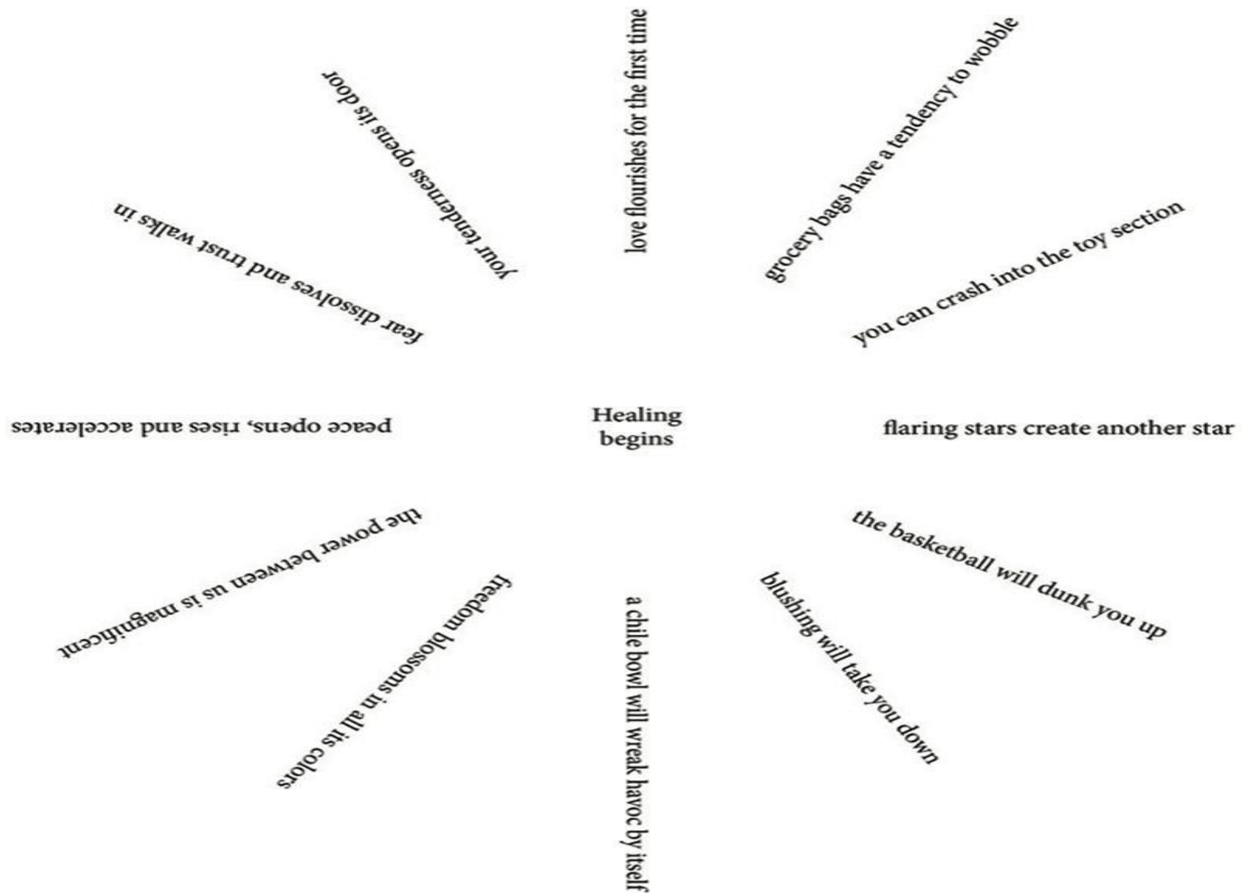

Fig. 1. Juan Felipe Herrera's "Social Distancing" Designed by Anthony Cody

Herrera ensures that his readers are uncertain about where the poem begins or ends: "The solar circle poem can be read in any direction, or simultaneously with various voices at a "distance," or it can be cut out and spun like a wheel. You choose where to begin and end" ("Social Distancing," para. 1). The audio version of the poem, which was developed by the Academy of American Poets, presents the poem in the following order:

> grocery bags have a tendency to wobble
> you can crash into the toy section
> flaring stars create another star
> the basketball will dunk you up
> blushing will take you down
> a chill bowl will wreak havoc by itself
> freedom blossoms in all its colors

the power between us is magnificent
peace opens, rises and accelerates
fear dissolves and trust walks in
your tenderness opens its door
love flourishes for the first time
Healing
begins (lines 1–14)

The fragmented images of the poem emphasise people's mental health during the pandemic and the social distancing policies, which revolve around the idea of healing. The writer intentionally capitalises the word "Healing" to highlight his theme that social distancing leads to healing, which appears as a bright spot at the end of a dark tunnel. According to Herrera, social distancing will bring people together to begin a new era for humanity.

However, Handal's literary contribution is not limited to poetry about the pandemic. The poet won the Creative Award at MEMO's Palestine Book Awards 2020 for her collection of poetry *Life in a Country Album* (2020) during the pandemic, in which she said, "Poetry like an alarm reminds you that you will survive. For instance, I got this Palestine Book Award during pandemic. It is like a sunlight after darkness" ("MEMO in Conversation with Nathalie Handal" para. 8). Handal composed "The City," published online in *Poets.org* (2022) when she contracted COVID-19. The poem alludes to Constantine P. Cavafy's "The City," published in *C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems* (1975). In Cavafy's poem, Cavafy's speaker addresses a passive character who tries to escape the place that reminds them of their failures, hoping for a better life and future:

You said: "I'll go to another country, go to another shore,
find another city better than this one.
Whatever I try to do is fated to turn out wrong
and my heart lies buried like something dead.
How long can I let my mind moulder in this place?
Wherever I turn, wherever I look,
I see the black ruins of my life, here,

> where I've spent so many years, wasted them, destroyed them
> totally." (lines 1–8)

Cavafy's speaker believes that change comes from within, not from leaving places. The mental affliction that impacts the speaker suggests a dialogue they have with themself:

> You won't find a new country, won't find another shore.
> This city will always pursue you.
> You'll walk the same streets, grow old
> in the same neighborhoods, turn gray in these same houses.
> You'll always end up in this city. Don't hope for things elsewhere:
> there's no ship for you, there's no road.
> Now that you've wasted your life here, in this small corner,
> you've destroyed it everywhere in the world. (lines 9–16)

In Handal's poem, the writer creates another dialogue with Cavafy's speakers and leaves her readers in a moment of uncertainty. In the poem, Handal mixes the poetic intertextuality with simulation:

> You tell me: I'm going to another country,
> another city, another body.
> Perhaps my heart will stay uncertain,
> and I will destroy my history but I am leaving.
> Even if on every street, I find the ruins of our bodies,
> I'll roam like a restless soul anyway.
>
> I tell you: you won't find a new country,
> new city, new body. You'll return to roam
> the same ruins, same streets, same quartier,
> return to complain in the same room
> of the same house, return to the memory of our intertwined bodies.
> You will always end up in Roma: I will always remain in you.
> And may be late, you'll see, that what you destroyed
> is worth more than all the worlds you wasted your time in. (lines
> 1–14)

Handal composed the poem when she was self-isolated in a hotel room. At first sight, the poem seems a sequel to Cavafy's. Handal's speaker addresses Cavafy's speakers and reveals how they feels about the concept of place. In "New Blog Series: Nathalie Handal's 'The City and the Writer'" (2010), Handal writes that she has "a passion for cities, their irresistible unrest, the way

they make you feel unsettled yet welcomed" (para. 1). According to the writer, the city and the body are in constant movement, carrying along their non-place of belonging. For Handal, the place seems unsettled and hosted inside her poetry. Handal contrasts her diasporic soul and sick body with the city of Rome. The first two represent sickness and death, and the latter represents beauty and life:

> The city, like the body, like love, is unreachable. During the pandemic, the view from the Gianicolo Hill of alluring Rome was in contrast to my aching body. What is death amidst such beauty? When I reread Cavafy's poem this time, I wrote: *You tell me*. Maybe the speaker is responding to Cavafy or the speaker in his poem, to Rome or the lover who returns after betraying their voyage, or to all of them and I find that only the city can give me the questions to my answers. ("The City" para. 1)

Whereas Nye's "Dear Vaccine" strives to raise awareness about the vaccines to overcome the pandemic, Handal's "The City" digs deeply into the human soul during the pandemic to ask questions about death and existence and gives answers to them. Handal's speakers explore the notion of displacement in a difficult time to expand it beyond Rome's borders in a search for "another country," "another city," and "another body" (lines 1–2). Nevertheless, Handal's speaker embraces a universal meaning in the diasporic question that is articulated by the writer's mobile identity established by the pronoun "I." The dialogue also embodies the possibility of uncertainty: "My heart will stay uncertain" (line 3). The intention to roam everywhere is undoubtedly a key point in the narratives related to place, identity, and diaspora at the time of the pandemic. According to Handal, these narratives are constructed as a process never completed. In other words, they are unreachable: "You won't find a new country, / new city, new body" (lines 7–8). On the contrary, Handal's speaker assures Cavafy's characters and Handal's passive speaker that their return to "the same ruins, same streets, same quartiere, / return to complain in the same room / of the same house, return to the memory of our intertwined bodies" (lines 9–11)

is inevitable. From this perspective, Handal’s poem emphasises the emotional distress and mental health effects of the pandemic, which have forced everyone to explore its implications for people’s lives. The poem also captures a moment of doubt and reveals that people have experienced significant disruption and uncertainty through self-isolation and lockdown policies. Handal’s “The City” reflects the social mental context in which it was written. In regard to minority literature, the four poems — Hazo’s “Life at a Distance,” Nye’s “Dear Vaccine,” Herrera’s “Social Distancing,” and Handal’s “The City” — highlight the significance of place for American minority literature to declare the individuality of the writers’ racial identity and their ability to transcend both geographic and constructed boundaries at critical times.

The health disparities among the Arab American community are not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although data on Arab American health is limited, Dr Abuelezam discovered that the health outcomes and vulnerability of the community are clearly different compared to the outcomes of White non-Hispanics (456). In the same context, Dr Al-Naser’s study highlights that Arab American patients are socioeconomically less privileged and do not receive enough access to insurance compared to Black and Hispanic patients (Alsharif, paras. 17–20). These two factors play a prominent role in collecting inaccurate data on the national level and increasing health issues within the Arab American community. Most importantly, political agendas have a decisive contribution here. During an interview on The Ray Hanania Show, an Arab Radio Show in the United States, Khalaf stated that he believes that the continued exclusion of Arab Americans in the decennial United States Census data resulted in these citizens missing out on many of the financial benefits and massive data that are required for healthcare and immunity programmes. Some Arab American organisations, such as ADC and AAI, have demanded that a special identifier for Arab Americans be added MENA

categorisation to improve data accuracy, encourage every Arab American individual to participate fully, and enhance cultural competence. As a population of colour, Arab Americans have been invisible in critical national data for decades. Fortunately, Arab American intellectuals have made great efforts to enhance cultural competence and to reduce health disparities, which will enable the Arab American community to obtain more benefits and rights in every sector and ensure that every individual will be counted, and their needs will be studied and considered.

This chapter explored the literary influences that shaped the work of the three Arab American poets who are central to this study. These writers have developed unique literary techniques that have played a significant role in defining Arab American literature within the broader landscape of minority literature. Intertextuality is one technique highlighted in the chapter and indicates an affirmation of the writers' hybrid identities. In fact, Nye's implementation of the allusion technique exposes the dual identity inner struggle. Simultaneously, it affirms her speaker's ability to exist between two worlds and creates a third space. As for Handal, intertextuality represents the politics of minorities and criticises United States foreign policies in the Middle East and how these policies affect Arab Americans. Hazo's intertextuality reveal the writer's intention to engage with themes of life that distance him from the controversiality of the politics of minorities. However, the three writers' employment of the poet-prophet concept greatly reveal a high sense of communal responsibility, besides, a critical awareness of superiority–inferiority discourse that fuelled the notion of anti-Arabism. In the chapter, I argued that the writers encourage readers to decolonise the mind and overcome racial discourse. In addition, I contended that the memory of war has influenced the writers to rewrite war poetry from a humanistic perspective. I also investigated the significance of family traditions in building cultural continuity. I argued that the writers' selected works function on the cultural

and individual levels as a cultural facilitator between generations and play a major role in the assertation of Arab American identity. I contended that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Hazo, Handal, and Nye helped establish narratives that transcend any geographical or ethnic borders despite the obstacles that the Arab American community has faced, including health disparities.

Reading these issues together offers a comprehensive understanding of how Arab American poets have to negotiate their identity and culture through the use of literary forms. As it becomes evident through such an analysis of the intertextuality, the poets affirm their existence and at the same time criticise the anti-Arab sociopolitical issues of the West, especially the foreign policies of the United States. The poet-prophet concept highlights their communal responsibility and critical awareness of anti-Arabism. This study underlines how family traditions and memory, particularly related to war, become the agents of cultural memory and identity assertion. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the poets transcended the ethnoscope and reinforced its cultural narratives through such works, thereby countering the community's crisis.

Conclusion

My literary analysis of the content of Samuel Hazo's, Nathalie Handal's, and Naomi Shihab Nye's poetry has shown that contemporary Arab American poets are embodying in their poetry distinctive cultural intersections, which play across a range of political and sociocultural topics. In their work, these poets have chosen to cross cultural boundaries and reside in areas they have created to exemplify the complexities of the hybrid identity's struggle. They have drawn strength from their Arab heritage and culture mixed with the Western culture in which they grew up, and they did not limit themselves to the literature of ethnic minorities. In this thesis, I claim that Hazo, Handal, and Nye succeeded in overcoming ethnocentrism and essentialism and that their literary works are clear evidence of the marginalisation, exclusion, and racism ethnic minorities suffer in the United States, presented in an aesthetic context. The poetry of Arab American writers has the advantage of not being confined to mere ethnicity but instead is deep and intricate poetry. The images, ideas, and similes these authors have used reflect a multiculturalism that does not stop at geographical borders. The central argument of this thesis is that Arab American contemporary poetry in the post-9/11 era engages with controversial global, political, and cultural issues based on a deep understanding of the complexity of its racial existence and, in the process, redefines Arab American identity and literature. This can only be achieved via the medium of poetry because of its brevity and formal freedom.

The domestic problems of the United States, the foreign policy priorities of every elected administration, and the political tension around the world have put Arab American poets under renewed pressure to redefine their identities and Arab American literature as well. Although the three selected poets have creatively reflected on the political, social, cultural, and racial complexity of the hybrid identity, their poetry exceeds the limitations of minority literature and

deserves revisiting due to its global implications and humanistic dimensions. As a predominant articulation of Arab American literature, I argued that Hazo's, Handal's, and Nye's poetry contribute to the visibility of the Arab American literature and community. I also contended that the writers have used their poetry as a platform to document the political and sociocultural changes of the United States. On a domestic level, this documentation is part of voicing their own experiences. In this sense, Arab American poetry does not provide expression only; it provides celebration of the Arab American experience. On the other side, they have contributed to the increased awareness of contemporary global concerns, including health concerns.

In exploring Hazo's, Handal's, and Nye's poetry, I propose a perspective that repositions Arab American poetry as a model for challenging and resisting the dominant discourse — an imperative response to the emergence of neo-Orientalism. I contend that the works I chose for analysis offer fresh insights into contentious themes, such as Trumpism, anti-Arabism, and the discourse of superiority-inferiority. In the fabric of my argument, I contend that Arab American poets play a pivotal role in deconstructing prevalent issues, such as discrimination, racialisation, and marginalisation. These issues are predominant in the redefinition of Arab American identity and its manifestation in poetry. Despite their immersion in a Western context, these writers preserve a distinctive cultural identity that integrates their Arabic heritage. I also argue that this cultural continuity contributes significantly to the creation of poetry that challenges prevailing ideological discourses, notably those attempting to categorise their ethnicity as "White." In the multifaceted process of reshaping a new Arab American identity, these writers not only safeguard their Arabic legacy but also create connections with successive generations. Additionally, I emphasise that Arab American writers play a crucial role in critiquing the vulnerabilities inherent in the United States' imperial intentions. They investigate the nature and

implications of Trumpism, a force promoting White supremacy, focusing on the imperative of decolonising the mind to counter the pervasive discourse of neo-Orientalism.

Throughout this thesis, I investigate the way that Arab American poets draw from historical and political events, interweaving them with personal experiences. This dynamic interplay, I argue, propels their poetry from individual exclusivity to collective inclusivity. In a distinct examination, I also contend that the selected poets' portrayals of Saudi women parallel the misrepresentations embedded in Orientalist discourse. These depictions not only unveil the marginalisation and racialisation in the Arab American community against Saudi women but also contribute to divisive narratives. Moreover, I suggest that the chosen poetry introduces innovative perspectives on space, place, and border crossing. The freedom inherent in poetic form and diction allows for fluid movement between these notions, enhancing the depth and breadth of the discourse. This exploration underscores the significance of Arab American poetry as an influential tool for resisting hegemonic discourse, particularly in the face of neo-Orientalism. Through the lenses of cultural preservation, identity redefinition, and sociopolitical critique, Arab American poets contribute richly to the broader United States narrative.

However, a great deal of recent Arab American literary criticism has concentrated on the misrepresentation of Arabs in the media and the hybrid identity struggle, in addition to the existing individual, organisational, institutional, and cultural prejudice, as well as the discrimination that Arab Americans have experienced in the post-9/11 era. The most striking thing about reviewing Arab American poetry is that there is a relative absence in some critical areas, including literally analysis of the erotic implications and interpretations in Arab American poetry. The literature included in this thesis about the aesthetics of sensuality, sexuality, nudism, and eroticism might pave the way for further investigations. Hence, I believe that critical studies

in these areas would provide a wider context and a broader vision for a better understanding of Arab American poetry.

Throughout my research, I noticed the lack of recognition that Arab American poets and scholars have made to the modern social, political, economic, and religious transitions in Saudi Arabia. Contemporary Arab American poets and scholars have ignored how Saudi Arabia has not only affected changes but has been concurrently affected by these profound changes as well. Moreover, it is important to note, how intensely relevant these changes are to the economic and foreign policies of the United States. An exception to this is research that does not involve literary criticism, exemplified by works such as *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change,* by Bernard Haykel et al. (2015). As a Saudi female scholar, I believe that my scholarship is part of the contemporary Saudi female empowerment that modern Arab American poets have failed to acknowledge. An additional investigation should be conducted to consider the fact that the representation of Saudi women has shown how Arab American poets have notably failed to articulate the paradigm shift among contemporary Saudi women.

Writers have swiftly responded to contemporary pressures and conflicts, paying special attention to warnings about climate change and the depletion of natural resources. These issues have become crucial in modern history and have given rise to a distinct literary approach known as ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, emerging as an independent field in the 1980s, involves the critical examination of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Cheryll Glotfelty, in the introduction to her edited book *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), argues that ecocriticism explores the interplay between literary production and the natural world. She posits that "ecological criticism shares the fundamental premises that human culture is connected to the

physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (xviii–xix). Despite that Arab American literature has addressed this issue through profound observations of nature, implicitly conveying messages that call for the preservation of the devastated global environment, which stands as one of the most urgent contemporary problems, little attention has been paid to study Arab American poetry from an ecocultural perspective. One of the challenges of Arab American literature's engagement with nature is its reading from a political perspective. In "Water Occupation and the Ecology of Arab American Literature" (2019), Haque highlights the problem of reading Arab American literature in terms of ecocriticism. The writer states that Arab American literature's engagement with the environment is often understood as parallel to the political dimension. In other words, the depiction of nature is employed to document Arab American experiences of land and the immigrants' journey. Therefore, preserving nature and environmental activism are luxurious concerns for Arab American writings whereas engaging with decisive issues, including exile, loss, identity, war, and racism, is a priority for them. The writer uses Majaj's poem "Cadence," published in *Geographies of Light* (2009), to reflect on this reading: "And the protests: "We Have so many problems! / – our identity to defend, our cultures under siege. / We can't waste time admiring tree!"" (lines 23–25). Haque relates the absence of environmental degradation to the political nature of Arab American texts (68–70). In my conclusion, I argue that the implications of climate change and global warming in Arab American poetry deserve further investigation and revisiting from an ecocultural perspective due to the limitations of criticism in this area.

However, there should be more focus on the significance of the role of musical instruments in the development of Arab American hybrid identity, which will immensely facilitate to address the gap in the field. Music is an important means to formulate ethnic identity

and emerges as a prominent connection to the New World or the old legacy. Overall, this thesis has focused on how musical instruments function as cultural representations that dynamically interact to narrate stories and define cultures. Even though I have tried to produce a comprehensive analysis of the functionality of musical instruments, especially the *oud*, the field still lacks deep exploration, and more critical studies on the musicality of the *oud* in Arab American poetry are required.

In the process of crafting my thesis on Arab American poetry, my aim was to productively shed light on critical areas within this field, with the hope of informing contemporary Arab American studies. I seek to inspire other scholars in delving deeper into this subject and cultivate further research. My sincere wish is that my contribution will play a part in altering the Western perspective toward the Other and in building a meaningful bridge between Arab culture and the Western world.

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