



Reconciliation of Diverse Cultures in Yussef El Guindi's Play *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*

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Abstract

Arab immigrants to Europe are individuals of Arab descent who left the Arab world to avoid political incarceration or acts of violence. To assimilate into their new communities, they carry their political beliefs, cultural traditions, and customs with them. The regulations and expectations of their own cultures disjointed Arab immigrants in various directions, causing them to struggle with identity issues. Arab immigrants struggle with issues of identity as they are pulled in different directions by the rules of expectations of their own cultures. The conflict to resolve the issue of their double origins may be reflected in times of doubt or confusion throughout their performance, manifesting in their internal conflict. Becoming fluent and proficient in their cultural origins takes ongoing work and commitment. As they strive to understand the subtitles of both cultures, the characters of the chosen plays battle feelings of indecency and feelings of not fully belonging to either environment. Immigrant families with cultural conflicts suffer from the marginalized and fragmented life experience. A persistent sense of alienation illustrates their struggle. How an immigrant's native culture and the culture of their host nation are intertwined may alter how their psyche is constructed. They suffer from double consciousness, and their character becomes hybrid due to their fluctuation between two distinct cultures.

Keywords: Immigrants, Cultures, Conflict, Marginalized, Double Consciousness



التفاوض على الهوية عبر الحدود الثقافية في مسرحية يوسف الجندي عشرة بهلوانيين في قفزة إيمانية مذهلة

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المستخلص

ان المهاجرون العرب إلى أوروبا هم أفراد من أصول عربية غادروا العالم العربي وارضه هرباً من الاعتقال السياسي أو أعمال العنف وكذلك للاندماج في مجتمعاتهم الجديدة، هم يحملون معهم معتقداتهم السياسية وتقاليدهم الثقافية وعاداتهم. وقد فرقتهم قواعد وتوقعات ثقافتهم، مما جعلهم جميعاً يعانون من مشاكل الهوية. ويعاني المهاجرون العرب من مشاكل الهوية بالذات إذ تجذبهم قواعد وتوقعات ثقافتهم في اتجاهات مختلفة. وقد ينعكس صراعهم ذلك لحل مشكلة أصولهم المزدوجة في أوقات من الشك أو الارتباك طوال أدائهم، متجلباً في صراعهم النفسي الداخلي. حيث يتطلب إتقان أصولهم الثقافية وإتقانها جهداً والتزاماً مستمرين. وبينما يسعون جاهدين في بلاد المهجر لفهم دلالات الثقافتين، تواجه شخصيات المسرحية المختارة مشاعر الحزن وعدم الانتماء الكامل لأي من البيئتين. وتعاني الأسر المهاجرة التي تعاني من صراعات ثقافية من التهميش والتشوي في تجربة الحياة. ويجسد ذلك في شعورهم الدائم بالاعتراب صراعهم. إن تداخل ثقافة المهاجر الأصلية وثقافة بلده المضيف في الغربية قد يُغيّر من تكوين نفسيته. فهو يعاني من ازدواجية في الوعي، وتصبح شخصيته هجينة نتيجة تذبذبه بين ثقافتين مختلفتين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المهاجرون، الثقافات، الصراع، التهميش، الوعي المزدوج

1- The Internal Conflict of Double Identities

The play *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* (2006) was written by Yussef El Guindi (1960-). The characters of the play represent the dispersed and fragmented life. El Guindi has shown the social unrest and violence that occurred in his home country, Egypt, and other Arab countries as a result of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, the War on Terror, the disputed nature of regional government, and the Arab Spring in his plays. Jack Helbig claims that El Guindi says, “they asked me to come to L.A. [Los Angeles: City in California] speak with people in the Muslim community, then to go off and write the play.’[...] El Guindi felt a certain pressure was on the show to speak for all American Muslim” and concluded that “no one play can do that” (Helbig). Then, defending his controversial play, El Guindi declares:

Some have asked me, why are you depicting a gay person and homophobia? There are so many other issues to deal with. However, to humanize people, you must show them warts. Our humanity lives in our cracks and wounds. How can you affirm something without talking about everything?” (El Guindi *Our Enemies* 15).

His work goes beyond surface-level concerns and delves deeper into the creation of meaning and worlds. El Guindi is the most gifted Arab American revolutionary playwright, and he is now active and known for his remarkable linguistic maneuvers.

2- Yussef El Guindi: A Life of Literary Achievement

Yussef El Guindi was born in Egypt and resides in Seattle, Washington. He completed his studies at the University of Hull in England before earning an MFA in playwriting from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's Carnegie Mellon University. Many of the plays he has written have been produced across the country. He has won numerous awards for his work, including the Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award, the Seattle Times Footlight Award, and the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award. He is a well-known playwright whose plays frequently address issues of Arab-American identity, intercultural tension, and the experience of immigration. Among his well-known plays are *Back of the Throat* (2005), A post-9/11 drama exploring themes of suspicion and paranoia. *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* (2006) Explores the lives of an Arab-American family balancing tradition and modernity. *Language Rooms* (2010) is a dark comedy about loyalty and assimilation in a post-9/11 world. *Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat* (2008) examines the challenges facing Arab-American writers and intellectuals. *Hostages* (2019) focuses on two captives trying to keep hope alive in dire circumstances. *Hotter Than Egypt* (2020) is a play about an American couple on vacation in Egypt and cultural

and personal revelations test their relationship (Haskins).

El Guindi has also authored essays and articles about identity, theater, and how Arabs and Muslims are portrayed in popular culture. These essays are frequently published in anthologies, theater journals, and internet forums devoted to modern theater and cultural criticism. El Guindi's work, which offers insightful and critical viewpoints on the nexus of politics, culture, and identity, is still relevant in modern American theater.

3- Yussef El Guindi's *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*

A person takes a leap of faith when he/she put their trust in something without considering all of the possible outcomes. To have faith in something, one must metaphorically cross the emotional and psychological barriers of reason and logic. Almost every character in the play flights, symbolically speaking, to investigate his/her true identity. The significance of iconographic elements like the headscarf, Ramadan, oud, and mosque in establishing a sense of home and belonging for first-generation Arab Americans like Kamal and Mona must be carefully considered in *Ten Acrobats in An Amazing Leap of Faith* (2018). The sounds of the oud bring back memories of their ancestors, which in turn show a longing for a country. The Islamic religious beliefs embodied in the dress rules, such as covering women's hair which symbolized by the hijab or withholding from alcohol.

A Muslim family from Egypt tries to maintain ties to their culture while simultaneously embracing American culture in El-Guindi's *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*. In order to be ready for an old family friend's wedding in Egypt, which is happening over the course of one Ramadan day, relationships will be challenged and even strained. The play deals with family, immigration, and generational conflict. Throughout the play, he crafts ten scenes that mirror the process of becoming. The characters in the play are born into devastation-stricken environments, which represent the individuals' disintegration as they seek a sense of belonging and identity. When describing the disintegration of a sense of belonging to a particular place or thing, transnational identity plays a significant role.

Kamal and Mona, the play's protagonists, are parents to three children—Tawfiq, Huwaida, and Hamza—who are all struggling with questions of who they are and how they fit in with the world around them. The parents, Kamal and Mona, are deeply rooted in their Islamic heritage and their cultural identity as first-generation Arab Americans. They continue to use Arabic terminology and observe traditional rituals like Ramadan fasting and prayer in their own language even though they live in the United States. The real-life characters that the drama seeks to analyze are Kamal and Mona. When Ramadan rolls around, Kamal follows all the rules for fasting. He takes his role as a father very seriously and wants his children to obey him and follow Islamic law. However, he is disappointed with their aggressive behaviors. He also makes an effort to furnish his house using certain iconography, including an oud and a carpet. As he strives to build his ideal

world in America incorporating Islamic and Arabic cultural practices, it may be claimed that a sense of belonging is tied to the iconographic concept.

The play's Arab-American family's mother, Mona, is far more subdued than Kamal; she passes judgment on Huwaida's clothing. She lives according to Islamic law and Arab culture, but she also adjusts to American culture as a result of her caring ways toward her children. Mona and Kamal, the parents, embody their Arab identities through their constant furniture-rearranging throughout the play. Their difficulty in adopting to American cultural customs reflects how they adjust to the life in America. This transformation represents their uncertainty and the way they are always "becoming" in the West. This situation mirrors Bhabha's (1994) third space theory, which is characterized as a symbolic realm wherein many social or cultural paradigms interact to generate novel or hybrid perspectives. Because they are so distant from their native nation, Mona and Kamal had to tolerate their third space.

On the other side, their offspring struggle with issues like atheism, homosexuality, and the hijab. Tawfiq, Kamal's son, often irritates him because of his unsuitable behavior within the framework of Arab norms. To give just two examples, he has never kissed his father's hand or spoken Arabic to anyone. Attempting to convey that this is not an emergency, Mona acts respectfully here; alternatively, she acts in this manner in the event that the conversation between Tawfiq and Kamal does not continue. Because of his parents' immigration to the United States, Tawfiq is the second generation of Arab Americans. In the play, he secretly becomes an atheist due to his theological confusion; nevertheless, other characters respond differently to this; for instance, Kamal views his atheism as a serious sickness requiring immediate medical attention. He says that "Every family should have an atheist," Kamal's buddy Aziz says, expressing his interest in atheism. "It keeps the faithful on their toes and God's voice fresh" (El Guindi 97). Because of his liberated and accepting worldview, Tawfiq's persona fully immerses himself in American culture. For example, he seeks to meet Huwaida and Murad before to their engagement and is also opposed to arranged marriages.

As with other affected character in the play; Huwaida struggles with her own inner demons. Additionally, she is an Arab American of the second generation. Because she comes from an artistic family, she is pursuing a double major in mathematics and art. Because her dream about the subconscious field delves into her duality—like wearing a bikini and a veil—she is portrayed as a personification of inbetweenness. Huwaida's dream character her Double represents her other self, and appears in the dream to reveal the unspoken truths that even Huwaida cannot admit. Because they hold such divergent worldviews, Huwaida and H.D. (Huwaida Double) are perpetually at odds with one another. And the Arab community's faith in Islam and its laws is reflected in the dream's veiled figures. H.D. is being judged by these personalities for disobeying Islamic laws by freely

expressing herself in a bikini. Though she initially agrees with Huwaida that the American marriage system is flawed, Huwaida ultimately opts out of the family matching process with Murad.

In spite of Huwaida objection toward the marriage system in America, yet, she decides not to participate in Murad's family matching procedure. Because of this issue, it is clear that she is not American or Egyptian. Due to internal doubts, her fragmented identity, and her ongoing "becoming" issue is a reflection of this. Pauline, Huwaida's psychologist, is asking about Huwaida's options. Her views on veiled women and Islam make her a symbol of the biased Western worldview. Here Pauline attacks Islam for its patriarchy and the taboos it imposes on women. From a Western viewpoint, covering up one's face is considered as a sign of humiliation for her. Islam is thus seen as an ideology that opposes Western-style feminism and the advancement of women. In her dream, Huwaida envisioned herself in a bikini, her hair pulled back. The conflict between the two faiths in Huwaida's subconscious is vividly depicted here. She is caught in the between, unable to articulate her condition. A message of absolute truth, the play's topic of universal applicability is revealed at the play's conclusion. Without regard to ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status, this unifying principle welcomes all people. Living life together is paramount. Ultimately, H.D. highlights the importance of Ramadan while highlighting the concept of God and bringing the entire family together.

Hamza, the third son, faces similar challenges in reaffirming his identity while contending with his country culture. People regard him as a victim of the prejudiced American society. The oud, the ancient musical instrument, is his main instrument. In contrast to Tawfiq, Hamza is a pleasant person since he is obedient and does not question anything else happening in his life. The fact that Hamza does not know how to act in relation to his religious choices is revealed in his lengthy talk with Kevin who is an American young man. Despite his best efforts, he gives in to Kevin's charms and violates Islamic norms including fasting and prayer. After returning home from jail, Hamza remains speechless, this may be interpreted as a sign of his regret towards Western ideology and activities. In this context, Kevin's homosexual identification can be interpreted as a symbol. In addition, by asking where Hamza is from initially, Kevin mirrors Pauline's prejudiced American society. Hamza feels like an outsider since, in the view of Westernized people, he does not belong to America, and he refuses to accept San Diego as the solution. Upon questioning Hamza about his homeland, Kevin rejects the response "San Diego" when Hamza explains his origins. Kevin's query: "Where is your family from?" usually indicates that Arab Americans are not regarded by Americans as belonging to any part of the country. It is a form of prejudice based on ethnicity.

Aziz who is a good friend of Mona and Kamal, and his son Murad both face distinctive difficulties to their identities within their own families. They are impacted by American popular culture, even if they do not reside in

the United States. They travel all the way from Egypt just so the Aziz family's son Murad and Kamal's daughter Huwaida can get married. But Huwaida and Murad aren't interested. Even though he does not currently reside in the United States, Murad's actions and dreams show that he is terrified of the prevailing culture there. He fears becoming a lost soul in America and is terrified of the economic culture there. This emotion is based on his emotional fragility and terror. His faithfulness to his native cultural identity and tolerance in interacting with Huwaida help her to reaffirm her cultural identity. She finds shelter in his presence because she can talk and behave freely.

3-1 Trauma in *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*

El Guindi's skillful, full acrobatic language delves deep into the theme of postcolonial trauma. He tries to humanize the Arab American characters in his play rather than discussing current political events. *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* presents the traumatic identity of Arab Americans who struggle because of their traditional alienation from American culture. The cultural conflict is understood with Arab American identities as America's hegemonic Americanized thought system. El Guindi's play explores various themes, such as post-colonized societies' personal and cultural identity crises within a new cultural context. Cultural adaptation and assimilation are among the most important issues tackled in El Guindi's play. The struggle of negotiating natives' principles within the European cultural context is investigated in the play.

In his play, El Guindi presents Kamal's family to enact how an individual suffers to maintain his personal and cultural identity within a new context. The parents grapple with differing views on cultural tradition and modernity, unlike the young generation who seek to navigate their identity in a way that balances two worlds in two different cultures. Tawfiq tries to integrate his desire to keep his cultural identity with modern features. He challenges his family's cultural norms and questions their preconceived notions and stereotypes. Tawfiq expresses his disagreement about his sister's engagement in a traditional way; he suggests that "She does not know what she is doing" and that she is "walking into something this stupid" (El Guindi 5).

Despite Mona, Tawfiq's mother, modern Westernized approach to raising her children, Tawfiq shows a strong responsibility toward his sister and brother, which reveals the impact of his Egyptian roots. Mona exclaims about Tawfiq's "short-tempered" (5) and disintegration with his family, to whom Tawfiq responds that he does not "want to pretend anymore" (5). The family relationship is what matters for Mona; she does not interfere with what he believes in as long as he does not "have to drag it in here and hit us over the head with it" (6), unlike his father, Kamal, who adopts a very Eastern traditional way in behaving with his sons. Kamal gets upset whenever he is treated "like a guest in [his] own family who mustn't be

allowed to know too mud” (33). His discovery of Tawfiq's atheism brings him face-to-face with deep trauma.

Kamal attributes his family's crisis to his migration to America, saying, “It was a mistake coming to this country” (26) and that their pain would never have happened if they stayed in Egypt. Tawfiq deliberately confesses to his father about his atheism, telling him that he does not “want to walk around like [he] is a criminal in [his] own home” (31). His behavior reveals accumulated psychological complexities, which heap up and then explode in a series of confessions. His meeting with Aziz unfolds the reason behind his conversion to a non-believer. He claims that he “stopped wasting [his] time and believing in something [he] does not see” (92) and that people who pretend to be religious are always committing sins while “God in their mouths all the time” (93). Tawfiq expresses to Aziz his fragmentation, which results from his frustration due to social hypocrisy. He tells Aziz that each religious party “goes around thinking their religion is just a little bit better than the next” (93). These small details ruin everything good about religion, according to Tawfiq's point of view.

Kamal, on the other hand, is experiencing a tremendous amount of pain between his family obligations, and his responsibilities as an Arab American citizen who should act according to the European cultural context. His reaction to Tawfiq's confession about his conversion to atheism uncovers his unconditional love for his family. He invites Tawfiq to join them for a meal: “Will you be joining us for Iftar” (23).

Furthermore, he gets tense when Tawfiq ignores to show him compassion: “I'm just asking for a hug” (24). Kamal's trauma of realizing Tawfiq's conversion has been undergoing a “belatedness” phase. Caruth explains that one of the most important characteristics of trauma is it is “belatedness,” in which the immediacy of a traumatic event with its extreme anxiety is confronted with that later not event-based kind of trauma (qtd. in Crape 66). Kamal's long conversations with Mona reflect his hidden struggle to maintain a compromise in the middle of this turmoil. When Mona refers to Tawfiq's crisis as a trial “to grow up” (El Guindi 27), Kamal exclaims about the meaning of growing up “in this country” (27). Kamal denies the Westernized parental rules, saying that nothing justifies treating your parent as “out of fashion” (27) or stop unbelieving in God because it does not go with “the latest train” (27) because God asks and demands too much or “takes away from one's busy schedule of shopping, and watching more T.V.” (27). El Guindi skillfully deconstructs the Western mindset by using Kamal's episode. El Guindi calls such freedom from family and religious obligations “that is what being healthy means here” (27), where God has no place. El Guindi refers to the environment that leads to Tawfiq's desolation, putting it on Kamal's mouth: “This is the environment we brought Tawfiq up in” (28). Mona seizes the chance to remind Kamal that he did the same with his father while young: “You did it when you went against your father's wishes and came here” (28). Kamal's feelings of anxiety and depression start to witness

compulsory repetition whenever he meets his family members. It takes the form of angry expressions and a strong overflowing of emotions. He provokes Tawfiq to re-confrontation because he wants to re-examine his crisis. Kamal teases Tawfiq by thanking him for joining his family despite their “primitive beliefs” (55). He then announces that he regrets that people consider God a fabrication of the imagination or a fantastic idea. Kamal experiences a wave of anger, which he describes as saying, “It is like a chicken bone stuck in my throat” (55).

El Guindi reflects on his characters’ fragmentation in Kamal’s family living room, where most furniture is scattered and put at “odd angles and positions”(74). It is never put in its proper place till the last scene. Kamal is also shocked by his younger son Hamza’s bad behavior with Kevin (the American young man). Kamal celebrates Hamza's passion for playing the oud [musical instrument], which continues his grandfather’s, but then he regrets his son's misuse of this “beautiful oud” (25). Kamal tells Hamza that the oud should have inspired you and “call out the best” in you while you have it next to you, “debating yourself?” (75). Kamal is again depressed by his son’s frustrating behavior, saying that it will be fixed publically in his record. Kamal is overwhelmed by shame and attributes all these misfortune to the displacement crisis. He wonders to Mona, "What happened? Did they change the drink water on us? Is there a virus going around that is affecting our ability to be sane? Decent? (76). Despite his agony, Kamal uses bitter humor to negotiate his crisis with his family. He suggests that Tawfiq's permanent solution is the phrase “So what” (76), which can be applied to help them get out of their catastrophic situation. Tawfiq then suggests that as long as “no one was harmed. This isn’t a crime” (76). Due to generational and cultural context, Kamal is constrained from ending his family conversation when he discovers the deep chasm or bottomless pit between him and some of his family members. He concludes that their talking “offers nothing but chaos” (79) and that “no family could survive for a day” (79) with their modern westernized ideas.

Kamal pretends to have control over his many drives, but he confesses to Mona that despite all his efforts to keep his family tied, he is called “the bad guy” (18). Kamal wonders about their deadly fault that the “world turned upside down” like that and that he only wants to “protect his son” from himself! – To stop him going down a road he doesn’t have to go down and make his life hundred times more difficult” (81).

El Guindi highlights the possibility of hope despite all odds to his characters. Kamal leans to use humor in serious situations. Ironically, he tells Aziz[Kamal’s friend] that their house needs “a big cleaning” and that Hawaida is the sanest among his children. He attributes her decision concerning her engagement to Murad to the bad effect of this country: “It will turn strange switches on and off in peoples’ heads and make them act in way you don’t understand” (85). Kamal asks Aziz to warn anyone who thinks that leaving home brings any good and prosperity. He uses his son as an

example of cultural deterioration explaining “how this place can rob you in more ways that it can give” (88).

Cultural adaptation and assimilation are tackled differently in El Guindi's play. Stef Craps argues that trauma originates from “a single devastating blow, as acute stab that breaks the individual's protective shield, causing serious damage” (Craps 2010 55). This individual's protective shield may undergo severe consequences due to daily “humiliation and abuses that can act as traumatic stressors” (56). El Guindi's characters' trauma is rooted in their specific historical and geographical context; thus, in *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*, it is called “culturally specific” (56) trauma. Huwaida decides that she is sick of her repeated nightmares and heads to a psychotherapist. She tries to reconcile both worlds: her inherited and her acquired identities. Her dreams are hunted by veiled figures who are supposed to be her family and friends. She exclaims whether dreams are trying “to teach us things?” (El Guindi 9) because she appears wearing a swimsuit in a Miss America contest and still veiled or in hijab. Huwaida adds, “The swimsuit fantastically on me. I'm mortified but a part of me takes note of, wow: I'm not bad” (10). This controversial feeling reflects Huwaida's suppressed desire to resist her traditional lifestyle in Western society. Huwaida Double, who appears dressing in a one-piece swimsuit, carrying a bench -ball and shows repeatedly in Huwaida dreams, dares to address a crowd of figures who are watching a big screen, are Huwaida's “friends and relatives, people from the community” (10). Huwaida feels bitter because she reveals herself in a swimsuit despite being a veiled Muslim.

Moreover, what pains her most is that her Double has taken the microphone and “dedicated this moment to all [her] Muslim sisters around the world” (11). She denies her behavior, saying she has “no idea I'd be in this contest, I swear to God” (11). El Guindi stresses the role of consciousness compulsory, repeating the individual's post-traumatic experiences through Huwaida's repeated nightmares. Huwaida Double then explains Huwaida's suppressed desire to adopt an American lifestyle, saying, “I am tired of being told that I have no modesty in coming out like this. I do have modesty” (12). However, she is confronted by other veiled figures who disapprove of her confession, saying “Shameless” (12), which Huwaida Double notes the other force of Huwaida's desires that urge her to keep on her traditional identity. Huwaida argues that part of her need to act contrary to what her mind orders her to do and that “this dream is acting out what I do not permit myself in real life” (13).

Pauline, the psychotherapist, is part of a Western culture that disapproves of Huwaida's traditional practices; thus, her suggestion of introducing Huwaida as a veiled woman, neglecting her other personal traits, provokes Huwaida to end the consultation. Huwaida supposes that any individual experiences different personalities depending on their needs: “We're always splitting off into different people depending on the occasion” (16), to whom Pauline respectfully responds that “a healthy person is able to

integrate those various parts” (16). Upon Pauline's aggressive points of view about hijab, saying that “she does not see any sign of God in demanding woman hide themselves” (66), Huwaida defends her point of view, stating that she wants to get rid of her Double annoying character in her dream and has no need to be “liberated, or saved” (66) from her traditional or cultural practices.

Hamza's behavior with Kevin indicates his exhaustion in balancing his original and adopted cultures. Being raised with hybrid identities, Hamza suffers from an undetermined sexual orientation. Kevin, Hamza's seducer, stands for Arab American's sexual fear in American society due to his homosexuality. He tells Hamza about the mythical story of the oud, which he calls a “funny myth” (46), in which he combines religious figures like Cain and Adam to be seen as part of a ridiculous narrative. Their conversation reflects Hamza's passiveness in front of Kevin's Westernized prejudiced expressions. Kevin shows his ethnic discrimination when he does not accept the answer San Diego” (44) as Hamza's original home. Kevin indicates, “I mean –where's your family from” (44), referring to the American disregard for Arab Americans.

Despite Hamza's stronghold on his religious and cultural practices and tidy family values, he fails to address for Kevin's seductive manners. Hamza insists that “Muslims don't do this” (48) and that his religion does not “end up being such killjoy.” Furthermore, he cannot understand how Kevin can “be doing this” (49) if he believes in God. Hamza suffers from deep agony after his disgraceful, humiliating, and scandalous interaction with Kevin and prefers to be enclosed in his room, avoiding any contact with others. This feeling of shame reveals Hamza's honest and clear conscience and his true sense of guilt as a reaction to his traumatic experience. Kamal thinks it is an inherited misfortune because his mother:

always thought it a vice of my father's, playing this... He would come home and get drunk on this instrument... Shut us out with the pleasure he found it. ...Sometimes making us be his audience... We would beautiful listen... And sometimes enjoy... I always wonder where he went in his head when he played. (75)

Nevertheless, Hamza insists that whatever they think about him, it is never happened “I'm not-it's not. It's not me. Please don't think that I'm not... The thought disgusts me. That you would think that of me” (70) and that “nothing happened; whatever the police said. I would never do that to you or myself”. Then he promises his parents that everything will be all right. Regretting and denying this shameful behavior gives room to identify future affirmation. El Guindi never gives his characters superficial analysis; he justifies every detail that leads them to act the way they do.

The struggle of negotiating native principles with European cultural context, according to Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma, is called survival

trauma, in which the victim of trauma finds it hard to cope with a natural, healthy life again (Craps 66). Despite her unresolved agony, Huwaida is El Guindi's most committed character to her Egyptian identity. She disapproves of her brothers' behavior in assimilating the American identity. In a private talk with Tawfiq, she criticizes his repeated request to stop her arranged engagement. She denounced the failure of marriage in America "leaving a miserable trail of step parents and screwed-up kids. As opposed to arranged marriages that have a much higher success rate" (El Guindi 33). For her, the traditional way of marriage is better and saner than two "strangers hooking up online" (33). She expresses herself openly on her first meeting with Murad, which results in their mutual understanding and harmony at the end of the play.

Despite her approval of the traditional marriage habits, which denies dating and getting to know the other person beforehand, she refuses to get engaged to Murad initially. Part of her pulls her to her original Egyptian side, and the other part encourages her to enjoy the adventure of adopting a new culture. She tells Murad that dating "gives you a false impression of knowing the other person before entering into a commitment that by its nature changes the people who enter into it" (38). Through Huwaida, El Guindi exposes some social issues that burden the young generation who are living in an in-between space, which never helps in maintaining their traumatized identities. Huwaida has her share of double identities, which haunt her dreams and traumatize her. Murad, too, confesses to her his regret for choosing medicine: "I felt it more important to protect the reasons for wanting to be a doctor, than to lose those reasons and become one" (99). He realizes that there is something wrong with their education or formation. Huwaida supports Murad and justifies his point of view, suggesting that "being an idealist isn't bad" but it is a promising drive, she encourages him and tells him that he is going to be "a great doctor" (99).

3-2Cocooning Identity in *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*

El Guindi's *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* provides nuanced perspectives on intellectual decolonization. He strives to cocoon his characters' identities to ensure they act as protective measures against the imposition of rigid dichotomies such as discrimination and estrangement.

The theme of identity reformation is considered in *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* according to the theoretical framework of theorists like Frantz Fanon and Cathy Caruth. Frantz Fanon's significant viewpoints offer critical insights into the effects of colonial trauma on a society striving for growth and liberation. He explores the influence of collective trauma on the psychology of an entire nation, striving for the independence and self-determination of its citizens. Fanon's experiences and viewpoints are illustrated in Caruth's assertion that narratives not only chronicle traumatic incidents but also 'articulate' and 'transmit' them. Fanon and Caruth assert that trauma encompasses not only physical assault but also the significant

psychological effects that resound inwardly. The study applies Frantz Fanon's theory of post-colonization and his key concept concerning the inferiority complex caused by a traumatic experience. Fanon's concept can be applied to El Guindi's characters who depersonalized themselves due to violent colonial intensity or a sense of misunderstanding and disintegration. Nearly all *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* characters suffer from personal cultural crises. Some characters from the younger generation experience a process of brainwashing because of their strong sense of belongingness, which results in their loss of identity. They strive to cocooning in order to create a hybrid identity that honors their past native identity while adapting to their present circumstances.

Several strategies are applied to foster acceptance, tolerance, and empowerment. El Guindi's strategies can be within the limits of symbolic cultural and religious practices and community and relationships, concentrating on characters' bonds. El Guindi uses symbolic actions and objects with cultural significance throughout the play. The symbols anchor the characters' identities, cocooning their traumatic experience. This cocooning process assists survivors of trauma in assessing their current stage of recovery and recognizing additional empowerment to manage and transcend trauma effectively.

The theoretical framework pinpoints the concept of Caruth's survival trauma. The agony of negotiating traditional cultural context elements within a Westernized cultural context is explored thoroughly in El Guindi's *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*. Survivors, after traumatic experiences, may fall into another form of trauma, in which the victim finds it hard to cope with a natural, healthy life again. In El Guindi's play, the characters witness many personal and cultural identity crises. It is rather traumatized memory than an event-based trauma. Most of El Guindi's characters are emotionally wounded, suffering recurrent frustration, dissociation, sadness, and fragmentation.

Kamal's insistence on uniting family for Iftar in Ramadan despite their crisis represents El Guindi's aim to convey an insight into Muslims' rituals and how Arab Americans navigate them. Huwaida Double describes Ramadan as the experience "that encourages you to remember God, not only because of fasting itself, but through which you can get a high after the first few days when your body stops crying out for the basics" (El Guindi 107). She adds that, sharing a table with family and friends in Ramadan arouses the feeling of "wonderful anticipation of something delicious about to happen. Of relief. And bounty. Of something about to be shared... The sense in the room that you've all been through something together" (107). Huwaida Double reflects El Guindi's call for tolerance and acceptance under the impact of colonization. She confirms that the family is an environment of continuous drama, that people are a mixture of sweet and bitter behavior, and that quarrels permanently happen because "we are who we are" (107). Representing El Guindi's voice, Huwaida Double asserts the role of close

people and friends to process any traumatic experience “in a way that will make your part in a shine, along with all the others” (107).

Some of El Guindi's characters tend to practice cultural adaptation and assimilation in their host country. They are forced to act like that, a survival technique to continue through their turmoil. The generation in the play is divided into two groups, maintaining different views on cultural traditions and modernity. The younger generation often seeks to navigate their identity in a way that reconciles both worlds, while the older generation tends to hold more firmly to traditional values. Both generations' perspectives can be elaborated through the lens of Homi Bhabha's third space. They need help deciding a medium of interaction to emphasize their hybrid identities in America. They establish new cultural practices that honor their heritage while adapting to their current circumstances. As for the theorist who presents genuine ideas about colonization, El Guindi's *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* highlights some key concepts in trauma studies. Stef Craps's concept of traumatic stressors can be applied when trying to understand the root cause of trauma if it does not result from extraordinary events. Craps suggests that everyday stressful experiences might change “the individual's protective shield, causing serious damage” (Craps, *Worlds of Grief*, 54). Arab Americans encounter permanent and complex conflicts with maintaining their cultural perspectives while adapting to American society. This tension exposes the internal and external pressure of identity crisis, a central theme in the discourse of decolonization.

Kamal approves Hamza's infatuation with the oud; he tells Mona that while playing this musical instrument, Hamza is “getting in touch with his roots” (2) through Hamza's insistence to improve his playing. El Guindi pinpoints more symbolic cultural identity issues. Kamal defines the process of learning a musical instrument as the struggle to aspire to a higher level of accomplishment and articulation; he says that “there is agony, and then there are the sweet sounds of someone who has not given up, someone who continues despite the problems, who refuses to rest until the sound answers his passion he knows his beloved instrument possesses” (2). Kevin expresses his appreciation for the instrument of the oud, which “gave birth to mandolin. And lutes” (44). He emphasizes the European borrowing from the Arab “renaissance instrument” (44). The oud is transformed into an intercultural dialogue between cultural and historical contexts. Kevin adds that music can unite any diverse countries: “So even if it's a tune from another country and it sounds foreign, we can still recognize it as having-as being melodic” (45).

Huwaida disapproval of hijab, on the one hand, and embarrassment in front of her family and friends when not putting it on, on the other hand, reveals her tendency towards her native identity despite all odds. She justifies her removal of hijab as the costume that she does not “usually wear” (89). Then she adds that after being criticized by her professor for wearing the hijab, she decides to wear an American costume and “show her how ridiculous the alternative was” (90). Via Huwaida's constant negotiation and

efforts to incorporate Arab cultural values while being torn between two different worlds, El Guindi succeeds in reaffirming the identity of his character's traumatic experience. She states in response to her psychiatrist about her wearing hijab in her dream "because it's still me; I suppose. I can't leave myself behind completely" (14).

El Guindi's first-generation characters keep their native tongue in their daily conversation as a sign of their connection to their homeland. Language is a crucial part of cultural identity, and losing fluency in one's mother tongue may contribute to a sense of loss and disconnection. Although the new generation avoids using the Arabic language, Kamal, Mona, and Aziz use Arabic phrases to defend their sense of loss and disconnection. Kamal uses Arabic expressions such as "Iftar" (21), "Habibti" (52), "In Shalla In shAllah" (25), "Allahyarhamah" (93), "Salaam' alaykum" (22), "Fadal" (82). Aziz, on the other hand, uses some Arabic words when he visits Kamal's family, like "Salaam alaykum, Ahlan, Ahlan" (82), "Ma'lish" (84), "Shukran" (87), "Ahlanwasahlan" (19), "Masha'allah" (91), and "Gidak" (105). All these Arabic words express warm greetings, regards, and respect between intimate family members and friends.

Aziz is amazed by Kamal ability to organize his garden. Mona explains that this is the place "where he goes when he can't talk to anybody. He plants something. Or digs" (101). Aziz was impressed by Kamal's professional effort in land spacing, which resulted in a fanciful garden. Then he adds that Kamal "take care of the inside and the outside" (103) as a gesture to Kamal's unique humanitarian characteristics. El Guindi digs deep into every personal human trait concerning his characters and tries to analyze coping mechanisms and pathways to self-affirmation and empowerment comprehensively.

Herman's key concept of trauma and recovery provides the groundwork for exploring the way El Guindi's characters deal with their unresolved issues and the difficulty of moving forward without addressing past traumas. *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* includes many symbolic cultural and religious practices affirming its characters' identity. The representation of community and relationships enact several interpersonal dynamics, which illustrate the support system that reinforces cultural identity. The bonds between characters, shaped by shared experience and cultural values, play a crucial role in affirming their identities. Through his characters, El Guindi enacts Herman's concept of a survivor by establishing their identity creatively. In doing so, they replace their broken identities with healthy, empowered, and cultivated identities.

Murad also has his share of El Guindi's symbolic cultural tides. His dream symbolizes his complete disapproval of Huwaida Double and her American lifestyle. He expresses his pride in Egypt and his nostalgic feelings, saying that he "would miss the skies over my city", "the streets. The broken pavement. The mess", and that he "would miss the call for a prayer most of all" (73). El Guindi proposes that he will never survive living in

America, and then he adds that America is not his country because he does not feel comfortable there.

Community and relationship are distinguished ways by which El Guindi cocoons his characters in the face of personal and cultural turmoil. Family and close friends' conversations provide a window into the character's emotional and psychological depth. It reveals their inner thoughts, fears, hopes, and conflicts, reinforcing their connection to their homeland and allowing them to grasp the complexities of their emotional crisis. Kamal's continuous support of his family members shields them against the permanent sense of alienation and fragmentation. Despite their temporary surrender to the Westernized current lifestyle, they experience constant and substantive retreat to their native identities. Kamal insists on getting his goodbye kiss from his family, telling Hamza, "You can't forget these things with me. I'm very sensitive" (22). Kamal regrets Tawfiq's disintegration with his family and complains that "he didn't want to hug...His own father" (26).

Mona also shows permanent pride in having a beautiful daughter and is more curious about the native homeland than they ever were. She is thankful that they are not addicted; not lazy, not even crazy. Nevertheless, Kamal's ability to maintain his family members is incompatible; he calls Huwaida his "jewel. A wonderful daughter"(55) and says that he feels honored of her. He never stops encouraging her to aspire to higher standards in society, suggesting that one day she may "run for Congress" or become head of state. Even regarding marriage, Kamal insists that Huwaida is "not committed to anything yet"(55) and that she is free to refuse the engagement. Kamal's insistence on having all the family members around one table promotes a feeling of belonging and familiarity to whom even Tawfiq responds positively. Paradoxically, Tawfiq suggests praying before eating anything and be grateful "For what we have" (16). This act suggests his deep roots in his native culture and the impossibility of adapting a complete European lifestyle and beliefs.

On the other hand, Aziz exhibits El Guindi's distinguished viewpoint about the importance of having close friends in the family. Aziz and Kamal's dialogues and interactions reflect La Capra's concept about working through individual trauma. Both friends reflect on their experiences and express their emotions, attempting to make sense of their traumas. Kamal reveals to Aziz his agony about Tawfiq's conversion to atheism and shares with him even his future fears, saying, "I swear, Aziz, we are ready to pack up our bags and follow you to Cairo" (87). Aziz shows his sincere concern and decides to initiate, participate, and become part of this great familial issue. Immediately, Aziz sets a plan to negotiate with Tawfiq, claiming that he does not see how this is so terrible "and that reasoning is what led him to this conclusion, then the reasoning can lead him out" (87). Kamal describes his pain to Aziz as An open wound with someone who is spooning salt in it.

It seems that even Tawfiq is encouraged to frankly tell Aziz about his atheism and confess all his thoughts. Negotiation with Aziz opens a wide

window for Tawfiq and Kamal to familiarize their agony, which will lead to reconsideration and understanding of straightforward steps. Amazingly, upon gathering around the table of Iftar, “there is a clear change of mood in the room” (106). All family members sit together with their close friends when El Guindi delivers a key theme using Aziz's voice; he says, “You and me, we must recover together and give each other strength” (106). This quotation affirms that the role of social bonds to decolonized a post traumatic experience. It safeguards the characters from cultural and emotional turmoil.

In fact, every character in *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* experiences a personal cultural crisis. In order to develop a hybrid identity that respects their previous native identity while adjusting to their current situation, they try to cocoon. In their new nation, some of El Guindi's characters frequently engage in cultural assimilation and adaptation. While the elder generation tends to adhere more rigidly to traditional norms, the younger generation frequently aims to navigate their identity in a way that reconciles both cultures. In order to highlight their blended identities in America, they require assistance choosing a communication channel. They create new cultural customs that respect their history while adjusting to their present situation.

To make sure his characters are safeguards against the imposition of strict dichotomies like discrimination and estrangement, El Guindi tries to cocoon their identities. A number of tactics are used to promote tolerance, acceptance, and self-determination. El Guindi's tactics, which focus on the ties between characters, can be found within the bounds of symbolic cultural and religious activities as well as community and relationships. Throughout the play, El Guindi makes use of culturally significant artifacts and symbolic actions. The characters' identities are anchored by the symbols, which encase their horrific experience. This cocooning process helps trauma survivors evaluate where they are in their recovery and identify areas where they may gain more empowerment to effectively manage and overcome trauma.

El Guindi identifies concerns related to cultural identity that are more symbolic. Learning a musical instrument, according to Kamal, is the battle to strive for greater achievement and articulation. As a symbol of their ties to their birthplace, El Guindi's first-generation characters continue to speak in their original tongue in everyday interactions. An essential component of cultural identity is language. Relationships and community are two unique ways that El Guindi shields his characters from cultural and emotional upheaval. Conversations between family members and close friends reveal a character's depth of feeling and thought.

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