

Identity Crisis in Yussef Elguindi's *Back of the Throat* (2006) and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012)

أثرمة الطوية في مسرحية يوسف الجندى «انطقها خاءاً» (٢٠٠٦)

و«الحجاج موسى وشيري في العالم الجديد» (٢٠١٢)

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Abstract

The Egyptian-American playwright, Youssef Elguindi, in his plays *Back of the Throat* (2006) and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012) shows an interest in exploring the issue of cultural power dynamics bringing to the fore the experience of eastern immigrants in the west. He portrays characters that find themselves, as immigrants, trapped between the western American culture and their original eastern one. In his *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha discusses the concepts of Mimicry, Ambivalence, and Hybridity discussing the cultural and trans-cultural ties between the western host culture and the Eastern one. In fact, cultural ties are reciprocal, so when one imitates another culture, one will reach a point where he combines the two cultures producing what Bhabha refers to as a 'third space.' This third space is a new cultural arena in which the immigrant adapts his existence. Hybridity is a stage which simultaneously combines the thing and its opposite, and with which the culture of the other completely mixes with the original one producing thus a third space for the individual. It could be that the playwright suggests that through adopting Hybridity one may find a solution for the struggle of the hyphenated identities. The individual must be fully aware of, tolerant with, and accepts the diversity and the dynamics of east-west cultural and trans-cultural ties.

Key Words: Mimicry – Ambivalence – Hybridity – Immigration – Cultural difference.

Identity Crisis in Youssef Elguindi's *Back of the Throat* (2006) and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012)

In his plays *Back of the Throat* (2006) and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012), the Egyptian-American playwright, Youssef Elguindi, shows an interest in exploring the issue of cultural power dynamics underlining the experience of middle eastern immigrants in the west. He portrays characters that find themselves, as immigrants, trapped between the western American culture and their original eastern one. In an interview with Noran Morsi, Elguindi says: "My plays are essentially about immigration and immigrants. I funnel my interest in the subject matter through the prism of Egyptian and Muslim characters because that's my background" (Morsi *Interview*).

Back of the Throat (2006) and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012) will be read throughout this paper whilst highlighting Homi Bhabha's concepts of Mimicry, Ambivalence, and Hybridity which he presents in his *Location of Culture*. Any eastern advent to the western culture most likely goes through this three-stage process. First, he/she tends to imitate his host culture in an attempt to have an access to the western culture. Mimicry at this stage functions as a cover-up for the imitator does not sincerely adopt the cultural constituents he imitates. Instead, he uses mimicry as a tool either to recommend himself to his host, or as a step towards assimilation. To Homi Bhabha, mimicry looks "like a camouflage, not a harmonization of expression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence" (Bhabha "Location of Culture" 90). Therefore, mimicry is no more than a disguise behind which real identity hides.

The second stage is Ambivalence which is strongly attached to Mimicry and Hybridity. Ambivalence is the natural result of an inner struggle of a confused perplexed identity. It is the articulation of the dynamics of power within an immigrant's self. The "discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective mimicry must continually produce its

slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha "Location of Culture" 86). An ambivalent person is entrapped in a certain conflict between two diverse cultural identities feeling that he belongs to both cultures and at the same time he does not really belong to either of them.

Finally, and following the stage of Ambivalence comes that of Hybridity. When one imitates another culture, one will reach a point where he combines the two cultures producing what Bhabha refers to as a 'third space.' This third space is a new cultural arena in which the immigrant adapts his existence. The emergence of this cultural "third Space ... challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the people" (Bhabha "Location of Culture" 37). It enhances the idea that culture is adopted and not inherited. Yet, once it is adopted, culture becomes inescapable and its traits become an essential part of people's identity. Hybridity or the 'third space' is a middle ground between two contradictory cultures. Bhabha writes: "Hybridity is the re-evaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" (Bhabha "Location of Culture" 112). Hybridity is the result of the domination of the host culture on an immigrant to the limit that its constituents start to represent a fair share of an immigrant's identity. Mostly, immigrants would not resist the impact of the host culture on their identities in order to escape the sense of alienation they suffer from or the discrimination that befalls them due to cultural differences.

In an interview with Caryl Philips, Stuart Hall expresses the impact of discrimination on immigrants, and shows how the western society in which he lives, namely Britain, is unable to accept him as a full citizen. He says: "People looked at me as an immigrant. They couldn't tell me apart from another boy just knocking around Notting Hill – the New Left Club had a club in

Notting Hill that we were involved in" (Hall, "Stuart Hall" 40). The protagonists of Elguindi's *Back of the Throat* (2006) and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012) personify the experience of the immigrants who live within societies dominated by the western culture. Immigration does not only affect the first generation of Arab immigrants such as Musa in *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*, but it also extends to affect the second generation; those who were born and raised in the west like Khaled in *The Back of the Throat*. Mostly, an immigrant would go through a period in which he mimics the host culture at the beginning of his journey in order not to be viewed as an outsider.

The main goal of western colonialism was to make the colonized wholeheartedly believe in and adopt their culture. In his "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Bhabha quoted an excerpt of Sir Edward Cust's writings to the colonial office in 1839:

It is out of season to question at this time of day, the original policy of conferring on every colony of the British Empire a mimic representation of the British Constitution.... To give to a colony the forms of independence is a mockery; she would not be a colony for a single hour if she could maintain an independent station. (Bhabha 125)

Cultural independence means that the colonized nation will be self-sufficient and in no need of the colonizer. That is why it has been planned since the time of colonialism that the colonized peoples should always be dependent on the colonizer. Otherwise, the colonizers will lose all the power and the benefits they get from being in control of the colonized countries.

Most of the Middle Eastern countries were colonized by the west, that is why many of Middle Eastern adverts to the west resort to imitating their powerful western host culture. Many of the characters of *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* and *Back of the Throat* resort to the imitation of the American lifestyle. In *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*, Musa, for

example, keeps alcohol at home despite being a Muslim. He asks his girlfriend, Sheri, if she wants some: "I have alcohol if you want" (*Pilgrims*, 4). Musa also gets involved in an illegitimate relationship with Sheri, a White American girl. Likewise, Tayyib, a Somali Muslim immigrant, gives Musa wine instead of paying him money for giving him rides by his taxi.

In *Back of the Throat*, the second-generation immigrant, Khaled, has let go of his Egyptian culture and has got immersed to the core in the American culture. He speaks only English and does not have the slightest idea about Arabic. He was born and raised in USA, so he lives as a full American citizen and thinks of himself as an American individual who belongs to this society. When addressed in Arabic by the investigators: Khaled responds: "Am I supposed to understand that?... I knew you were looking for Arabic speakers.... Yes. I keep telling myself I should learn it" (*Throat*, 3). He also used to have an American girlfriend who lived with him before they broke up. Again, Khaled presents an example of a Muslim Arab who chooses willingly to be completely Americanized by fully copying the American lifestyle.

This kind of mimicry "is most commonly seen when members of a colonized society (say, Indians or Africans) imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonizers" (Singh). As shown above, these Arab characters choose to imitate the cultural components of the other such as language, and traditions. This kind of imitation functions as a mask used by the immigrants to be endeared and accepted by their hosts. This behaviour of imitation reflects the easterners' inner desire to suppress all cultural differences between their own culture and the western culture.

However, mimicry does not bring about the "harmonization or repression of difference"; rather, it represents a form of resemblance that defends presence by "displaying it in part.... Its threat... comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory identity effects in the play of a power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no itself"

(Bhabha, "The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" 131). The imitator becomes in fact a deformed copy of the imitated: neither a full eastern nor a complete copy of a western identity.

This can be noticed in *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri* through Tayyib, Musa's Somali Muslim friend, who lives like an American in regard of his social relationships. He does not mind getting involved in illegitimate relationships with women for example. However, he is still eastern to the core when it comes to his beliefs concerning marriage. He admits that he would never marry any of his girlfriends and that . He says to Musa: " I have more women than suitcases. The difference between you and me? When I go with women, I know what I'm doing. I'm having a nice time. And so are they. I am not falling in love" (*Pilgrims* 31-32). Though Tayyib still identifies himself as a Muslim, he consciously goes against the teachings of his religion goofing around with women, in order to look like an American. Yet, this mimicry results in only being "the *blurred copy* that Bhabha referred to" (El-Bardisy 112). His desire to assimilate with the more powerful western culture is not out of self-hatred but it is simply out of his wish to have an access to the western society and its cultural power.

Mimicry can also be a rebellious act in two cases: either as a means of mockery of the other or as a means of empowering the weaker. Sometimes immigrants use mimicry as a means of criticizing the culture of the other. This is indicated by Gamila's copying of Sheri in *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri* in order to mock and criticize Sheri's western culture. . Gamila appears as a character that is always capable of maintaining some sort of balance between her Americanism and her being a Muslim Arab. Although Gamila was raised in USA, She adheres to her Muslim Arab culture. She is, for example, a *hijabi* who has never been involved in an affair with any man. However, she considers taking off her hijab when she discovers Musa's cheating on her concluding that the reason behind his cheating is that "Musa is infatuated with Sheri because of her audacity" (El-Bardisy 113). Consequently, she gets to mock Sheri's American culture: she

takes off her hijab in front of Musa for the first time to prove that she can be as bold as Sheri. Gamila's imitation of Sheri's boldness with Musa is not motivated by her admiration of the American culture or by an attitude of assimilation like that of Musa, and Tayyib in *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri*, or that of Khaled in *Back of the Throat*. Rather than that, it is an imitation to mock the American culture. Mimicry, in such cases, seems to be "a kind of resistance against colonizer because mimicry does not simply imitate, but also mock the colonizer of being differen[t]" (Dhanu 31). Gamila mocks Sheri for being different. Gamila believes that a woman must be chaste and never throw herself at a man. She says to Sheri:

I used to always wonder about girls like you in high school.... I couldn't understand how some girls could just throw themselves at boys. Be that easy. With no respect for themselves. People look at me and think I'm the weak one for wearing this [hijab]. When I used to look at girls like you and think what a waste. How weak; and pathetic. To get used like that. (*Pilgrims* 52)

Mimicry can also be seen as a means of empowerment when it "involves the copying of 'western' concepts of justice, freedom, and rule of law" (Singh). This is the second case in which mimicry becomes subversive. In *Back of the Throat*, Khaled is shown throughout the play as a helpless character that is totally detached from his original culture to become entirely Americanized. However, when he shows that he has sound knowledge of the American constitution and that he knows his rights according to the law, he becomes threatening and unapproachable to the two investigators who broke into his house accusing him of being a terrorist. When Bartlett and Carl, the investigators, insist on invading his privacy, he defends his rights saying:

I have rights.... I do have rights.... I don't have to show you anything if I don't want to unless you have a --- which doesn't mean I'm trying to hide anything, it just means I care

enough about what makes this country – you know – to exercise the right to say no. There is nothing on that computer that would interest you, I promise you. And even if there were, I still have the right to --- (*Bartlett continues to stare at him.*) I'd rather not have people go poking around something that's still very private.... It would be a horrible violation for me. (*Throat, 22*)

Despite his vulnerability, Khaled employs his knowledge of the American constitution empowering himself in this aggressive situation. He resorts to the fact that he has the American citizenship and that he has the same rights as any non-Arab American. Khaled's call for his rights, however, irritates the racist Bartlett and Carl who have not expected that an Arab immigrant can use their law against them:

Bartlett: It pisses me off!... "it's my country." *This* is your ... country. Right here, right now, in this room America is out there and it wants nothing to do with you....To hear these people who got here two hours ago quote back to me Thomas Jefferson and the Founding Fathers. They're not his fucking fathers. it's like they wave it at you like ... (*Sing-song*) "You can't touch me, I have the Constitution. (*Throat, 25*)

Khaled imitates his American hosts in their adherence to the constitution. He also uses 'their' constitution to empower himself against their injustices. Incapacitating the investigators with his knowledge of their laws stops mimicry from being regarded as trivial imitation of the other. Rather, it becomes a means of empowering the weaker party. It also becomes the way through which the inferior traumatized person faces the oppressor.

This continuous confrontation between two contradictory cultures within the psyche of an immigrant result in a sense of ambivalence. At some point, an immigrant does not become sure of his\her actual identity. In *Back of the Throat* and *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri*, almost all the characters undergo a state of Ambivalence due to being trapped between two or more choices

which are usually contradicting. This contradiction confuses them and blurs the dividing lines between what they should or should not do. Ambivalence does not only affect Arab immigrants, but it also affects white Americans like Bartlett, Carl and Beth. They are torn up between their attitude of accepting immigrants and being prejudiced against them. Americans are usually brought up to believe that they are tolerant human beings who welcome all immigrants. Bartlett says: "God bless immigrants. My great grandfather was an immigrant.... This country wouldn't be anything without them" (*Throat* 26). However, after the 9/11 attacks, they are unconsciously systemized by their media that Arab immigrants are not welcomed anymore, that they should suspect any Muslim, and that the Middle eastern immigrants represent a threat to their national security. Now, they undergo an internal conflict resulting from two contradictory poles: the concepts of openness, acceptance of the other and equality ethics which they have always believed to be a basic element of the American culture on the one hand, and on the other the biases against their fellow Arab-American citizens about whom a negative image is drawn and diffused by their national media. This opposition makes their behaviours incompatible. Carl says:

You know what I really resent?... what you force us to become. We are a decent bunch and do not want to be dragged down to your level. But no, you just have to drag us down, don't you. You have to gross us out with your level of crap. I personally hate this, you know that. I hate it when I have to beat the shit out of someone because then ... I have to shut out everything good about me to do my job to defend and protect. (*Throat*, 44)

Carl expresses his resentment and despise of this situation that forces him to act in contrast to what he really is. That is why Carl tries to justify his unaccepted behaviour against Khaled by blaming it all on him. Carl and Bartlett's ambivalence stems from the contradiction between their desire to maintain their decency and civility, and their duty which forces them to adopt an

indignant attitude and pitiless behaviour against the Arab immigrant Khaled. Thus, they get confused and shocked at their inability to realize the distinctive line between the truth and their claims. This results in their sense of ambivalence.

An ambivalent person "is defined as a person who experiences opposing emotions and attitudes" (Olsson, 4). Ambivalence has become one of the clear traits of the Arab-Americans personalities. Arab immigrants, like Musa, Gamila, Khaled and Tayyib, find themselves always entrapped between two choices: either to follow their religion teachings and their original culture, or to assume the dominant American culture. The former choice will relieve their conscience pangs and helps them feel less psychologically suffocated. The latter choice, however, would make them socially accepted. Gamila, who at first has thought that her adherence to her religion will maintain her intimate relationship with her fiancé, finds out that this adherence makes her lose him. Hence, she reaches a point where she questions the reasons why she adheres to her original culture. She says: "What am I Protecting? My Reputation as a good Muslim girl?" (*Pilgrims* 67). She is in fact completely confused because she finds out that what she believes to be right –her adherence to her eastern culture- is the very reason why Musa cheats on her with Sheri. He says:

I can be what I want with her [Sheri]! For the first time. I can't live in this world you want me to.... Why did I come to this country? So I can stay in this same world? ... I feel I am supposed to be someone I'm not!.... what you expect of me!.... why you want to marry me? Because you think you keep in touch with back home? With our religion? I am a terrible Muslim. I go to the mosque to see friends, not God. Of course God. But God is not happy with me. I fail him too. (*Pilgrims* 69)

Musa decides to break up with Gamila because she links him with his original culture. That is why he ends up his state of ambivalence by preferring his host's culture to his original culture

instead of being torn up between both cultures. That is why he gets involved in a relationship with a white American girl, called Sheri. He finds her as an embodiment of the culture of this new world, and the key to have an access to its culture. One of the main constituents of any culture is language. Stuart Hall states that language is "a key to the culture, that language and writings [are] always situated in a much broader cultural field" (Stuart Hall 40). That is why Musa prefers Sheri to Gamila: with her, his "English improves" (*Pilgrims* 57).

Understanding cultural and trans-cultural ties, ambivalence occurs when one gets in touch with the other's culture without biases. The union of Sheri and Musa gives hope that reconciliation between the eastern and western cultures could be possible provided that both sides intend to accept the differences of the other. However, an immigrant would most likely reach the stage which Bhabha refers to as the 'Third Space' where eastern and western cultural constituents meet within the psyche of an immigrant to make a hybrid out of him.

Passing through the stages of Mimicry and Ambivalence, cultural and trans-cultural ties come to the third stage of Hybridity. At this stage, an immigrant would represent "a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" (Bhabha *Location* 13). The traits that the immigrants adopt from the host culture would gradually become part and parcel of their identity, a combination of two cultures: their original culture and the culture of the other. At this stage, an immigrant formulates a "third space," a place in-between these two cultures formed by mixing up together the cultural components of the two parties. This immigrant would not be a fully Arabic person or a fully American one. In *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World, and Back of the Throat*, the characters simultaneously act as Arabs as well as Americans. In *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri*, Musa becomes a hybrid combining the traits of two contradictory cultures. He is an Arab-Egyptian who starts imitating his American hosts mentally and culturally. For example, he has come to terms with having a

girlfriend, and drinking alcohol. Yet, he is at the same time "a semi-practicing Muslim" (Walker). He also has fair knowledge of Islam, so his Muslim eastern core sometimes overcomes his western half. This mixture of cultures that is deeply rooted in his psyche results in some paradoxes concerning his ideas about himself and the others. For example, his original culture as a Muslim makes him unable to accept the idea that a Muslim may commit sins consciously and on purpose. That is why he judges the Muslim owner of the "corner store" for not abiding to the instructions of Islam: " I say, why you do that? You Muslim. This is not good.... He says nothing. Says it's business.... But it's not right. Not being a good Muslim" (*Pilgrims* 6). However, Musa is unconscious that he himself, like the corner store owner, has also violated many of the Islamic instructions simply because he has already adopted many of the attributes of the American culture that contradict with his original culture. When Sheri defends the corner store owner saying that all people are sinners, Musa argues:

Musa: But some sins are obvious. You can say no.

Sheri: Like Scotch?

Musa: This is a weakness. God understands weakness.

Sheri: sounds like a slippery-slope to me. (*Pilgrims* 6)

Hence, it can be said that Musa exists in the "third space which counters the dominant representation of cultural, ethnic and racial identity" (Marotta 2). Musa's behaviours can neither be classified as fully American nor as fully Arab. Rather, the way of life he adopts becomes a cultural hybrid, a mixture of Muslim, Arab, Egyptian, Eastern, Western, and American elements. In an attempt to settle his inner conflicts, Musa begins to accept the idea that he is a combination of two cultures. Stuart Hall asserts that "for the 'doubly inscribed body', hybridity, hyphenated identity and the third space might seem attractive solutions to the contradictions of embodiment and emplacement" (Rojek 55). A Hybrid person is forced to formulate an identity out of his sense of hybridity. Since an immigrant is neither a fully American nor a fully Egyptian, Somali, Sudanese... etc., he finds resort in identifying his

hyphenated identity as an Egyptian-American or a Sudanese-American and so on.

White Americans also could experience hybridity believing in the thing and its opposite: like Musa in *Pilgrims*, the white Americans Bartlett and Carl's speech contradicts with their behaviour in *Back of Throat*. Bartlett and Carl, for example, say that America is for everyone but they cannot accept Arabs among them. They claim that they are civilized but they show savagery and terror against Arabs like Khaled. They claim that they hate violence, but they willingly choose to beat Khaled and try to find a lawful justification for their behaviour. Their prejudices against Arabs are the result of the negative stereotypical image instilled in their cultural identity by the mainstream media: "After 9/11, Anti-Arab institutionalized racism is considered necessary by the neoconservatives in the Bush administration, whose ethos... determine that Arabs are by necessity dissidents, worthy of surveillance, detainment, or deportation" (Almostafa 48). This Western phobia and fear from Arabs and Muslims develop some sort of duality, or hybridity within white Americans' subconscious. Bartlett's hybridity becomes clear in his conversation with Khaled:

And I have nothing against immigrants. Let me make that clear.... The more, the merrier.... God bless every ... one of them. My family worked damn hard to make this country the place it is. And if you came here to do the same, I will personally roll out the red carpet for you. But if you've come here to take from us. Pick all the good things this country has to offer and give nothing back and then dump on us?... I don't think you're making a contribution, not at all.... You're unemployed. You're on welfare.... You're blocked, you're not writing, that means all you're doing is taking from the system.... You're involved in something you shouldn't be, that's why you're blocked. It's hard being creative when all you're thinking about is plotting destruction. (*Throat* 26)

Bartlett claims that he accepts the Other; however, he becomes intolerant when it comes to dealing with Arab immigrants. This contradiction and belief in one thing and its opposite is a hybridity of thought. This kind of hybridity in its current "descriptive and realist usage,... appears as a convenient category ... describing cultural mixture where the diasporized meets the host in the scene of migration" (Hutnyk 81). The contact between the host and the immigrant in the context of migration results in this mess that occurs to the ideas of both parties. Despite Carl's claim that he is more civilized than Khaled, it is he who tends to violence against Khaled who is not a criminal nor is he accused of any specific unlawful act. Khaled's only accusation is that his original background as a Muslim Arab "happens to be the place where most of [the] crap is coming from" according to Bartlett (*Throat* 22). This reveals the confusion of their thoughts and the conflict that is going on in their psyche resulting from being surrounded by various contradicting ideas after 9/11 attacks.

The trauma of 9\11attacks has turned Bartlett and Carl into two terrified persons who are completely blinded by their fear of Muslims. Social interaction with the other is what gives power its essence. Power "is nothing in itself and only ... meaningful in terms of the distribution of power across social relations, among different groups or classes or interests that make up... a social body" (Kelleher 3). In his "The Traumatized as Traumatizer in Yussef El-Guindi's *Back of the Throat*," Khaled Sirwah writes:

Disasters may lead police officers to have traumatic reactions and as a result of being overawed by the atrociousness of a catastrophe which has 'a significant impact on' them, they have 'to uphold inhuman laws that have ... been defined as unlawful, and the cultural divide was in sense epitomized by the organization. (303)

This explains why many westerners are so oppressive and intolerant when they deal with Arabs like Khaled. This also helps understand the unjustifiable violence and prejudice that Carl and Bartlett develop against Khaled in *Back of the Throat*.

The major characters of *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri* and *Back of the Throat* are Muslim African Arabs. They belong to an eastern culture that is seen as an opponent culture to the western one according to Samuel Huntington. In his "East-West in Postcolonial Times," Ziauddin Sardar refers to the seven civilizations which are seen as opponents to the west according to Huntington: "Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and 'possibly' Africa" (212). Then, it is not surprising that the people who are attached to these categories are negatively stereotyped, and become subject to racial and religious discrimination. The hybrid immigrants keep fluctuating until they settle in their constructed Third Space. They waver "between two different worlds; i.e. the world of their indigenous culture and that of the culture of the host. This fluctuation puts immigrants in a hybrid position," combining together two contradictory cultures (El-Bardisy 105).

One is not born bearing the culture components of one's own society. Rather, culture is the sum of all the social practices, the cultural principles, and the lifestyle that a person acquires or chooses to adopt while living in a certain society. Culture is not "inherited genetically, and cannot exist on its own, however, culture is always shared by society members" (AL-Shammari 98). Social relationships between different individuals become healthy when partners share the same culture. Otherwise, relations will require more effort to be maintained. In *Back of the Throat*, Khaled suffers from the lack of understanding between him and his ex-girlfriend, Beth, thanks to their cultural difference. Hence, their relationship fails, although Khaled believes himself to be an American to the core. In his conversation with Beth, Carl and Bartlett, Khaled always refers to himself using the pronoun "we" grouping himself on one side with white Americans:

Beth: That's your idea about defense?

Khaled: We'll finish the job they started if we don't.... That is a complete--- I wasn't justifying anything. I was saying

let's get at the root causes so we can stop it once and for all.
Where do you get "praising them" from that?

Beth: There were almost a gleam in his eye. Like he was saying, "it's just what you people deserve." (*Throat* 37)

Americans do not descend from one main ethnicity; instead, they are a mixture of people from all around the world and the majority of Americans have hyphenated and hybrid identities. That is why being an American citizen or bearing the American nationality does not mean that one is a full American. This individual still belongs culturally and ethnically to an outsider sect. That is why when the attacks were suggested to be committed by Muslims, all Muslim Americans become suspects even if they were really loyal to America. For example, Beth "revalued her former relation with Khaled in a sinister manner. She thought he might have role in such a terror" (El Sayyid 97). She is also the one who has reported Khaled as a suspected terrorist. Descending from two different hybrid backgrounds represents a challenge for both. However, they manage to have a bare minimum of tolerance that maintains their relationship. Only with the terrorist attacks has their relation come to an end. Now, Beth, like the majority of Americans, is overwhelmed by fear and anger against Muslims. That is why she is biased against Khaled, and "increases [the investigators'] doubts" about him" (Sirwah 304).

Another kind of hybridity that occurs in the context of migration and the contact between the host and the immigrant is the linguistic hybridity. On the part of immigrants, Linguistic hybridity enhances their sense of alienation in America. Language is known to be "the carrier that reflects our identity to others and delivers our culture" (Al-Shammari 98). Hence, language can be a bridge connecting people from different races and nationalities provided that they speak the same language. Yet, in a heterogeneous society, language functions differently. There is always one hegemonic language that is used for communication between people from different origins. This language is also the carrier of the dominant culture in this society. This means that

mastering this language empowers who speaks in it and gives them access to the culture of this society. In *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*, Abdallah, Musa's Sudanese-American roommate who went to Haj, becomes privileged in America due to his mastering of English – the language of his hosts. Abdallah enjoys the linguistic diversity of America because he managed to transcend the linguistic barrier and to make the best use out of it. He says:

With my English, a language I must say almost as beautiful as my own, and which I learn before coming here, with this language, I quickly learn to figure out things as soon as I come to this new country with all its strange customs [To] be able to compliment in the language of your hosts, it makes a difference. So, in general, I have no problem fitting in.... Meeting other nationalities, Guatemalans, Polish, Puerto Ricans, Russians. I got to learn some Russian Spanish....[and] English. And in meeting all these people, I get to know them. (*Pilgrims* 22)

Abdallah manages to use English as a bridge to communicate with and to mix up with people from other cultures. Moreover, English becomes an income source for him:

You see, in getting to know all these people, with the music of their different languages in my ear, I learnt all about the things they dream about and wanted. Services they need but don't know how to get because their English is not so good. And in knowing so many people, I knew for instance that what Carlos was looking for, Dimitri had; or what Nadif dreamed about getting cheaply I could arrange a special discount from Amina. And so on. Connecting people. For business. (*Pilgrims* 22)

Abdallah's linguistic hybridity gives him power in the American society. Although he enjoys the cultural diversity of the USA for its financial benefits, he meets many hardships, one of which is the cultural difference. Abdallah says: "Arriving in a land filled with

so many strangers, and enough strangeness in it, it could make you cry sometimes" (*Pilgrims* 22). In spite of his admiration with the American culture including its language, huge portions of food, and massive buildings, he finds it too hard to completely go with the grain that he sometimes cry because of the strangeness and difference.

In *Back of the Throat*, likewise, Asfoor, a character interrogated by the investigator as a terrorist, expresses the power of language in cultural and trans-cultural interaction. He says:

When first I come to this country - I not know how to speak. How ... even to say anything. How one word best is placed with that word next.... But in my head? It is a river of beautiful speech.... Language that has fallen on our heads and made us like --- like children again. What is this power? What if I know it? I say to them, send me there so I learn this. I want to learn. ... In English. That is the goal, yes? And one day, I say.... I might even teach it... I will teach language back. I will make them speak their own language differently. ... They send me.... and now... my tongue.... It wants to take off in this new language and conjure up brilliant words. It wants to do things in English that seemed impossible for so long. ... I can help. Most of all else, Khaled... I know how to inspire... I know how to inspire." (*Throat* 50-51)

Throughout these lines, Asfoor highlights the power of language and its importance as a solid indicator of identity. The power of language stems from being the "link that is used to 'make sense' of things.... Language is essential to culture and meaning and can be considered the key container of the values and meanings of culture" (Al-Shammari 98). Hence, Asfoor wishes not only to learn English to have a full access to the other's culture, but he also wishes to make changes to this language so that he would have an impact on this society. He believes that the way to empower himself in the west is through mastering English and combining it with Arabic. He wishes that "one day the Muslims

will restore their former glory and laurels, and in return their language and culture will have the power and supremacy. They will teach the West words they never know" (El Sayyid 114). From Asfoor's viewpoint, making changes to English or making English people learn Arabic helps him succeed in dealing with the host society. Asfoor's existence in the USA forces him to develop a sense of linguistic hybridity. He could not hide his admiration of the English language. He even wishes to write a book in English, and to intermingle with this society culturally through language.

Linguistic hybridity has also an impact on human relationships narrowing perhaps the cultural gap. Stuart Hall affirms that "nothing operates outside meaning" that is why "the need to understand how we use language, how language is shaped by and shapes us, how we reproduce systems through meaning is something that can be achieved in our examination of signifying practices" (George 523). In *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri*, Gamila is fluent in English since she was raised in America, so she does not suffer in the American society or find a difficulty in understanding and dealing with the western culture. She has already managed to find a way to tolerate the cultural gap that exists between her original Arabic culture and the western culture of this society. Her Arabic becomes so poor that she says: "I can't do Arabic when I'm upset" (*Pilgrims* 63).

At the same time, language functions also as a gap between her and Musa who is a fresh immigrant speaking poor English. Reem El-Bardisy writes: "There is always a mixture of Arabic and English words in his speech. When he speaks English , he always uses some Egyptian words such as *Ana asaf* , *Argukee* , *Inti magnoona*, *Ana mishader atnafas*, *Ahlan*, *Hamd'illah asalama*,, *masjid*, *shay*, *kahk*, *ummar adeen*" (El-Bardisy 114). This linguistic gap between him and his fiancé affects their engagement. Speaking in different languages reflects the cultural differences and expectations between both of them. They misunderstand the needs of each other. Musa does not want to

establish an Egyptian household in America. On the contrary, he wants to lead a full American/westernized experience. He says:

This life that I know we will have. How it will be, the routine, it is very clear. What we will have in this life together, the things that we ... will repeat is important. You want to keep in touch with your roots? I don't want roots! I want things I know nothing about. I want a life where I don't know where it goes. With us, the story ... – it would be very clear – and customs and tradition and family; and this is who we are and where we started and this is where we are going. All the way to when they bury me. (*Pilgrims* 70)

Musa aims at assimilation with the American culture which is confusing to Gamila, the Egyptian-American girl. Her cultural hybridity hinders her from fathoming Musa's needs. She intends to tie him with his roots, and longs for establishing a home for Musa in USA. She says:

I felt I needed to behave a certain way around you.... I thought you expected certain things of me. I felt trapped in that too. Worrying the American part of me would spring out and shock you. And that I'd better behave like the well-brought up Muslim girls that perhaps you were used to. I probably did want to marry you to keep some link with back home. (*Pilgrims* 72)

Gamila and Musa are unable to please each other due to their different social backgrounds. Each is unable even to guess what their partner's cultural tendencies are. It is true that in heterogeneous societies, citizens are familiar with getting involved with partners from different cultural backgrounds; yet for these relationships to manage, both partners should let go of their original culture and assume a middle ground, a third space in-between both of their original cultures to guarantee the existence of mutual understanding and tolerance.

However, Musa and Sheri appear to be the only characters who are able to bridge the cultural gap between them. They realize that there is a gap between the Arab culture and the American

culture which can be easily observed through the connotation of their names: Musa is named after one of Almighty God's prophets which reflects the religious background from which Musa's outlook stems; while Sheri is named after "the name of [an alcoholic] drink [because her] mother was an alcoholic" (*Pilgrims* 17). This cultural gap between Musa and Sheri is supposed to challenge mutual understanding. Yet, they turn their backs to the cultural differences between them both and decide to unite and continue their journey together. Sheri, for example, starts to drink tea with mint like Egyptians. She says: "I've switched from coffee to sweet tea the way [Musa] likes. "Shay." I'm even learning some Arabic words" (*Pilgrims* 9).

Sheri, then, presents a different example from Tayyib's white American ex-girlfriend who is unable to endure even the smell of Tayyib's food and who felt shut out from Tayyib's world without trying to understand him. Sheri is also different from Beth, Khaled's ex-girlfriend in *Back of the Throat*, who becomes biased against her Muslim boyfriend and could not develop any mutual understanding with him. Sheri is open to the Arab culture and is ready to learn and understand more about it. She wants to be a part of Musa's journey. In her own words:

I feel like I'm now a part of that journey. Like I'm a part of his struggle to make a new world for himself. In this country. Like I'm helping him give birth to this new world of his.... The other thing is - selfishly - what it's doing for me.... How it opens up your world; if you let it.... Like mint leaves in tea, for instance. How cool is that. And just - finding out there are other ways to look at things. I'm so fed up of the way I look at stuff, you know. The same old world every day. It's so refreshing. ... Part of us always packing up, wondering if there's something better further on. (*Pilgrims* 46-47)

Musa and Sheri's relationship represents a hope for reconciliation between eastern and western nations. They will not let cultural difference destroy their relationship. They bridge the cultural gap

between the west and the east through coping up with the culture of the other. Musa says to Sheri:

Let us both go.... Let us both go; drive somewhere. To another state. Many other states. Another coast. And when we're fed up there, we'll go somewhere else. North, South. Then back to here if we want and see if anything's changed, and if it hasn't we head out again and not stop until we find somewhere we like. Why be okay with anything we don't like? We don't have to. (*Pilgrims* 78)

Musa and Sheri, as denoted by the title of the play, will become pilgrims in USA, roaming the whole country in search for a place where their relationship will be accepted.

The three-stage process of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity underlines the cultural and power dynamics between eastern immigrants and their western host society. Sometimes immigrants, like Gamila, manage to reach hybridity combining their original culture with the culture of the host society. Other immigrants, like Tayyib, search for home to escape his sense of alienation through marrying an Arab girl. Then, there are still other immigrants, like Khaled, who completely mingle with the dominant culture of the society in which they live. Khaled tries to maintain a pure American identity not a hybrid one, but he is shocked by uncovering the fact that white Americans do not accept him as a full American.

However, there are some immigrants (like Musa) who are able to intermingle both cultures and accepts his hybridity peacefully. Hybridity is a stage which simultaneously combines the thing and its opposite, and with which the culture of the other completely mixes with the original one producing thus a third space for the individual, a space where one may belong alleviating one's sense of ambivalent confused identity . Musa and Sheri prove to be the only characters being able to manage the situation rationally: each of them wholeheartedly accepts the culture of the other without trying to change each other. Moreover, they willingly intermingle with the culture of the other. This hybrid couple suggests a solution for the struggle of the hyphenated identities of the immigrants in their host society through being fully aware of, and tolerant with the diversity of the society in which they live.

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