

THE TRAUMA OF PASSAGE AND NOSTALGIA OF RETURN IN SELECTED ARAB- AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

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ABSTRACT: *The current paper investigates the experiences of passage and home nostalgia in four selected Arab-American short stories. These short stories are: O'Lebanon, by Evelyn Shakir, Death and Lebanon, by Barbara Bedway, The Calling, by Nahid Ratchlin, and The Top, by Kaldas Pauline, all which represent three different angles of indigenous cultures in Lebanon, Iran, and Egypt. The four stories celebrate the trauma of 'transition' in the light of Arnold Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's concepts of passage and transition. Nostalgia of return is approached under the concept of Svetlana Boym's 'reflective nostalgia'. The four stories involve home nostalgia as a common trait which colours their symbols of behavior and draw their maps of transition.*

KEYWORDS: Transition, Liminality, Nostalgia, Hybridity, Neophytes

INTRODUCTION

In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Ashcroft argues that the sense of the liminal is an "interstitial or in-between space, a threshold area" (117). Arnold Van Gennep (189) has also called the *rites de passage* as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age". His basic argument is that all liminal subjects undergo "life crises", and that ceremonies exist to assure safe travel through those crises.. In this sense, Gennep states that

For groups, as well as for individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. And there are always new thresholds to cross: the thresholds of summer and winter, of a season or a year, of a month or a night: the thresholds of birth, adolescence, maturity, and old age; the threshold of death and that of the after-life for those who believe in it. (189-90)

Gennep describes the process of passage as passing through three basic movements: separation, transition, and incorporation. In other words, the process of passage begins with the subject's departure of his original culture, home and his environment towards a new horizon and an ambiguous unknown. The second phase of 'transition' is marked by a state of 'liminality' in which the subject is torn "betwixt and between" two worlds. The third stage of 'incorporation' is the phase of being involved and inserted into the veins of the new society and a return to the customary environment, giving these movements a "recurring pattern". Gennep believes that rites of passage are of a "territorial" nature in the sense that they involve "physical space", and that "the spatial separation of distinct groups is an aspect of social organization....In short, a change of social categories involves a change of residence, and this fact is expressed by the rites of passage in their various forms" (192) . Thus, Gennep refers to six kinds of rites of passage: strangers, pregnancy and childbirth, birth and childhood, initiation rites, betrothal and marriage, and funeral. He believes that during the stage of strangers, those subjects are expected

to be incorporated through a ceremony of greeting sings and signs of friendship. During the phase of pregnancy and childbirth, woman is "considered impure and dangerous" (41) owing to her exceptional state which always results in a "transition period" and then a "reintegration into ordinary life" through the process of birth. In like manner, birth and childhood rites involves the process of the baby's separation from the mother's body, its transition to a new world and its incorporation into the new environment. He is "individualized and incorporated into society" (62). Through the initiation rites, Van Gennep differentiates "puberty rites" from "social rites" which result in a new life through the process of death and rebirth as they are "twice born" and "born again" (67). Gennep, through betrothal and marriage rites, states that "to marry is to pass from the group of children or adolescents into the adult group" (124). This transition could be marked by breaking of virginity, bathing or ointments which mark the new shape of the subject and his new space. Similarly, Gennep refers to the rites of funeral as involving separation from group, transition to an unknown world, leaving groups in a state of incorporation around meals after burial is done "in the same way that a chain has been broken by the disappearance of one of its links must be rejoined" (164-65).

Building upon Van Gennep's thesis, Victor Turner in his book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, argues that Gennep's first phase of 'separation' "comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group" (94) in his original culture. The second phase which is marked by its 'liminality' and transition is foggy enough as he "passes through a cultural realism that he has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. Liminality expresses initiant's ambivalent state, its passage to the intermediate ambivalent social zone, the so-called "limbo"(94). The last phase is where passage is "consummated", and where incorporation corresponds to initian's return to the society with reinovated social status or reaggregation". (95).

Turner further believes that liminality has taken on a new meaning as an autonomous and sometimes enduring category of people who are neither here nor there; they are "betwixt and between". Thus, liminality is "linked to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (95). Turner, moreover, delineates the differences between the marginal characters, the luminal characters, and the outsiders: "marginals like liminars are also betwixt and between, but unlike ritual liminars they have no culture assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity". (The Anthropology 233). Liminal entities, such as neophytes, as Turner states, "may be represented as possessing nothing", but rather they may "disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as luminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system" (The Ritual Process 96). In addition, their behaviours are passive in the sense that "they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint" (95). Moreover, neophytes are symbolically represented as *tabula raza*, pure, undetermined possibility- the converse of social structure, which emphasizes differentiation, hierarchy, and separation.

Of particular relevance to the 'rites of passage' is Bhabha's theory of 'in-between' cultures which are "neither" 'one' nor the "other" (Locations 127), and the concept of 'cultural hybridity' that Bhabha develops to describe the marginalized subject's discursive and disjunctive relationship with past and present cultures. Bhabha also distinguishes between three different kinds of hybrids who are the outcome of "the conjunction of Arab and American cultures" (Majaj, "The Hyphenated" n.pag). The first of these kinds is the hybrid caught in 'mid-position' between past and present, the second those who are 'past-oriented' and 'present-oriented' (Majaj, n.pag).

Bhabha's image of 'in-between' is viewed as the "disjunct position that minorities occupy ambivalently within the nation's space" ("Cultures" 57). This space is known as Bhabha's "third space". Thus, 'in-between' spaces have become as "interstitial passages" between present and past(217-18). These passages allow displaced subjects a constant hovering "back and forth" between these two states of past and present. Bhabha put it as follows :

Liminal space, in-between , prevents identities at either end of it from setting into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference. (Locations 4)

Thus, liminality emerges as a state which could be voluntary, involuntary, internal, or external whereas an individual is removed from a place of origin and enters a period of liminality definitely between leaving one's origin and resituating oneself in a new location.

Mythodology and Theoretical Framework

The present paper attempts to fill in a gap in the field of criticism of Arab-American fiction. The postcolonial approach chosen in this criticism is marked by its focus on issues of liminality and marginality. To this end, the paper provides an analysis of the ambivalent experiences of four narrative experiences within the framework of 'rites of passage'. The paper, accordingly develops upon Genep's and Turner's concepts of liminality and Homi Bhabha's concepts of cultural hybridity and theory of in-between cultures. The ambivalent experiences of the characters in the four short stories might be best described in terms of 'rites de passage' whereas Genep's and Turner's images of 'in-betwee-ness and 'threshold' might be read as an embodiment of the marginalized subject's spatial dilemma. This concept of 'liminality' is meant to represent the subjects 'split' temporality as he/she not only oscillates between past and present cultures, but also feels irreconcilable to a disjunctive present-future relationship. In addition, home nostalgia will be viewed in the light of 'reflective nostalgia' which has been the channel of connecting past with the present.

Four Experiences in Context

Coming out in 2007 and 2014 respectively, Evelyn Shakir's *Remember Me to Lebanon* and Susan Atefat-Peckham's (ed) *Talking Through the Door* involve the selected stories: *Oh' Lebanon*, by Evyln Shakir, *Death and Lebanon*, by Barbara Bedway, *The Calling*, by Nahid Ratchlin, and *The Top*, by Pauline Kaldas. In *Remember Me to Lebanon*, Evelyn Shakir "presents a variegated picture of women of Arab origin and different religious backgrounds living in America in various times and places".(Homs-Venson, 2008, no pag).The collection "is an insightful collection that not only expresses the fullness and complexity of the Lebanese immigrant experience in the United States, but also evokes memorable characters whose very fictional status allows them to emerge in more vibrant and vivid detail".(Homs-Venson, 2008, no pag). In like manner, *Talking Through the Door* "is an anthology of prose and verse, fiction and non-fiction, by seventeen authors whose families came from Iran and other Middle Eastern lands. When the volume's editor Atefat-Peckham died in 2003, the project languished for a decade until Lisa Suhair Majaj took up the task and completed it, including new material written in the ensuing years".(Cascheta,2015.no pag)

These selected stories represent the traumatic transition from original, fixed, and different locales to a new world of ambiguity, anxiety and incorporation. Unfortunately, the new world did not satisfy their social and cultural needs albeit it could have quenched their financial ones.

Traditional and cultural outcries have been heard throughout the four narratives, rejecting the state of 'in-betweenness' and 'liminality' that marginalized their existence and hazarded their children's futures. All of them fall within the boundaries of passage leaving their home lands: Lebanon, Iran, and Egypt respectively, and their 'separations' have been for various reasons consequently: for escaping war in *Oh, Lebanon* and *Death and Lebanon*, for familial togetherness in *The Calling*, and for a better standard of living in *The Top*.

In *Oh, Lebanon*, Evlyn Shakir, tells the story of her protagonist, the girl who planned a "escape" (17) through seeking an admission in Wellesley university which her "progressive"(17) father approved. The reader is introduced to a Lebanese girl who is torn between her separation from her original culture and her sense of liminality during her experience in Wellesley University in the United States, and finally her nostalgia of return she has been striving for. The story in some way explores the struggle of the experience of immigrants in the context of an American or Western society that generally misreads such identities. The protagonist's 'separation' has not only been from her original place, but also from a cultural and a traditional obligation that she violated once she set foot in America. In her first semester in Wellesley university, she met with a "black Jamaican gentle" (17) about whom she wrote to her father, who by his turn, rejected such a violation and consequently "refused her phone calls and burned her letters without opening them"(18). Her separation worsened as she overcame the "hurt" (18) resulting from her father's reaction, turning it into a sense of "defiance" (18), and later into a "resignation"(18). Since then, she has set the process of 'separation' in full operation and pulled it towards a further dimension when, after the boy's graduation, she "visited him in Kingstone" (18).

In Kingstone, her 'separation', in Turner's terms "comprises symbolic behavior" which glaringly emphasizes her "detachment" from her own original culture as she asserts: "I could live here forever" (18) albeit she knows "it wasn't true" (18). Soon, she is terrified by the occurrences that took place and let her retreat in a similar simple manner: "I can't live like this" (18). The Jamaican indulges her into sex with him in an attempt to make her change her mind, but she was resistant enough to tell him that "it had nothing to do with it".(19).

Her separation takes her a step further back to Boston where she runs through "a series of romances"(19) that widened the gap between her and her original culture. The last of these romances was with a Navajo mechanic after which she started to evaluate her position as a liminal subject whose judgment "never guided her right".(19), but rather left her "betwixt and between" two warring cultures. Thus transported into a liminal subject living on the margin in a locale which is not her own, home nostalgia began to find echoes in her stance towards her father: " She used to be proud that her father was not old-fashioned, but now she was angry at his neglect"(19-20) and she "thought of return" for the first time.(20), but soon she screams she will "never go back" (20) as it has been "too late anyway"(20) to her. Her trauma has been in the state of "in-betweenness" that makes her suffer from the feeling of being trapped between two worlds and from the state of being neither here nor there although hers has not been a forced migration.

In her luminal sphere, her 'split' sense of being 'betwixt and between' two cultures increased her feeling of estrangement, which forced her to think back, review her adventure in the new locale, and to highlight her attachment of her original culture. To this purpose, Shakir throws a divorced man on her way as he was marketing himself in a newspaper as a "knight in shining armor" who is seeking "a damsel worth jousting for" (21). Fortunately, he was of a similar nostalgia towards Lebanon and expressed his happiness that she was Lebanese and added: "In

my family, we've lost our Arab culture, and I'm the only one who cares" (23). It was not only he that cared, but also she was of equal interest and consequently compared her father's previous reactions when she wrote to him about the Jamaican Gentle whenever she went off the right course to her intended comeback with an eligible husband which would gain her much of her father's lost confidence.

Since she met with that divorced man, the third phase of passage seemed not to be fulfilled as both of them became more reclining towards home path rather than to any assimilating process. Thus, in her awakening fit, she avoided repeating her previous mistakes of falling physically to her new man; "no more than an arm offered and taken [.....]. Right cheek, left, right-Lebanese style". (27). Henceforth, both characters, under their nostalgic sense of return, reciprocated maneuvering enquiries which resulted in his complete acceptance of her approaches that tested the validity of his seriousness. Her final decision was to clear his blurred vision concerning his concept of gender: "gender is easy"(32), which symbolically referred to their "unspoken agreement"(27) over the same destination and refusing the third phase of passage; namely, 'incorporation'.

In *Death and Lebanon*, Barbara Bedway narrates the story of two young girls; Ajunya and Mashaya who have recently been in America because of the war in their original homeland, Lebanon. Their passage has been a forced one which has been suggested by their Sitti (grandmother) who has two daughters living there. In America, they were received by her aunt, Philamena, who manages a miner's supply and her sister Hikmet. Their aunt speaks Polish, Russian, and a little Greek to her customers, while Hikmet gets by with just Italian. Thus constructed; two figures of the younger generation as opposed to two ones of the elder one, the rites of passage started to gain significance. Ajunya and her sister, Mashaya are viewed as liminal and marginal being new in their new locale: "Everyone here came from somewhere else but my sister and I are the newest: two years from Lebanon, because of the events" (74). The protagonist, Ajunya, was nine and her sister, Mashya was eleven when they arrived in America with their grandmother. When Ajunya arrived in America, she has difficulty deciding which of these two different worlds is going to be her 'home'. She has already been two years in America, no traceable 'transition' of any sort seemed in the offing. She kept hovering between her original homeland and her newly adopted home. The story refers to Ajunya's discontent with her new location: "We live with bare walls and a bare floor; all pictures, mirrors, crucifixes got put away and their ghosts with them" (74).

Ajunya's inability to forget Lebanon reflects her state of 'in-between' age, when she has gained mastery over the concerns of childhood while is still on the cusp of adult concerns, aware of them but not captured by them. Emily Hancock stated that a girl at the age of nine is a fully formed person, only to be subjected to fragmentation and an eclipsing of her former clarity and sense of self once she reaches puberty (qtd in Alghamdi 2). The same might be said of Ajunya, who has clarity of purpose and is not at all compromised in her interactions with any of the variety of people that surround her. In other words, Ajunya is a new immigrant to the United States and shows strong signs of nostalgic attachment to the Arab world through her reflective narrative of the second part of the story which is entitled *Beirut*. Through this section of the story, she ponders over Lebanon and recalls her memories about war there. She, as well as her sister were quite familiar with guns and their names: "Katushka, Kalishnokov, Duska; American M-16s, Czech M-58s"(77). So far, Ajunya's passage has been of a physical nature as she has just crossed the geographical territories, then, felt liminal and marginalized having failed to cope with the new locale, and finally felt that strong 'pull' homeward. In addition,

Ajunya's clarity of purpose is called into question when she rejected the possibility of being called a "refugee" by the counselor and affirmed her ability to go back home (83). In this sense, she reminds us of the co-existence of marginality and liminality and the fact that liminality itself is and must be unstable ground. Hers, as pre-adolescent character, is a walking paradox whose voice and perceptions shape the world around her albeit she still has no power being at the mercy of the movement of that fluctuating new world which she rejects as she started to think of Beirut as soon as she arrived there: "At night I sit in our window and think of Beirut" (74).

The sense of home nostalgia has been highlighted even before they left Lebanon; as Ajunya still remembers how she and her sister were informed about their leaving and the preparations they had to make: "Sitti says we are going to America.... We have to get to Cyprus and we need gold".(87). In addition, she also remembers how her father deepened their sense home when he told them that "Jounieh is where [they]'ll live" (80) when they come back from America, and gave each one of them a gold coin to buy tickets as a guarantee of their return.

Consequently, the trauma of the two girls has been formulated at the 'threshold' of the new society. Their liminality has overwhelmed their sense of being with its fogginess and their passage seemed to have been obstructed by a nostalgia which kept them attached to their origin. In their 'limbo' state, they failed even to normalize their social existence, but remained remindful of Beirut, and continued asserting that: "[they] are going back" (83), supplicating to God to "let [there] be where Sitti does not lie"(83). Thus, as a luminal subject, Ajunya is born not once but "twice born" and "born again". Her second birth is her geographical movement which alters her fundamentally, making her into something she would not otherwise have been. This sort of 'transition' between two contrasting realities harboured for her the threat of falling into, and belonging thereafter to, a different cultural arena, but it has been her home nostalgia that wiped away the image of that threat.

A similar trauma of 'transition' is encountered in Nahid Rachlin's *The Calling* as the reader is introduced to two sisters, but of an older age. Their migration to America has not been a forced one, but for the sake of joining her son after her husband's death, this is the story of Mohtaram and her sister, Maryam. Mohtaram is an Iranian old lady who wanted to be near her son Cyrus and her daughter Feri who settled in America. The situation here is reversed as the older generation is preceded by the younger one's adventure away from home. Children are calling the mother to join them, and here begins the rituals of passage for Mohtaram.

Mohtaram's 'transition' to America left marks of 'liminality' and 'marginality' upon her behaviour. She realized that she was 'betwixt and between' two contrasting cultures, a position she could not bear. In this sense, she belongs to Genep's category of 'strangers', and she began very early to feel the 'ambivalence' of her status as a 'neophyte' who is represented as a 'tabula rasa' who plays the 'converse' of social structure'; a fact that determined 'differentiation' and 'separation'. For this reason, since she came to America five years ago, she did not stop asking her sister to join her: " You will love Ohio" (228). When Maryam decided to visit Mohtaram after she had a dream that stimulated her worries about her sister, both of them expressed their astonishment at the American lifestyle towards strangers :

Mohtaram said : "No one interfered in your affair".

"But it's so lonely, it's like everyone crawled into a shell". Maryam said.(228).

Most likely, it has been the 'shell' of liminality that wrapped their existence, characterized their 'limbo', and rendered them to a complete social 'invisibility'. In addition, at a time Mohtaram and Maryam are viewed as luminal subjects at the threshold of the new locale, her children seem to have passed the 'transitory' area and became fully 'incorporated', but remained very 'separated', not only from their origin but also from their mother as well:

Mohtaram was thinking how much closer she felt to her sister than to her children. Her children seemed aloof by contrast to Maryam. There was something offhand about them [.....] When children, they had been like all other Iranian children, dependent on her approval, thriving on her warmth, her cuddling and kissing them, but they changed. They were cool and independent and egocentric. (232)

Thus, in much the same way 'liminality' has been a place of 'in-between-ness', it has also been a place of ambiguity and uncertainty, of anxiety and hope. Being in the luminal phase creates a sense of vulnerability, and the luminal subject crossing the threshold comes into contact with divine elements and gains sacred knowledge that is informative and transformative (Turner, 1964, 48). What Mohtaram gained while with her children has not been far from this hypothesis.

Mohtaram's sense of 'estrangement' and 'liminality' consolidated her home nostalgia and strengthened her rejection of the third phase of passage. Her nostalgia for a return has been highlighted throughout the story in more than one occasion: when Maryam told Cyrus about the necessity of having a Muslim wedding (230), when the scent of the Iranian food prevails, and when 'halal' food is repeatedly referred to. (233). Mohtaram also contemplates her days of childhood with Maryam and recalls the memory of her late husband.

In a word, both sisters 'passed' through an internal/external liminality and failed to reposition themselves in the new world. They emerged in a new phase of 'passage'; namely, that of 'rebirth': "she wished she could break out of the prison of this new self, and be reborn again into the old one" (236). The idea of return has been so persistent that she imagined the house so "barren" (236) without her sister, and consequently states: "I must return with Maryam. This is my chance" (236), which could be viewed as a backward 'transition'.

The fourth experience of 'passage' and home nostalgia is introduced by Pauline Kaldas' *The Top*; the story of an Egyptian Christian family who aspired to a better standard of living under Nasser's regime. Shoukry, the husband, is a government employee, a head of a unit in charge of "issuing permits for the construction of new apartment buildings or adding new floors to old one" (152). By virtue of his position, he used to refuse any requests to add more floors unless, occasionally, he passes others in return for some compensation, which has never been adequate for his wife.

His wife sparked the flame of 'transition' when she asked him: "You don't look around you? Everyone wants to leave this country and its misery". (152). Her husband wondered at her request and inquired: "What more do you want?" (152), and she, consequently, lists her reasons why immigration is so urgent:

I want what all people want. I want a house for myself with a garden and a fancy car. I want to go out to enjoy myself and to see the world. I want my freedom, not this society that suffocates our desires. (153)

In Shoukry's viewpoint the world is not there in America, but, as he asserts to his wife that: "the world is in your home in front of you, your husband and your daughter. We are your world" (153). Passage-resistant as he appears, she repeatedly urged him to consider her sister's family affairs and how they could have a house and a car in six months as America, to her, has been "heaven" (153), while Egypt remained a "closed country" (153).

Deeply rooted in his traditions and culture, Shoukry's sense of home nostalgia anticipated his physical 'transition'. This is intelligibly expressed in his investigation about his daughter Amira who has gone on a school trip without his previous permission: "And did you find out anything about this trip? Are there boys going too? Don't you think about your daughter's reputation? You want her to ruin herself?" (155). Paradoxically enough, Shoukry's 'transition' to Boston seemed as if towards a psychological 'death' resulting from a forced 'separation' from his homeland.

As soon as Shoukry set foot in Boston, home nostalgia began to be so pressing, and his memories to be in full process. Claude Simon's *Histoire* views such a process in which:

Memories of religious school, the Latin prayer in the morning, grace at midday, the evening Angelus, provide landmarks amid the views, the disassembled schemes, the quotations of all sorts that stem from every period of existence, from the imagination and the historical past, proliferating in apparent disorder around a central secret. (qtd in Auge, 61-62).

Shoukry's "central secret" that took hold of his existence is his nostalgia of home, memories, church, holy bread, and food scents that prevail, or so he believes, the place around him. He recalls the scents of the holy bread (*orban*) and of the incense in the church. Although his "craving came over him like a shadow", he became "sure that if he could only trail the smell he would find the *orban*". (155). His nostalgia has been materialized to the degree that he started to lose sense of being: "he was concentrating so hard, the door [of the elevator he is in charge of] almost closed on his nose, and he heard the echo of laughter around him" (155). Even, in his dreams, the 'craving' of the holy bread remained so ubiquitous that he;

Heard his mother calling and began to run[.....]he looked down to see the *orban*, but his hands clutched only air. He woke [.....] found nothing except his fingers in the same position as in the dream. (156)

In his moving limited locale inside the elevator he is in charge of, a new 'craving' attacked his memory; that is, the "taste of *Koshari*". (157). He thought "it had to be [there], somewhere close. If only he could get out of the elevator, he would find it(157). Accordingly, Shoukry's 'transition' did not result in an 'incorporation', but kept him a liminal and a marginal space out of which he could not escape. The space he occupies now at the limits of social norms rendered him to a ritualistic pattern of behavior that left his 'transition' lacking in any assimilating process. His nostalgia of return, though nor verbalized, remained recurrent through the narrative.

Nostalgia

Heather.A.Hillsburg conceptualizes the imprints of nostalgia as viewed by Pickering and Keightley's *The Modalities of Nostalgia* (2006) and Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) in his article *Reading Nostalgia, Anger, and the Home in Joyce carol Oats's Foxfire* (2014). He reiterates Boym's view that there are two kinds of nostalgia; restorative and

reflective nostalgia, that are utilized as two loose trends within ways of looking at the past. Restorative nostalgia figures as a longing for a linear past grounded in hegemonic gender roles and untenable notions of home. Reflective nostalgia points towards "homesickness for a lost past". (Pickering and Keightley 922.qtd in Hillsburg 3). Reflective nostalgia exceeds limits of mere longing for simplicity, and refers to feelings of displacement that become of a person, place, thing, or set of circumstances" (Boym xiii). Pickering and Keightley still believe that nostalgia is not "living in the past" (923), but rather, "can function as a dialogue between the past and the present" (923). In this sense, nostalgia becomes fruitful because, in Boym's view, "this typology of nostalgia allows us to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory" (xviii). For the purpose of this analysis, reflective nostalgia will be of a particular relevance.

The four experiences of the current study have home nostalgia as a common trait which characterizes their existence in their adopted homes. Each one of them seeks refuge from the burdens of the new environment through recalling their past memories and occurrences in an attempt to eliminate the anxiety resulting from the trauma of transition. Out of their 'liminal space', these 'split' identities start to hover 'back and forth' at the very 'threshold' of their passage experience. Their 'in-between' positions resulted in fragile psychologies which prohibited them from completing the triangle of 'passage', directing the last of its elements, 'incorporation', backward home.

The protagonist in *Oh' Lebanon*, is a young girl in her early steps in quest for her identity. Having separated her original homeland, family, and society, and joined the Wellesley community, she began to struggle against her sense of 'liminality'. Deep in her background, there lied an undercurrent that did not allow her to be fully detached, but rather connected with her origin and cultural habits. In the mid of her relationship with the Jamaican young man, she, unconsciously, was aware of, rather worried, about her father's reactions although he represents a culture she rejected. Supposedly, as a 'neophyte', she "has been placed in a stage in which she is radically dissociated from past knowledge before being presented with much new information", (Meyer, Camino, Turner 384), but this has not been the case with her. She led a life of a 'split' identity and a double consciousness that kept her memory in progress.

Then, when a divorced man declared himself in want of a wife, and she got to know him, the common tie between them has been that of home nostalgia. Consequently, a new strain of jubilation erupted in her existence, and began, accordingly, to imagine how will her family receive him in Beirut. This traditional concern never parted her, and she always tries to connect her fate with the teachings of her indigenous culture :

She imagined returning to Beirut with a Lebanese American husband in tow. Imagined her father's pleasure because now she'd finally done it right. [.....]. He'd throw a party, the whole family would come, three generations of uncles and aunts and cousins. There would be long tables laden with food-everything from hummus and *baba ghnnuji* to ice cream flavored with orchid extract, gum mastic, and rose water. [.....] "you are one of us", they would say. (24)

The thin line separating truth and falsehood in her recalling of the rites at home has been a source of relief which she, as a luminal subject, has been seeking. As a neophyte, she is "neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another" (Turner 1964, 47), this

is where her nostalgia erupts. Thus driven homeward, she concludes that "American have no dignity" (25), and views herself to be the man's "ticket" back to Lebanon.

Another aspect of her reflective nostalgia is achieved when she argues with him over matters like her Muslim family, going to mosques, wearing scarves in an attempt to make him reconsider his position. Her attempts are implicitly deployed as a test of the man's nostalgia, but he, unexpectedly, agreed to all her preservations in return for home until she, at last, voices him a welcome into her life: "You're welcome *habibi*". (32).

Similarly, In *Death and Lebanon*, nostalgia of return wraps the existence of Ajunya and her sister Mashaya, as representatives of the younger immigrant generation. It took them only two years to feel longing for Lebanon. In the second part of the story entitled Beirut, reflective nostalgia is represented by summoning events in Lebanon. Ajunya recalls the image of her father and his cousin who represent the national resistance during war on their country. It is through reflective nostalgia that Ajunya reports incidents in Lebanon and narrates about war and how their grandmother prepared them for leaving.

Ajunya reflects on an incident when she and her sister were in the streets of Beirut at a time it was so dangerous to be outdoors:

People we couldn't see were scurrying into the alleys and buildings. Mashaya and I, holding each other's slippery hand and stumbling over the rubble. Behind us we heard the crack of a rifle but we were standing up so we ran on. I thought of invisible things, of a breath that breathes on and a look without eyes. (82).

Ajunya's reflective nostalgia is found to be an ideal means to connect her sickness to home. In the current luminal position, "they have physical but not social reality". (Turner,1988, 49), so, their nostalgia is deployed as a refuge which resisted the process of 'incorporation' in a new society. Home, on the other hand, is viewed as an 'illusion of coherence and safety', and the construction of idyllic home relies on the repeated and reinvigorated stories that look place there:

I hold the flashlight pen while she [Mashaya] sifts through her treasures from the Lebanon. There's dirt and broken glass and Sitti's hypodermic needle for her insulin. In a rubber band Mashaya keeps strips of posters she tore off the walls of Beirut. She has eyes and hair and lips and shoulders from a hundred different boys, boys whose families plastered their pictures all over the city to honor their sons dead in the events. (75).

Nostalgia of return takes a psycho-socio dimension with Mohtaram and her sister Maryam in *The Calling* as it is sought as a psychological shelter, a shell of tranquility, and a channel of salvation. In their marginal and luminal positions, Mohtaram and Maryam emerge as luminal personae whose "structural invisibility has a twofold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified."(Turner,1964 ,48).In their invisibility, both sisters shared a common nostalgia for their original culture. When Maryam, upon her arrival in America, started to fill Mohtaram with stories about their "brothers, nephews, and aunts and uncles" (229), the first feeling that ran into her was that of a "longing to be with them in person". (29).

John Su believes that reflective nostalgia "allows a person to decide how to remember, what to omit, and how to deploy these memories".(qtd in Hiilsburg 2). Within the framework of this fact, and on remembering and recalling life in Iran, Maryam selected people and incidents that

appealed to the inner workings of his sister's mind. In like manner, her enquiry which she posed to her sister: " And imagine if you get ill who's here to take care of you?"(234), uncovers their status as 'luminal personae', and accordingly, their inabilities to 'incorporate'.

Other occasions which deploy reflective nostalgia in *The Calling* take place when Mohtaram recalls memories of her happy marriage and how it ended sadly with a husband's eyes staring unmoving[ly] into space. (235). Under those pressing memories, Mohtaram's sense of nostalgia has been materialized and crystallized in her final decision to return.

The strain of nostalgia of return in *The Top* is connected with Shoukry, the Egyptian Christian who was forced by his wife to transfer to America demanding for better conditions of life. His nostalgia was stirred by "the smell of flour, bread, the baking of crust". (155). Under the effect of that smell, Shoukry began to recall his memories at home and remembers how he "ate the *orban* as a child" (155). Soon, his craving had its imprints on Shoukry's reflective nostalgia that started to recall home memories which harbor the much-desired food. What he does to get hold of the memory is physically expressed through "creep[ing] his tongue over his lips in hopes of catching a hint of its taste". (155).

Besides *orban* craving, there has been another craving for *khoshari*, the most popular meal in Egypt. The craving has been so "strong and powerful" (157) over him that he "stretch[ed] his tongue for it" (157). He has been chasing the smell and has gone behind his craving until some one of the people around him thought he has gone mad. (158)

Thus, reflective nostalgia has been the means through which those luminal subjects have expressed their longing for the indigenous culture.

CONCLUSION

It is possible to conclude, then, that the stances involved in the four experiences are similar in originating their traumas in the deep nostalgic sense towards home lands. In addition, they all experience a sense of spatial 'in-betweenness' that forced them to struggle against the feeling of being 'neither' Arabs 'nor' Americans, which left them 'neophytes' at the 'threshold'. This position of being 'betwixt and between', which is shared by all of the characters, acts as an 'inetrstitial passage' between their pasts and present cultures. But while the concept of 'threshold' is used to refer to their inner spatial dilemma about where home is, the concept of cultural hybridity relates more to their existing condition. Thus, their real dilemma could be fixed between the call for preserving the past culture and the demands of the current status.

To this purpose, the four writers set contrasting patterns of preservation and assimilation to have past and present significantly juxtaposed. On the one hand, patterns of preservation are deployed to help characters maintain, or withdraw to a recollected or imaginary past or to refer to, "selected elements of their cultural baggage" as Huseby-Darvas put it (15), while patterns of assimilation to the present culture are used to give characters an opportunity to "adapt [.....], to go ahead rather than retreat" (15) on the other hand. Acts that exemplify patterns of preservation in the stories could be traced through: speaking native language at home, keeping local names, getting-together in familial gatherings, cooking national food, refreshing home memories, and keeping prayers. Patterns of assimilation, which are not fully applicable here, could be viewed in speaking a foreign language, befriending foreigners, going for mixed marriages, eating foreign food, and adopting others' styles of living.

Being trapped at the 'threshold' of two contrasting worlds, characters in the four stories have found a safe refuge and a constant shelter in the mere recalling of their memories at home sometimes, and in taking home traditions as guidelines some other times. All of them shared the same sense of 'homesickness' in their ambivalent experiences. No sooner had they passed into a new locale than they seemed to hang on their bonds with the past in order to diminish their sense of otherness. Even more, they recalled past memories from their indigenous cultures as it has been the case with Maryam who arrived from Iran with her national food, the young girl in *O'Lebanon* who kept thinking and reconsidering her family's possible reception of her intended husband, Ajunya who brought to present her memories in the streets of Lebanon, and Shoukry's craving for local food that shaped most of his behaviors.

In the same vein, all of them fell back upon the past for aid and interpretation of their liminal positions. Mohtaram, in *The Calling*, thought of what does it mean to die alone in America, the young girl in *O'Lebanon*, found relief in imagining how her father would receive her husband after she had done right, Ajunya wished God not to make America where her grandmother lies, and Shoukry's craving of Egyptian food that let others thought he was mad. Each and every carved in past for memories and for the protective 'grasp' of past culture.

In a word, although the counter-assimilation strategies the characters followed could have taken place after a short period of their 'transitions', they kept them at the 'threshold' of 'incorporation'. Home nostalgia has been more powerful, more energetic, and more significant than any attempt of assimilation

Over the course of the paper, it has been argued that characters of the four stories followed the channels of passage fully through the first and second phases, but failed to pass through the third. In their experiences, they were determined to locate a liminal position, 'neither' here 'nor' there, but 'betwixt and between'. All of them have similarly expressed the same notion of home sickness, and it has been through 'reflective nostalgia' that their destinies have been interrogated. Through reflective nostalgia, all of them could draw links with their indigenous cultures. Reflective nostalgia has paved the way for them to practice telling and re-telling of the past and to summon old memories afresh into present. It has also been through re-visiting those old social constructs that they could find the long-sought for safety and the much-awaited self recognition

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