

# **The Melting Pot or the Salad Bowl?:A Bhabhian Reading of Yussef El Guindi's Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World**

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates whether it is better to have a heterogeneous society based on diversity, in which each culture keeps its own distinctive qualities, or to have a homogeneous country, in which ethnic groups abandon their heritage to have a single common culture that maintains the national identity of the country in which they live. Exploring some of the problems which immigrants face today and referring to Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence, this paper handles the immigrant experience through an Arab perspective in Yussef El Guindi's play *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012). Moreover, it sheds light on the struggle of Arab immigrants to synchronize their native Eastern culture with the dominant American one, and handles people's expectations of each other and of themselves. Furthermore, it explores whether Laray Barna's stumbling blocks of inter-cultural communication might impede the interaction between the different characters in this play. As this paper handles different models of assimilation, specifically the *melting pot* and the *salad bowl* models of integration, it explores which model is the most appropriate one in cross-cultural communication. Besides, it asks whether inter-ethnic love can overcome all the cultural differences. It, also, investigates whether it is better to have a rational and safe marital relationship or to venture and have an exciting marriage based on love. In addition, it explores how far our personal qualities can unite us together more than our cultural differences that separate us.

**Keywords:** Mimicry, hybridity, ambivalence, melting pot, salad bowl, inter-cultural communication, stumbling blocks

*"This gathering of strangers. So rich....For that alone...for this gathering alone, I give thanks" (Yussef El Guindi 81).*

## **Introduction**

In a globalized world, inter-cultural communication is getting an increasing importance. It is difficult, in this multicultural world, to live in

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isolation and avoid culture encounters. In a time, in which the dialogue between civilizations became inevitable, people need to accept and embrace cultural diversity. In her article, *Stumbling Blocks in Intercultural Communication* (1994), Laray M. Barna emphasizes the barriers that might hinder people from different cultures to interact effectively with each other. According to Barna, language differences, non-verbal misinterpretations and the high anxiety or tension, with which people from different cultures deal with each other, are some of the obstacles that might obstruct inter-cultural communication. Moreover, she believes that preconceptions, or, stereotypes as well as the tendency to evaluate others are other blocks that thwart cross-cultural interaction. Furthermore, she asserts that the assumption of similarity might also impede cross-cultural communication and maintains that people must believe in the assumption of difference in order to avoid frustration (337-346). Migration plays an important role in promoting cross-cultural communication. When people migrate to another country, they come across a new culture, language, customs and traditions. Immigrants fluctuate between two different worlds; i.e. the world of their indigenous culture and that of the host culture. This fluctuation puts immigrants in a hybrid position. They, sometimes, try to mimic the norms of the dominant culture, and, sometimes, resist and strive to preserve their native culture. Their mimicry and hybridity lead to their ambivalence.

*Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2012) is a play about immigration and assimilation. It handles the dichotomy of self and other which controls the immigrants' life. It is romantic comedy that accentuates the immigrants' struggle to fulfill the American Dream and have a new life. This play sheds light on the relationship between the East and the West and focuses on some of the problems that immigrants face like clash of cultures, otherness, frustration and adjustment.

This paper investigates whether it is better to have a heterogeneous society based on diversity, in which each culture keeps its own distinctive qualities, or to have a homogeneous country, in which ethnic groups abandon their heritage to have a single common culture that maintains the national identity of the country in which they live. Exploring some of the problems which immigrants face today and referring to Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence, this paper handles the immigrant experience through an Arab perspective. Moreover, it sheds light on the struggle

of Arab immigrants to synchronize their native Eastern culture with the dominant American one and handles people's expectations of each other and of themselves. Furthermore, it explores whether Laray Barna's stumbling blocks of inter-cultural communication might impede the interaction between the different characters in this play. As this paper handles different models of assimilation, specifically the *melting pot* and the *salad bowl* models of integration, it explores which model is the most appropriate one in cross-cultural communication. Besides, it asks whether inter-ethnic love can overcome all the cultural differences. It, also, investigates whether it is better to have a rational and safe marital relationship or to venture and have an exciting marriage based on love. In addition, it explores how far our personal qualities can unite us together more than our cultural differences that set us apart.

### **Colonial Mimicry as Camouflage**

The Indian- English theorist and critic Homi K. Bhabha (1949- ) is one of the leading figures in the field of post-colonial criticism. Most of his writings handle the interrelations between the colonizer and the colonized. He has originated some crucial concepts, such as "hybridity", "mimicry" and "ambivalence", which emphasize how colonized people resist the authority of the colonizer and highlight the influence of the dominant culture on immigrants. His works remain an indispensable guide for those interested in colonial, postcolonial and cross-cultural studies.

The term *mimicry*, in colonial discourse, refers to imitating the manners, habits, behavior, gestures, language, costumes and attitudes of people in power. Homi Bhabha based his conception of mimicry on Jacques Lacan's notion presented in his essay *The Line and Light* (1973). At the beginning of his essay, *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, Bhabha quoted Lacan's words, "The effect of mimicry is camouflage.... It is not a question of harmonising with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare" (qtd in *Location of Culture* 85). These words show how Lacan established the relationship between mimicry and camouflage which leads to colonial ambivalence.

Bhabha asserts that mimicry “emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge”. He maintains

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that the colonized, or the *other*, imitate people in power because they want to have the same power, but the result might be ridiculous. He asserts that mimicry does not only indicate imitation of aspects of the dominant culture, but also an exaggeration of this imitation which distinguishes it from merely imitation. It is a "repetition with difference". Bhabha states that when the *Other* mimics the colonizer, or, people in power, he becomes "almost the same" as the colonizer, but he never "quite" blends in the dominant cultural and political regimes that administrate both of them. He claims, "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Location of Culture 122). Bhabha believes that the process of imitation is always incomplete. The colonized can never copy the colonizer completely.

Moreover, Bhabha states that mimicry can be a source of threat to the white man. When the colonized mimics the colonizer, he can, inadvertently, destabilize the authority of colonizers. He claims, "The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority". Copying those in power can be quite threatening because it might lead to making fun of them. In this way, mimicry can be similar to mockery. Bhabha asserts, "It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come" (Location of Culture 126). He maintains that there is a difference between mimicry, which has a respectful nature, and mockery, which has a negative attitude, in which the colonized undermines the authority of those in power by his mimicry.

### **Hybridity as a Post-Colonial Concept**

In colonial context, the word *hybridity* refers to a mixture of cultures. In his pivotal book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha introduced this term to refer to the amalgamation of cultures which takes place during a cultural encounter. He illustrates that this cultural hybridity, might result in a "double vision" or "double consciousness". Bhabha defines the space between two diverse cultures, or in-between worlds, as the "third space". He states, "these 'in-between' spaces provide the train for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1-2).

Furthermore, Bhabha asserts that no culture is completely pure. He illustrates that cultures are created by the hybridizing process. Moreover, he believes that the communication between the colonizer and the colonized has an impact on both of them. It leads them to have a hybrid cultural identity. Due to this cultural encounter, both the colonizer and the colonized are affected and none of them has a pure cultural identity (113). The concept of *hybridity* is closely associated with that of *mimicry*, as both of them illustrate what occurs when two cultures encounter.

### **Ambivalence in Colonial Discourse**

Ambivalence means having contradictory feelings and attitudes towards the same object at the same time. It originated in psychoanalysis to depict a recurrent oscillation between desiring one thing and its opposite simultaneously. For Sigmund Freud, ambivalence means the concurrent existence of love and hate for the same object (118-9). Bill Ashcroft maintains that ambivalence describes the state in which a person finds himself confused whether to accept or reject a certain culture. This may take place when two cultures have the same impact on this person (10). According to Bhabha, ambivalence highlights an attraction toward a person, an idea or an action and repulsion from them at the same time (Location of Culture 85-92).

### **Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World (2012)**

*Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* was written by the multi-award winning Egyptian-American dramatist Yussef El Guindi. El Guindi was born in Egypt in 1960. After President Gamal Abdel Nasser had nationalized their businesses, El Guindi's family left Egypt and went to London where he got his early education. There, he began to appreciate theatre through watching the plays of the great English dramatists such as Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard and David Hare. He returned to his native country as a university student where he graduated from the American University in Cairo in 1982 (Qualey). He, afterwards, went to the United States and got a Master of Fine Arts at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and an MFA in playwriting from Carnegie-Mellon University. He has lived in the United States since 1983 and has been a citizen since 1996 (Stack).

Although El Guindi left Egypt when he was 3 years old, he always feels that he belongs to his native country. He maintains, "Egypt will remain a

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part of me — a large part of me — whether I like it or not. And generally speaking, I like it.” Moreover, he asserts that his immigrant experience has a great impact on his works. He asserts:

Even when I’m not directly writing about immigrants, that experience leaving something familiar, and then trying to acclimatize to a radically different environment, naturally affects my choice of subjects and characters. The question of “home” comes up a lot. Either my characters are trying to get to it, are excluded from it, have cast themselves far away from it, or are simply trying to define it. (Arlin)

El Guindi comes from a celebrated artistic family. His grandmother was the renowned actress and publisher Rose al-Youssef, his grandfather was the distinguished director Zaki Toleimat and his uncle was the eminent writer Ihsan Abdel Koudous (Qutami). Most of El Guindi's plays explore themes of immigration, assimilation, ethnicity, harassment and negative stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims.

*Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* is the winner of Harold and Mimi Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for 2012 (Jones 1). It tells the story of Musa, a recent Egyptian immigrant working as a taxi driver, and Sheri, a white American waitress who, quickly, become acquainted and fall in love with each other. They disregard the cultural and religious differences between them and ignore the opinions of all the people around them who do not approve of this relationship because of the multi-cultural challenges. Musa, even, forgets his hijab-wearing Egyptian-American fiancée, Gamila, who travelled to Egypt to plan for their wedding with his parents. After they had faced some problems, Musa and Sheri decided to get united in spite of their cultural differences. Sheri, also, agreed to abandon her job and start a long journey with Musa to discover America. The optimistic ending of the play stresses the idea that everyone must do what he wants, not what he is expected or required to do.

The play achieved a huge success when it was performed in 2013. It won the applause of the audiences and critics alike. *San Francisco Chronicle*, for example, stated that the play "seems very much alive. Smart, funny and thought-provoking" (Hurwitt 1). *The Joint Forces Journal* described it as "both Provocative and Entertaining" (Miller 2). *The Mercury News* regarded

the play as "...funny, quirky show" (Hogarty 2). Farah Bullar asserted that "Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World unravels the struggle between longing and belonging with a rich tapestry of wit, charm and humanity"(3). Because of the crucial themes it tackles, *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* is still performed. It was selected by the Mosaic Theatre in Washington D.C in January 2020 to be performed in their "Voices from a Changing Middle East Festival" (Stoltenberg 1-3). Moreover, it was performed at the beginning of 2020 at the DCPA Theatre Company's fifteenth celebration of new American plays (Moore). Cross-cultural communication, problems of immigrants and the other overriding themes, addressed in this play, have given it a great importance and attracted the attention of producers and directors who have been very confident that it would always achieve an overwhelming success whenever it is performed.

### **Colonial Mimicry as Represented in Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World.**

Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence find representations in *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*. Bhabha claims that colonial mimicry is "the desire for a reformed, recognizable *other*" (Location of Culture 122). This applies to Musa and his Somali Muslim friend, Tayyib. In their attempt to find a place in the American society, Musa and Tayyib mimic the Americans either consciously or unconsciously. Musa began to drink alcohol since his arrival to the States in order to feel that he is American. Similarly, Tayyib always offers him bottles of wine, instead of money, in return for the taxi rides which Musa gives him:

Musa: I have alcohol if you want.

Sheri: Great. That's what I thought you meant.

Musa: Scotch.

Sheri: I'll take it.

Musa: This Somali friend, he give me Johnny Walker as  
payment after I help him take merchandize across

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bridge a few times. Says he not believe in money  
between friends. (3-4)

Although Muslims are forbidden to drink wine, Musa and Tayyib drink because they think that, in this way, they can integrate into the American society and become part of a homogeneous cultural group:

Sheri: Alcohol is okay though.

Musa: I say, so you corrupt me with drink? He say now you  
test your faith with drink. Money is like invisible evil.  
But drink, you know what it is. I give you good way  
to prove your faith. (4)

Furthermore, although Musa and Tayyib come from an Arabic and Islamic background that does not allow people to have extramarital relationships, they have illegitimate relationships with women. While Musa loves the American woman with whom he has an illicit relationship, Tayyib is not ashamed to declare that he does not intend to love or marry any of his girlfriends:

Musa: Don't be angry just because you don't have a woman.

Tayyib: Me? My friend. I have more women than suitcases. I  
just don't go smiling like a fool about it.

Musa: What women? Those who stand by the corners?

Tayyib: 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. (31-32)

Bhabha believes that the result of colonial mimicry might be disappointing. He asserts that when the *other* imitates people in power, he may become "a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Location of Culture 122). Bhabha's claim applies to Tayyib who thinks that when he has many illegitimate relationships with women, he will be similar to those liberal American men. However, his numerous relationships neither

bring him happiness, nor make him a liberal American man. On the contrary, they make him the *blurred copy* that Bhabha referred to. Moreover, they lead him to lose his confidence in American women. Hence, he does not want Musa to marry an American woman, but to marry Gamila that comes from an Arabic and Islamic background.

Thinking that Musa is only attracted to Sheri's white culture, Tayyib warns him of this incompatible relationship. He believes that love must be based on real grounds, "I believe in love. I do. But any love, it must -any love must have some common sense behind it. A solid ground for real feelings to take root" (35). Tayyib's relationship with his American lover came to an end because of the differences in language, color, religion and customs. Although these differences attracted them to each other in the beginning, they, afterwards, became obstacles that hindered their relationship. He maintains:

... like all lovers we thought we were different. But by the end, everything was kicking our behinds. Everything. Small things, and very quickly. My speaking two languages for instance, and how she felt shut out when I invited my friends over and spoke in my own tongue. Or the smells from the kitchen when I cooked my food and how that made my sweat taste funny and could we eat "normal" food for once. And even that I went to the mosque, or rolled out my mat to pray at home. And all of these were charming to her in the beginning. Don't think they weren't. It was like a little spice for her, and for me, the different ways *she* did things. I loved it. But eventually, and simply, she began to miss home. Her idea of what home-life should be. And so did I. (35)

Tayyib believes that inter-ethnic love cannot overcome cultural differences. He thinks that the clash of culture is the main reason that led to his separation from his previous American lover. He tells Musa, "That I let someone make me feel more of a foreigner than I already was. Where I actually felt embarrassed to be who I was" . Hence, he does not want Musa to suffer as he did. He tells him, "Musa: - You cannot be a foreigner twice in this country. When you are out here, you are a foreigner, but when you go home, you must be allowed to hang up your foreigner hat and be yourself" (36). He cannot imagine that Musa's and Sheri's mutual attraction and love can defy cultural differences.

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According to Bhabha, mimicry is close to mockery (Location of Culture 126). The only situation in which Gamila decides to mimic the Americans and forsake her Islamic traditions happens when she was shocked that Musa does not love her, but he falls in deep love with Sheri. Gamila believes that Musa is infatuated with Sheri because of her audacity. Hence, in her encounter with Musa, she tries to get rid of her shyness and mimic Sheri to attract him. She tries to talk about sex thinking that, in this way, she might arouse his admiration as Sheri did. At the same time, she is trying to mock Sheri and accentuate her lack of ethical values. However, the result is ridiculous and disappointing. She does not manage to capture Musa's attention; on the contrary, she raises his anger and disrespect for her.

### **Hybridity in Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World.**

Musa and Tayyib show *hybridity* by combining some aspects of their indigenous Arabic culture with those of the dominant American one. Throughout the play, they are vacillating between the Eastern and the Western cultures and leading a dual life. They are, completely, unable to strike a balance between their native Arabic culture and the American one. Some theorists, such as Chris Weedon and Stuart Hall, believe that identity is not fixed, but ever-changing, and "will change according to the context in which it is used" (Weedon 6). These words apply to Musa and Tayyib who sacrifice some of their values and build up a hybrid identity in order to cope with the multicultural society to which they migrated. Bhabha asserts that people cannot "be addressed as colossal, undifferentiated collectives of class, race, gender or nation", because they "always exist as a multiple form of identification, waiting to be created and constructed" (Rutherford 220). These words account for the change that occurred to Musa and Tayyib when they went to the States. Their characters altered to suit the new context in which they live. They got a dual or hyphenated cultural identity and began to belong to the two sides of the hyphen. According to Bhabha:

Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements— the stubborn chunks, as the basis of cultural identifications. What is at issue is the performative nature of those differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually --remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference- be it class, gender or race (Location of Culture 313).

This hybrid hyphenation makes these two immigrants, Musa and Tayyib, torn between the two cultures. They sometimes adapt to the new milieu to the detriment of their indigenous culture and they, sometimes, refuse to assimilate.

Gamila is the only immigrant character in the play who managed to sustain equilibrium between her two cultures. She is an example of a synchronized cultural hybrid. Gamila was brought up in the States. Hence, she was affected by the context in which she was raised. According to Berry et al., "young people who come to a new country as children, or who are born to immigrants, face the challenge of developing a cultural identity based on both their family's culture of origin and the culture of the society in which they reside"(5). Accordingly, Gamila has been integrated into an American way of life, and at the same time, she does not forget her Islamic background or Arabic heritage. She is both American and Egyptian. She is the only character in the play that succeeded to strike a balance between her culture of origin and the culture of the country in which she lives.

The play highlights Musa's linguistic hybridity. 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 asalam*, *Salaam 'alaykum*, *Al Hamdulillah*, *masjid*, *shay*, *kahk*, *ummar adeen*, etc. Musa learns English from crime books, "I learn English by reading crime books...Raymond Chandler. Dashiell Hammett... Sometimes, in my taxi, I pretend I am like American tough guy, investigating something"(7-8). He speaks poor English with an Arabic accent. Gamila, also, shows linguistic hybridity. When she was expressing her fury because of Musa's betrayal to her, she could not speak Arabic. She maintains, "I can't do Arabic when I'm upset"(63). Contrary to Musa, she is more fluent in English and speaks little Arabic.

Musa's cheap house in America, in which he does not feel comfortable, stresses his harsh financial conditions which led him to leave home and migrate to America:

Musa: It's cheap; not nice.

Sheri: It's alright.

Musa: I sleep here, that's all. Later, when I save enough, I buy

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a place (2-3).

The post-colonial theorist, John McLeod handled the repercussions of migration from one's country or "home" to a foreign country. He maintained, "The concept of 'home' often performs an important function in our lives. It can act as a valuable means of orientation by giving us a sense of our place in the world. It tells us where we originated from and where we belong" (210).

Home plays an important role in sustaining one's identity. Consequently, "unhomeliness" can lead a person to have a hybrid identity. As Bhabha mentions, "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (Location of Culture 9). The idea of home is mentioned many times in the play. Tayyib and his lover left each other because they missed home. He tells Musa, "Musa: - You cannot be a foreigner twice in this country. When you are out here, you are a foreigner, but when you go home, you must be allowed to hang up your foreigner hat and be yourself" (36). Accordingly, he advises Musa to marry the woman that will make him feel at home, "Do not mistake the woman who gives you pleasure with the woman who will surround you with things that feed you, in here. Gamila is a beautiful woman. *She* will make you feel at home. And without this home, a place you can feel comfortable, this country will eat you up. Little by little" (35- 36). However, it is Sheri, not Gamila, who makes Musa feel at home. Although Sheri comes from a background that is completely different from that of Musa, he feels at home with her, not with Gamila who shares the same cultural background with him. This accords with McLeod's opinion that, "to be 'at home' is to occupy a location where we are welcome, where we can be with people very much like ourselves" (210). For Musa, home is any place in which he lives with people he loves and feels comfortable with. Sheri gives him the shelter, stability, security and comfort that McLeod referred to. Hence, he feels at home with her.

### **Ambivalence in *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*.**

Bhabha states that mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence are linked with each other. He states, "the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Location of Culture 86). In *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*, the characters' mimicry and hybridity lead to

their ambivalence. Musa and Tayyib have concurrent contradictory feelings, attitudes and responses towards the same idea or object.

According to Bhabha, ambivalence is "a constant fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action" (Location of Culture 80). Bhabha's words apply to Musa who is ambivalent in most of his actions. Although he invites Sheri to his house to have an illegitimate relationship with her, he, at the same time, informs her of his desire to visit *Ka'bah*, one day, whose photo he keeps in his flat:

Sheri: I know that. I saw a special on TV. People dressed in  
white, going around that

Musa: (points to calendar photo) *Ka'bah*.

Sheri: Yeah. Have you done that?

Musa: One day I will.

Sheri: (walks over to look at photo) It looks so intense. With all  
those people. Like Woodstock, you know. On steroids,  
without the music. Well, maybe not like that. But it looked  
like everyone was so into it. I'd love to be able to lose  
myself in something like that.

Musa: Yes...I dream of it sometimes.... You still want drink?

Sheri: Sure (3).

Another example of Musa's religious ambivalence is that while he keeps a copy of the Holy *Qur'an* in his library, he always consumes alcoholic drinks and commits fornication. Because he is aware of his ambivalence, Musa does not want Sheri to read from the Holy *Qur'an* while they are drinking alcohol and tries to snatch the book from her:

Sheri: (picks up book) What's this one?

Musa: Oh. Not mystery. This is translation of *Qur'an*.

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Sheri: A holy book, right?

Musa: I learn English also this way too, since I know original.

Sheri: (reading from random passage) "Allah knows what the heavens and the earth contain. If three men talk in secret together, He is their fourth; if four, He is their fifth; if five, He is their sixth; whether fewer or more, wherever they be, He is with them."

Musa: (wanting to take the *Qur'an* from her) Maybe this is not the time. (8)

Musa does not want her to talk about God or religion at the time in which they drink alcohol and embark on an illicit relationship. This shows the inner conflict that occurs within Musa and highlights his struggle against two opposing forces in the play, i.e. his Egyptian customs and traditions as well as the American ones. The dilemma of Musa as an anti-hero in this play is that he always has to strike a balance between his cultural heritage and the culture of the country to which he migrated. The anti-hero is a "central character, in a dramatic or narrative work, who lacks the qualities of nobility and magnanimity expected of traditional heroes and heroines in romances and epics" (Baldick 11). Contrary to the classical tragedies which begin with the hero as a great man who falls because of a defect in his character, this play begins with Musa as a person who has many flaws in his character. He "exhibits qualities the opposite of those usually regarded as 'heroic' " (Quinn 28-29). He fornicates, consumes alcoholic drinks and has relationships with two girls at the same time. In a word, Musa lacks the conventional heroic qualities.

Musa's ambivalence is also shown in his attitude towards those Muslim salesmen who adopt a *non-Islamic* way in dealing with people. Although Musa does not adhere to most of the rules of Islam, he is not satisfied with the ways of these salesmen and regards them as bad Muslims:

Sheri: He's open kinda late, isn't he? For this neighborhood.

Musa: He not very good man. Stays open for junkies. He knows they want things at night. I say, why you do that? You Muslim. This is not good. ...He say nothing. Says it's business....

Sheri: Well, they don't have to buy his stuff. If he wants to stay open, let him.

Musa: But it's not right. Not being a good Muslim. (5-6)

Musa's ambivalence arouses Sheri's astonishment. She wonders how he condemns some Muslims while he, himself, violates most of the teachings of Islam. Musa's ambivalence leads him to deny his wrongdoing:

Sheri: Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

Musa: What?

Sheri: We're all sinners.

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

Sheri: Like scotch?

Musa: This is a weakness. God understands weakness. (6)

Musa is aware of his religious ambivalence. He knows that Gamila is a better Muslim than him, and that he does not suit her. He tells her, "I'm sorry....You find better man than me. A good man. A good Muslim. Someone you be proud of. Who live up to what you want. I fail in this. I know I do. I feel it now. With you, I am...I am always failing a little with you" (64). Musa realizes his ambivalent and confused state.

Tayyib is, also, an ambivalent man. He mimics the Americans because he wants to find a place in the American society, but, at the same time, he wants to preserve his native culture. Although he has many illegitimate relationships with American women, he prefers to marry a religious woman who comes from a good Eastern family. Tayyib's pieces of advice for Musa highlight his ambivalence. In his view-point, as long as Musa does not need the

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green card, he is not obliged to marry an American woman. He tells Musa, "Your Gamila is a jewel. And wants you for a husband. She is beautiful. Comes from a good family, and is respectable, and religious. She wants to finish school and become a nurse. *And* she's a citizen. You don't need an American to get you a green card" (34). Tayyib fluctuates between the world of his ancestral culture and that of the dominant American one. Though he likes America and wants to spend all his life in this country, he is not completely satisfied with the American culture. He likes some of its aspects and hates others.

In spite of the fact that Tayyib is not a moral person who has many illicit relationships with women, he condemns Sheri because, in his opinion, she does not follow any moral standards. Although he tries to pursue the American dream of freedom and adores "the free spirit", he does not want Musa to marry Sheri because she has this free spirit for which he came to America:

The final thing I will say is I went to this diner where your Sheri works. Perhaps our friendship will end after I say this but I am obliged to tell you that the way she carries on with other men in the diner would make *me* very nervous. Yes, the women here are whatever, but even American men would have problems seeing their girl sitting on the laps of her customers. And joking and laughing and God knows what else. We all love the free spirit here, that is why we came, but there's free and then there's no morals or anything. (36)

However, he assures Musa that he "know[s] nothing; very well" (36) but he speaks "as a friend" and asserts that "the future will prove [him] right" (37). Tayyib does not know Sheri well, nor does he have any evidences that prove she is an immoral woman. However, he speaks badly about her and distorts her image in front of Musa.

Similar to Musa, Tayyib realizes his ambivalence. He admits that neither he nor Musa are good Muslims. They drink alcohol and have illegitimate relationships with women:

Musa: My friend, you give whiskey for payment. Who are you to talk of good behavior?

Tayyib: You are right, neither of us are good Muslims. I with

my whiskey, and you having no problem screwing  
someone when you are engaged. Gamila, this beautiful  
woman will come back and you will stop seeing this  
Sheri and you will get married? Is this the plan? (33)

Not only do Musa and his Eastern friends do ambivalent actions, but Sheri does, as well. Although she has an illegitimate relationship with Musa, she assures him, all the time, that a good girl must not agree to go with a stranger to his house and have a drink together:

You know - with me in your apartment. - And with this now looking like a set for a movie where the lady you see in the first few minutes gets taken out by the man she shouldn't have gone so casually up to his apartment with. I mean -what kind of good girl accepts an invitation for a drink at two a.m. From a guy she's just met a couple of times. (7)

She feels ambivalent and always maintains that it is improper for a good girl to do such actions, "So I don't come off looking quite as...I can still come off as the good girl, huh? At two a.m. Drinking scotch. With somebody I don't know so well" (7). Because Sheri realizes her ambivalence, she tries, all the time, to defend herself and convince Musa that she is not an easy girl:

On two occasions I only knew the guys for like forty-eight hours, but somehow managed to crunch six months worth of going out with someone into that short period. But you know, I think this is why guys are drawn to me, because I'm that accessible....Except when I say accessible, I don't mean easy. Just to put you in the picture, I'm surprisingly on the good girl side of things. Though God knows, I don't hold my liquor well, I mean... in about ten minutes I'm going to be a cinch to bang. But just so you know, I'm not the kind of girl who drinks scotch at a stranger's apartment at two a.m., and all that suggests. I guess that's what I'm trying to say. (13)

Sheri understands the ambivalent nature of people in Eastern countries and how they have double standards regarding men and women who have illicit relationships. Here, Sheri is the mouthpiece of El Guindi who satirizes those ambivalent Eastern people who might forgive men when they commit

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fornication, while they do not do the same with women, though both of them violate the moral standards as well as the rules of religions. Although Sheri is not ashamed to have an illicit relationship with Musa, she feels very embarrassed when Gamila finds her in his flat. She feels that Gamila would consider her a sinner and tells her, "The least attractive way to meet a relative, naturally. I'm -...feeling just a little bit naked in front of you...This is pretty bad meeting you like this. Even for me and I'm no prude; still, you know. First impressions really matter" (39-40). Moreover, she is very worried about Gamila's reaction as a "religious" person wearing the veil. Being shocked at Musa's betrayal to her with Sheri, Gamila insults her saying that wearing the veil does not mean she is religious, but it means she is not easily available as Sheri is:

Sheri: Please don't judge me like this. I don't deserve it. If  
you're as religious as you seem to be then I think  
you could at least give me a chance.

Gamila: For your information, what I'm wearing doesn't  
mean I'm a nun. Or a saint. Or even that I have  
spontaneous warm feelings for I meet. It just means I  
believe in being modest. Not loud. Not showy. And  
not - easily available. (42-43)

Similar to Musa and Tayyib, Sheri also has religious ambivalence. While she drinks alcohol and has an illicit relationship with Musa, she always talks about God and religious affairs:

Sheri: But I love these kinds of talks. You must get them in your  
taxi at night. The night shift's so cool because people open  
up and talk about things they wouldn't have time for, or  
feel too shy about in the day. And God is like right up there  
on my five top things to talk about. If you talk of God

during the day, people think you're a religious nut.

Musa: You religious?

Sheri: I have aspirations....I get distracted. Life happens. And then who has time to think about anything.(9-10)

Sheri realizes that "Clearly religion is a big deal"(49). She also resorts to religion to convince people that the differences between her and Musa must not hinder their relationship. For example, she tells Gamila that her being older than Musa is not something disgraceful because Prophet Muhammad's wife, Khadija, was older than him, "And I'm not *that* much older than him if that's the issue. And shouldn't I meet the rest of the family before getting dismissed? And by the way, wasn't the Prophet's wife like fifteen years older than him?"(49).

Sheri is aware of Musa's ambivalence. She knows that Musa is not a virtuous person and that he is not studying a lot to go back to college as Gamila desires. Besides, she knows that he is a poor taxi driver and that he sends all the money he earns to his family in Egypt. However, she loves him. In this regard, she is completely different from Gamila who was shocked at his ambivalence and at his being not as "straightforward" and "honest" as he seems (45). Sheri is also ready to exert every effort to help him fulfill his dreams. She tells Gamila "... 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" (46). She, even, tries to come closer to his world and know much about his religion. She tries to read the Holy *Qur'an* to understand his religion, "...And the *Qur'an*. It's really quite a read....I've been reading passages and finding out the Prophet was like an immigrant too, right? The migration he had to make, to escape persecution" (47).What is only important for Sheri is love and the mutual understanding between her and Musa.

The scene in which Gamila finds Sheri in Musa's flat is the climax of the play according to which the plot turns in an unexpected direction for Musa, Sheri and Gamila. At first, Gamila tries to convince Sheri that Musa is exploiting her in order to put an end to their relationship. She tells her, "He is my fiancé. I've just returned from talking about wedding arrangements with his family. He's not some boyfriend like he is for you... He's not going to stay with you. He was just using you. He was *getting off* "(51). Sheri's indifference to

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Gamila's words stresses their different personalities, as well as their different attitudes towards Musa. In spite of all his defects, Sheri does not want to abandon him. She is ready to fight for him and overcome all the obstacles that might impede their relationship. For Sheri, the differences in religion, language and color are not stumbling blocks that might hinder her relationship with Musa. She tells Gamila whom she has mistaken, at first, as Musa's sister, "My only defense is that we're really happy. Know that your brother is really happy. Like happy for the first time in a long time, he told me. And whatever the religion, I think happiness and love have got to be way up there in God's book, right?"(41). This scene is a turning point in the life of these three characters. Gamila discovers that Musa does not love her and that she has to reconsider their relationship. Similarly, Sheri realizes that she has to make sure whether Musa really loves her or he deceives her and just spends a nice time with her. Further, this scene makes Musa arrive at a recognition of his true feelings towards Sheri and Gamila. He recognizes that he does not love Gamila and that their marriage will not be a successful one. He also realizes that Sheri is a more suitable partner for him than Gamila is. It also leads him to make his decisive decision to leave Gamila and marry Sheri.

### **Stumbling Blocks in Intercultural Communication**

Laray M. Barna (1922-2010) discusses the barriers that might thwart people from different cultures to communicate successfully with each other. In her article *Stumbling Blocks in Intercultural Communication* (1994), Barna asserts that there are six stumbling blocks that make cross-cultural exchange challenging.

The *assumption of similarity* is the first of these stumbling blocks. According to Barna, some people think that having the same biological and social needs of "food, shelter, security and so on", makes "everyone alike". However, she states that although these needs are the same, the ways people adapt to them differ from one culture to another. Moreover, these biological needs do not help when people deal with each other. It is true that the assumption of similarity "reduces discomfort of dealing with differences", but at the same time, "if a person acts in a way different from that of other people from a different culture, they will evaluate this as 'wrong' and treat him 'ethnocentrically' "(337). Barna thinks that people from different cultures must also believe in the assumption of difference because, without this assumption,

"someone is likely to misread signs and symbols and judge the scene ethnocentrically" (338). Barna states that people from the United States believe in the assumption of similarity more powerfully than those of the other cultures. In *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*, Tayyib's problem is that both he and his American lover assumed that there are many similarities between them and did not pay enough attention to their differences. Accordingly, their relationship ended in total failure. Hence, he was trying to pay the attention of Musa to the differences between him and Sheri in order not to be agonized as he was. Conversely, Musa and Sheri realize that there are many differences between them. However, unlike Tayyib and his American lover, they accepted and embraced these differences. Moreover, the similarities between Musa and Gamila did not lead to the success of their relationship as the differences between him and Sheri did.

Barna, also, believes that *language differences* might hinder intercultural communication. She thinks that even if a person speaks a foreign language fluently, he may have a problem with "the vocabulary, syntax, Idioms, slangs and dialects" of that foreign language. Barna states that one of the language problems is the "tenacity"; i. e a person might understand just one meaning of a word and does not understand the intended meaning "regardless of the context or the connotation". Moreover, Barna thinks that *non-verbal misinterpretation* might obstruct intercultural communication. The nonverbal signs and symbols, such as "gestures, postures and other body movements" which differ from one culture to another, might be misinterpreted and cause problems. She believes that "The unspoken codes of the other culture that are less obvious such as the handling of time, spatial relationships and subtle signs of respect and formality"(341) might thwart intercultural communication. Musa's linguistic hybridity and his inability to speak English correctly did not cause problems between him and Sheri. Similarly, Sheri's fluent English was not an obstacle that hindered Musa to communicate successfully with her. Each one of them was willing to overcome all these linguistic barriers. On the contrary, sharing the same mother tongue with Gamila did not lead Musa to have a successful relationship with her. The same, also, applies to the nonverbal signs as the gestures and the other body movements which differ from the Egyptian culture to the American one.

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Furthermore, *preconceptions and stereotypes* are also obstacles that might hamper Intercultural communication. Barna gives an example of the distorted image that the Western have about the Arabs as being "inflammable" and believes that this may lead people to avoid dealing with them. Barna defines stereotypes as "overgeneralized second-hand beliefs that provide conceptual bases from which we 'make sense' out of what goes on around us whether or not they are accurate or fit the circumstances "(341). The *tendency to evaluate* is also one of the obstacles that might impede cultural communication. Barna believes that when people from different cultures start to "approve or disapprove the statements and actions of the other person or group rather than try to comprehend completely the thoughts and feelings expressed from the world view of the other"(342), this might cause problems and hinder intercultural communication. Finally, Barna believes that the *high anxiety or tension*, which people from different ethnic groups feel when they deal with each other, might, also, hinder the cross-cultural communication. In spite of all their faults and defects, neither Musa nor Sheri tended to approve or disapprove of each other's modes of behavior. They did not try to evaluate or stereotype each other. Their tolerance with each other was very important to ease the racial tension between them. In this regard, they are completely different from Gamila and Tayyib who had a very limited tolerance towards Sheri and disapproved of all her actions.

### **Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World: A Melting Pot, or, a Salad Bowl?**

*Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* is a play which addresses different models of assimilation. Musa's and Tayyib's desire to assimilate into the American society makes them, unconsciously, adopt the *melting pot* model of assimilation. In colonial discourse, the *melting pot* is a metaphor which denotes the cultural assimilation of different immigrants into the United States (Jacoby 20-25). According to this metaphor, a heterogeneous society turns into a homogeneous one when the different cultures of immigrants melt together with the dominant culture of the United States. The *melting pot* metaphor came into usage in 1908 after it was first presented in a play that carries the same name. Israel Zangwill, the author of this play, used the *melting pot* metaphor to describe America as the country to which oppressed and frustrated people from different ethnicities escape and integrate into its different

social, economic and political spheres. The immigrant protagonist of this play maintained:

Understand that America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups, your fifty languages, and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to—these are fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American.(12)

Since then, the *melting pot* metaphor has been used to refer to the fusion of different cultures into the single, unified and inclusive American culture.

The *melting pot* metaphor was discarded by advocates of multiculturalism who preferred to use different metaphors to refer to the American society such as the *mosaic*, *salad bowl*, or *kaleidoscope*. They preferred to have a miscellaneous cultural mosaic rather than a homogeneous culture. The *salad bowl* is another model of assimilation according to which different cultures mix, like salad ingredients, but the members of each ethnic group maintain the distinguishing qualities of their culture (Kolb15-20). Unlike the *melting pot*, the *salad bowl* turns the homogeneous society into a heterogeneous one. Those who support the *salad bowl* model believe that being American does not mean that one has to abandon his ancestral culture to integrate into the American society, but this only requires the loyalty of the citizen to the United States. On the other hand, those who oppose this model of integration and prefer the *melting pot* believe that America must have one common culture to maintain its national identity.

Throughout the play, Musa and Tayyib try to adopt the *melting pot* model according to which they abandon many aspects of their native culture and mimic many aspects of the American culture. They try to adjust to what Martha Boudakian defines as the "white supremacist U.S. mainstream culture, wherein ... people of color are urged to consider ... [themselves] physically, historically, and ideologically white" (Boudakian 35). It is only in one situation, in the play, that Tayyib decided to adopt the *salad*

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*bowl* model of assimilation, instead of that of the *melting pot*. This happens when he insists that Musa must marry Gamila to preserve their ancestral culture and maintain their individuality in such a multi-ethnic society.

Contrary to Musa and Tayyib, Abdallah, Musa's Muslim Sudanese roommate, favors the *salad bowl* model of assimilation. In the two times in which he appears in the play, he voices his inner thoughts and feelings about America as a salad bowl. At his first appearance, he delivers a long soliloquy while he was "dressed in the white robes of a pilgrim on a Hajj". In this soliloquy, he talks about the three years he spent in America and how he turned from a "poor boy from Khartoum... into a businessman with much cash, as thick as a deck of playing cards". Abdallah's soliloquy shows that he is such a kind of immigrant who knows how to adapt himself to the new culture, "I quickly learn to figure out things as soon as I come to this new country with all its strange customs. Its different ways of doing things and seeing the world. The different foods, the huge portions of food and amazing size of buildings". He asserts that he did not find a "problem fitting in" and accepting "odd jobs" to survive in America. Hence, Abdallah did not mind to work in "cleaning offices ... grocery store, a Laundromat"(21). He did not have such feelings of shock and angst which many immigrants get when they move to new countries. On the contrary, he was very happy to meet people from different cultures in America, "... in meeting all these people, I get to know them. And believe it or not, what they say about people is true, boring as it is: we are all basically, wonderfully the same...Arriving in a land filled with so many strangers, and enough strangeness in it could make you cry sometimes, in spite of all this, I do great"(22). Although living in a multi-cultural country might be difficult, Abdallah learnt how to cope with all these trials and tribulations.

At his second and final appearance, Abdallah also emphasizes how it is enriching to live with people from different cultures:

One more look. Before my body washes ashore and they bury me. Before they find my suitcase floating and identify me. Look where my memory - my spirit, takes me. To this place. To the struggles I had here. I went - I traveled to give thanks. To walk with strangers gathered for something. To walk in what I knew would be a crush of too many people

gathered to give thanks. A coming together. Of people from everywhere; with different tongues and looks and ways of seeing things. And for all of us to remember a time before we were - before we were strangers to each other. To connect, and pull our voices together in song and reflect on the paths our hearts have stumbled along, and surrender our mistakes and everything else. And here: The country I came to. The strangers I met here. The struggle to remember the time before we were strangers here too. (80)

Abdallah makes a comparison between pilgrimage and living in a multicultural society, as well as between pilgrims and those who deal with *the other*:

The everyday pilgrimage you make when you open your mouth to a stranger and hope to God you are understood. The everyday *Ka'bah* you walk around, the everyday Mecca you head towards. The people you meet who don't know you. The way you have to open up and travel to the place someone is coming from. Before my body washes ashore, I remember that, not the immigrant I was, but the pilgrim I became by coming here. (81)

Abdallah appreciates cultural diversity. He believes that people of different ethnic backgrounds must communicate with each other. In attempting to understand *the other*, we, in a sense, go through a pilgrimage or a journey. We try to make a connection, with the divine in us, individually, and the divine in *the other*. Abdallah's words stress the divine in people and between people and emphasize that people are consecrated, too. Similar to any pilgrimage, the journey to the divine is laborious. Abdallah's final speech shows that we are the travellers and we are the destination as well.

Abdallah is Musa's and Tayyib's foil. Besides favoring the *salad bowl* model of assimilation, rather than that of the *melting pot* as his two peers, he is portrayed as a pious person who makes pilgrimage and who does not drink alcohol or fornicate as Musa and Tayyib do. Moreover, his words at his first and second appearances echo what Allah stated in the Holy *Qur'an*, "Oh mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is)

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the most righteous of you"(49-13). This shows how he is a religious person who follows the teachings of Islam, the religion that calls for peaceful co-existence between people from different religions and cultures.

At the end of the play, Musa decides to go out from the *melting pot* to the *salad bowl*. He decides to live with Sheri and embrace the cultural differences and heritages of each other. Musa and Sheri decide to make the best use of hybridity and produce something new out of their different cultures. They endeavor to create *the third space*, that Bhabha accentuated, and decide to have a new way of life, different from that people planned for them or expected from them. Martin Luther King believed that people "hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they don't communicate with each other, and they don't communicate with each other because they are separated from each other"(35). Musa and Sheri avoided all the complications that Luther King stressed. They gave themselves the chance to communicate with each other; hence, they knew each other well. This led them to fall in love with each other and defy all the people to maintain their relationship. The ending of the play emphasizes how Yussef El Guindi prefers heterogeneity to homogeneity. By making Musa go out from the *melting pot* to the *salad bowl*, El Guindi asserts that people must co-exist peacefully with each other, maintain their individuality, accept and embrace their cultural differences. Moreover, the concluding lines of the play, uttered by Abdallah, show how the dramatist values cultural diversity, "This gathering of strangers. So rich....For that alone...for this gathering alone, I give thanks"(80). Abdallah, here, is the spokesperson of El Guindi who appreciates cultural multiplicity and calls for respecting cultural differences.

### **Conclusion**

Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence manifest themselves in the play through the actions and modes of behavior of the major characters. The analysis of *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* has shown how the desirability of assimilation of the immigrant characters, Musa and Tayyib, led them to vacillate between two different worlds throughout the play. They, sometimes, mimic the dominant culture, through their appearances and manners in order to find a place in the American society, and, sometimes, reject some of its aspects. The paper has stressed how they are

trapped in the liminal space between the two cultures and how their hybrid characters and dual lives led to their ambivalence. The paper has highlighted their struggle of oscillation between the two cultures and demonstrated how their ambivalence led to their internal conflicts as well as conflicts with those around them. However, unlike his friend Tayyib, Musa succeeded to resolve the conflict inside him at the end of the play. Gamila is both American and Arab. She is a hybrid that cannot get rid of any of her two identities. This paper has emphasized how the characters' mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence are the repercussions of collision between Western and Eastern cultures

Moreover, this paper has shown how Yussef El Guindi prefers heterogeneity to homogeneity. The ending of the play emphasizes how he favors the *salad bowl* model of assimilation in which people maintain their individuality and embrace each other's cultural differences , not that of the *melting pot* in which people reject diversity and abandon their heritages to *melt* altogether within the dominant culture. Furthermore, this paper has accentuated how the different stumbling blocks of intercultural communication, that Laray M. Barna accentuated, did not impede the hero and the heroine of the play from co-existing peacefully with each other and how their inter-ethnic love could overcome all the multicultural challenges. It has shown how they decided to live together in the best possible way, maintain their own individuality, celebrate their personal qualities that unite them and disregard any cultural differences that could set them apart.

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*Journal of Scientific Research in Arts*

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