

The World on the Threshold: Liminal Thinking during
COVID-19 Pandemic in Select Pandemic Poems

العالم في المنطقة الحدية: التفكير الحدي في أثناء جائحة كوفيد-١٩
في قصائد مختارة عن الجائحة

Dr. Saeed Ahmed Gazar
Lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages,
Faculty of Education, Tanta University

د. سعيد أحمد جزر
مدرس بقسم اللغات الأجنبية
كلية التربية، جامعة طنطا

The World on the Threshold: Liminal Thinking during COVID-19 Pandemic in Select Pandemic Poems

Abstract:

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic by the end of 2019, the whole world has entered a threshold area where everything has never been like before: change is the norm in all fields and the customary ways of life seem a thing of the past. The work of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner on liminality assist in fathoming what the world undergoes during this liminal period of human history. Like other periods of pandemics, the present COVID-19 era is set apart from the stable pre-liminal one when everything used to follow fixed rules and systems, and transfers to an in-between time of mixed features – both positive and negative. The present study attempts to discover such paradoxical characteristics of liminal thinking during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines select pandemic poems in Regin Silvest and Malini Ganapathy's *COVID-19 Pandemic Poems*. Vol III (2020).

Key words: COVID-19, liminal thinking, cognitive dissonance, identity reformation, pandemic poetry

العالم في المنطقة الحدية: التفكير الحدي في أثناء جائحة كوفيد-١٩ في قصائد مختارة عن الجائحة

الملخص:

منذ بداية جائحة كوفيد-١٩ في نهاية عام ٢٠١٩ والعالم قد انتقل إلى منطقة حدية تنسم بالانفصال عما اعتاد عليه الناس في حياتهم اليومية، سواء الأنظمة الاقتصادية أو الاجتماعية والتعليمية والمهنية مما يشي بسلوك أفراد المجتمع على نحو مغاير. تقوم الدراسة ببحث سمات التفكير الحدي والجوانب الإيجابية والسلبية المصاحبة لهذا النمط من التفكير، حيث تبدأ الدراسة بالقاء الضوء على مفهوم الحدية والتفكير الحدي والتطور الذي مر به المفهوم بدءاً من ظهوره على يد أرنولد فان جنيب عام ١٩٠٩ ومروراً بدور فيكتور تيرنر وصولاً لبيورن توماسين وفكرة الإرادة الذاتية لتجربة الشعور الحدي. ثم تنقسم الدراسة بعد ذلك إلى قسمين رئيسيين هما الجوانب السلبية والثمار الإيجابية للتفكير الحدي. ومن أبرز النتائج السلبية التي تركز عليها الدراسة الحالية شعوري الشك والاضطراب المعرفي، وهما من النتائج البارزة للانفصال عن نمط الحياة السائد قبل الجائحة، في حين تتمثل الجوانب الإيجابية لهذا النمط من التفكير في التحرر من أي قيود والانطلاق نحو الإبداع والابتكار، وإعادة تشكيل الهوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوفيد-١٩، التفكير الحدي، الاضطراب المعرفي، إعادة تشكيل الهوية، شعر الجائحة

The World on the Threshold: Liminal Thinking during COVID-19 Pandemic in Select Pandemic Poems

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic by the end of 2019 has ushered in various global changes on all planes: political, social and cultural. Nine months later, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared that "(T)he COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating" (WHO, 2020). Due to the constraints of social distancing and quarantine imposed by the pandemic, new forms of social relations began to form the new normal. Working from home has become the norm in most fields. Parent-child relationships have been given new perspectives. Most importantly, the issues of identity reformation and inevitable change have come to the fore.

Poets, on their part, have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting on the various changes that the whole world undergoes because of the pandemic "devastating" social and economic effects. R. S. Regin Silvest and Malini Ganapathy (2020) have published anthologies on the COVID-19 pandemic that feature an array of poems dealing with the impact of the pandemic on the individual as well as society. This study discusses how the poets in volume III approach the issue from a liminal point of view.

According to the theory of liminality, originally introduced by Arnold van Gennep in his groundbreaking study of rituals, *Rites of Passage* (1909), in times of crisis, people are initiated into a liminal phase in which they undergo a change in the way they view the world around them. The liminal phase is a threshold between and betwixt more or less stable phases of the social process. While this change seems to have negative implications, it is not devoid of other positive outcomes.

This qualitative study investigates the various features of liminal thinking as presented in *COVID-19 Pandemic Poems*, vol. III. The study

is divided into two sections: the pandemic negative features and strategies of cushioning the disturbance, projecting into the post-liminal phase. The first section takes into consideration the features of liminality highlighted by Agnes Horvath et al. (2015): "the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies and uncertainty about the continuity of tradition and future outcome" (p. 2). The second will focus on the way liminal thinking during the COVID-19 pandemic can offer chances for overcoming the negatives of the first section. Horvath et al. add that "liminal situations can facilitate understanding of the technologies used to shape identities and institutions" (p. 2). Van Gennep (1909) asserts this remedying impact of liminal thinking since "(T)he transition period is met with rites of passage which cushion the disturbance" (p. ix). The poems in the said anthology reflect on how the pandemic (seen as a threshold) has provided people with the opportunity to reshape identities, reevaluate priorities and, above all, rejoice in the feeling of being born anew. This new attitude can set the view of the future of the world in the post-liminal phase.

2. Liminality: A General Overview

The term "liminality," which essentially means to be on the threshold, is better seen as "a prism through which to understand transformations in the contemporary world" (Horvath et al, 2015, p. 1). It originated in anthropology and political studies at the onset of the 20th century. Yet, it has developed to incorporate other disciplines such as business, performance studies, literature, psychiatry, psychology, and education. Manuel Aguirre et al. (2000) differentiate between "marginality" or "marginalization" and "liminality" in that the former negates the other party, while the latter necessitates the existence of "a second territory on the other side" (p. 6). "Liminality," suggests Aguirre et al, "designates the condition ascribed to those things or persons who occupy or find themselves in the vicinity of the threshold either on a permanent basis or as a temporary phenomenon" (p. 6-7). By way of analogy, liminality can be compared to a river:

A land-bound community may think of the river as its boundary, a margin beyond which only the unknown in its chaotic, dangerous, threatening aspect exists. A

community that has learnt to navigate the river can reach new lands, and therefore new possibilities, prospects, benefits; for them the river is liminal, a threshold beyond which danger may exist but also promise.... In the end,...those who view the river as a threshold rate its promise–value higher than its threat.

(Aguirre et al., 2000, p. 9)

Aguirre's remark asserts the innate paradoxical nature of liminality: it is simultaneously beneficial and dangerous.

Historically, it was in 1909 when Arnold van Gennep published his masterpiece, *Rites of Passage*, that the term came into academic circulation. His study mainly focused on the life crisis rituals of birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Van Gennep (1909) found that there exist three basic stages in the rites: separation, margin or limen, and re-aggregation. The first phase detaches the ritual subjects from their old places in society; in the second, the liminal phase, the subjects pass into a cultural and spiritual realm that has few of the attributes of either the past and coming states; the last phase reinstalls them in a new place in society: inwardly transformed and outwardly changed,. It is this middle phase that has attracted much academic attention, because it is characterized by unique paradoxical features, compared to the other two phases which are much more stable.

Victor Turner has extended the term, exploring the various characteristics of this liminal period and pinpointing a new form of human communion - "*communitas*" - to differentiate it from the status system of both the pre-liminal and post-liminal periods. For Turner (1966), a *communitas* is generally marked by totality and equality. All liminal beings do not relate to a reckoned social system; accepted systems of government and social interaction fall apart, and people are not subject to them anymore. Furthermore, Turner (1966) identified this liminal period as one of uniformity, humility, unselfishness and simplicity (p. 106). He sums up this state of being in-between:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed

by law, custom, convention and ceremonial....Thus liminality is frequently linked to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness...and to the eclipse of the sun or moon. (p. 95)

In this respect, Turner is credited with expanding the scope of liminal thinking from the anthropological vein to other disciplines.

Bjørn Thomassen (2014) introduces another development of liminal thinking. He stresses the role played by experience in liminal thinking. He agrees with Szokolczai (2009) in that experience connotes with one's understanding of the feelings of danger and fear associated with liminality. Since "liminal experiences are in most cases adrenaline ones, causing much fear and anxiety" (p. 184), Thomassen marks a shift from the liminal to the "limivoid" which is "the inciting of near-death experiences, a jump into nothingness, a desperate search for experience in a world of ontological excess" (p. 169). Here, the threshold becomes a representation of nothingness or voidness, or, to use Thomassen's words, "going to the limits or standing *on* the limit" (p. 168).

This development indicates a willingness to shift into liminal experiences rather than be unwillingly forced to undergo them. Thomassen (2014) investigates extreme rituals associated to falling such as the original *gol* ritual in Melanesia, the *volador* ritual in Mexico, and the *Charak-puja*, or 'hook swinging' ritual in India. He maintains that the modern forms of such cultural rituals – i.e. bungee jump and other extreme sports - have the potential to turn from being an individual attempt towards thrilling situations into complete rituals of the limivoid. Despite the related sense of near-death fear, practitioners of extreme sports find in them a chance to explore the unknown, go through the dangerous and experience being born anew, even if for a few moments (p. 187-190).

In short, liminality, from one perspective, is associated with the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies and the uncertainty about the future outcomes, liminal periods, from another, are pregnant with promises of freedom from long established systems and redefinition of identity – both for the individual and the society. However,

it also warrants a number of catastrophes due to that separation and transition into the state of in-betweenness. In the case of a pandemic like COVID-19, these prospects and devastating changes cast their shadows on the whole world which is, by no means, initiated into the liminal phase and has become on the threshold. It is the world of liminality: one of "life and death, of ambivalence, of cultural identity crash, of hybridity, of doubtful convictions" (Mahesh Sharma, 2013, p. 109). Paradoxically, it is also a world that provides people with "a set of templates or models which are periodical reclassification of reality and man's relationship to society, nature and culture" (Turner, 1966, p. 129). Thomassen (2014) finds that the world as a case of liminal space is synonymous with Plato's *khora* which is "a void, an abyss in which things can reproduce themselves infinitely.... *khora* is without limits, without bottom, without ground. The *khora* is nothingness and infinity at the same time" (p. 12).

3. The Dark Side of Liminality

To think liminal means to be cut off from all stable systems, whether they are political, cultural or economic. Initiation into the threshold designates the shift to a state of instability and doubt – it is the territory of the unknown. Maysa Ibrahim (2021) contends that "COVID-19 has shaken man's belief in his power. A little infectious bug has disturbed the whole earth, disrupted systems and habitual modes of life long taken for granted, disrupted life itself. Man stands powerless" (p. 55). Inhabitants of planet earth have transformed into "threshold people" who, Sharma (2013) maintains, "[have] become outsiders, [and] in a strange way kept at a distance from 'the' social reality" (p. 110).

3.1 Deep Sense of Skepticism

The worldwide spread of COVID-19 is coupled with a liminal negative attitude towards this separation from the modes of life that have long been customary and taken for granted. A sense of doubt has controlled people throughout the world and on all planes of life. The virus has devastated whole health systems in many parts of the world, and imposed financial as well as economic conditions. The most notable impact is the great number of people who have already lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Protective measures such as social distancing and general lockdown aiming at limiting physical contact have had their

catastrophic impact on companies. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) pointed out on 20 March, 2020:

The spread of the COVID-19 virus interrupted international supply chains, notably with China, and is forcing workers to remain at home because they are quarantined, sick or subject to lockdowns. Such a “supply shock” is very difficult to address with standard monetary and fiscal policy tools. interrupted international supply chains, notably with China, and is forcing workers to remain at home because they are quarantined, sick or subject to lockdowns. Such a “supply shock” is very difficult to address with standard monetary and fiscal policy tools. (p. 1)

This economic "shock" has a social counterpart. Doubt of what is going to happen has haunted people's attitude to life in light of the escalating number of deaths by the COVID-19 virus. More than three million people have lost their lives from the start of the pandemic to June 2021. Social relations in general, and family ones in particular, have witnessed a major change. Family gatherings are not allowed, let alone social events and celebrations. Valeria Saladino et al (2020) highlight this social aspect of the spread of the COVID-19, finding that while social distancing is a necessary measure to prevent this spread, there is an urgent need for empathic steps to be taken. This stems from the fact that the sense of uncertainty has become the norm. Saladino et al (2020) state that if it is not possible to predict the duration of the pandemic, the serious impact of any protective measures on social relationships and interactions is undeniable. The simple question "How are you?" they contend, "is no longer just a formality." It becomes a form of expressing fear and anxiety.

The poems included in *COVID-19 Pandemic Poems*. vol. III express this overwhelming and crippling sense of doubt. In her poem "Cherry Blossom," Kamala Wijeratne finds no hope in those cherries that blossom this spring since next spring will not be the same again:

I have heard
That cherry trees bloom
With extra brilliance
This spring (p. 4)

These opening lines bear witness to the sense of doubt. The speaker's source of information is only through hearsay. This paves the way to questioning whether this information is true or just *infodemic* – a term coined by the WHO. *Infodemic* is related to the rapid spread of too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. As a result, mistrust in health authorities and other social systems causes many to separate from such systems. This sceptic attitude to how nature behaves is intensified when the speaker reveals the reason: thousands of people died in Wuhan, where the COVID-19 pandemic started:

The Cherry Blossoms too will wither
And fall and decay under feet
Moving along the live Wuhan roads
They will return with lesser hue
Next spring (p. 4)

When faced with doubtful situations, liminal beings resort to nature and value the integration between man and Nature. The speaker finds that the virus has its impact on both man and Nature. With this gloomy picture in mind, the basic question that all people around the world keep asking during this situation of unlimited doubt will be: "Will those thousands/ Show life again?" (p. 4)

These sights of withering and decay resonate with Genalyn P. Lualhati's emphasis on the lack of social connection in "Lockdown Connection." The poet records the sudden change in social life and the enforced separation from the loved ones:

Hugs. Kisses. Touches.-this is love and life
Then suddenly an invisible enemy arrives
Enforcing isolation, silence and distance
Making a line, stretching across sea and land. (p. 8)

The invisibility of the enemy (i.e. the COVID-19 virus) conjures up the sense of restlessness and deepens the sense of doubt and separation which are typical of liminal thinking. During periods of transition like those of pandemics, "liminoids (i.e. members of the liminal community)...show a sundry of submissiveness and silence" (Turner, 1966, p. 103). In a hopeful mood, the poet starts:

Questioning life how to find a new normal in pandemic
Pressure falling hard in her shoulders like a catastrophic
Even facing difficulty, she builds a great wall for your safety
Bringing happiness and positivity for you and the whole family.
(p. 9)

In a Promethean-like image, the world bears the rock of a devastating pandemic. Yet this “pressure falling in her shoulders” does not negate with the latent hope for a way out of this. The world will withstand the pandemic in a similar manner to Prometheus bearing with the rock on his shoulders.

The bitter reality of the pandemic has turned people's high hopes into nightmares, searching for "a new normal." This new situation has separated them from what has been the norm, making way for their acceptance of, even if unwillingly, the need for a new form of social connections after this liminal period is over. This period is preparatory for the third phase of van Gennep's model: aggregation. Despite this utter suffering, Turner (1966) views it as inevitable and suggests that:

This helps in the destruction of the previous status in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay and dust, mere matter.
(p. 103)

3.2 Cognitive Dissonance

Concomitant to this deep feeling of doubt and rootlessness, liminal beings suffer a case of culture shock. During transitional periods, when normal relations to traditional systems are shaken, people are encountered with new forms of living, positing an urgent need for novel approaches of treatment. This cultural shock takes its point of departure from "cognitive dissonance" (Leon Festinger, 1976). In his seminal book *Cognitive dissonance*, Festinger gives numerous insights to this case of discomfort people suffer when they "find themselves doing things that do not fit with what they know, or having opinions that do not fit with other opinions they hold" (p. 4). This is due to new events or new information that become known to the person and over which they have no control.

This destroys the person's trust of the knowledge they have had for a long time, causing a type of culture shock. In the case of international travelers and liminality as well, Robert St. Clair and John Koo (1991) find that "...the new experiential encounters with a substantially different culture have naturally reverberated the foundations of their (international travelers') own epistemological framework, resulting in a state of cognitive dissonance" (p. 131).

In the case of COVID-19 pandemic, people all over the world have been "thrust into chaos" (St. Clair, p. 133) with complete lockdown and other health protective measures. They face a new system of living with very strange features. Torn between their attempt to integrate and accommodate themselves into this "cultural new cosmos" (St. Clair, p. 133) on the one hand, and attracted to their old traditional cosmos on the other, the possibility of cognitive dissonance during this pandemic escalates. "Victims of cultural shock," St. Clair maintains, "will never view their own country and its values in the same way. They have stepped over a boundary, a cultural liminality" (p. 131).

In "Battle Cry of a Warrior," Karen Arlaiza O. Mendoza expresses her utter bafflement and inability to understand what is going on in this time of health threat. She finds no better than silence to start and end the poem with. She entitles the poem with connotative lexicon: the world on the threshold is battling the virus, attempting to overcome its threat and contain its drastic effects:

In these trying times, the judgement have been sentenced:
Mass exodus may give chance to those who were left
jobless and homeless
A chance to go back to the place they once called home,
But their advent doesn't promise peace for the place they
are going to
As this virus will continue to plague through. (p. 13)

The lines bear witness to the sense of discomfort and inability to comprehend the new form of culture. People might find in "mass exodus" promising peace and a return to the world they used to live in before the pandemic. However, this attempt seems futile since the place they are

going to, i.e. the world after the pandemic in the third stage of aggregation in Van Genepp's model, has not become fit for living, nor does there seem a chance for the virus to come to an end. Liminality speaking, it is evident that the world on the threshold is far from being called "home" in the traditional sense.

Shocked by the devastation caused by the pandemic, the poet bitterly displays how the virus has changed the world:

A lethal virus that took away our days living under the sun.

An unforeseen force that took the fault for the fall of man.

.....

It left people no choice but to be weary. (p. 13)

To describe it as "unforeseen force" widens the gap between this liminal situation and the old cosmos. It also aggravates the cognitive dissonance that has afflicted people around the globe.

Although Festinger (1968) asserts that "there is no guarantee that the person will be able to reduce or remove the dissonance" (p. 6), he provides three basic strategies people use when their whole worldview is threatened. The first strategy is avoidance where they escape the imposed conflict of the different worldview and retreat to the comfort of one's own belief system. "This seems like establishing a ghetto which is a bold attempt to recreate the experiences of the past" (St. Clair, p. 136). This is the reason for Mendoza's question at the end of the poem:

Where does this battle against COVID-19 will lead us through?

What does this war would turn us into?

.....

Where shall we put our faith into?

.....

Where shall we find the place towards the bright future?

(p. 13)

This series of questions reflects the helplessness of the whole humanity in this liminal world of the pandemic. The poet tries to find a

haven for humanity, a resort from this "unforeseen force" or any other form of ghetto where people can aggregate their power and withstand this virus.

The second strategy is the devaluation of the threat through ethnic value judgements (St. Clair, p. 137). Nova Noor Aisyah asserts these two strategies in her poem "He Kills in the Silence." Despite the lethal impact of the virus, she wonders about the paradoxicality of the situation: birds sing and nature breathes fresh air:

The world is healing itself
Happy
Birds sing again
Air, fresh again
Quiet (p. 14)

Yet, this attitude may be interpreted as an attempt to quell the feeling of anxiety related to the virus that "kills in the silence." Repeating the word "again" gives hope to humans and assures them that earlier forms of living can be protected and the return is sure to take place. That is why, she depicts how it is natural to find people hiding from that virus:

Meanwhile
Humans are hiding
Trying to escape from him
Without knowing where will he attack from
Without knowing who is he. . . . (p. 15)

The third strategy is accepting the new worldview as long as the presence of the new social distancing and lockdown regulations still prevails. St. Clair contends that "with the passage of time, the threats are less cacophonous. And finally what was once a system of stark contrasts is now seen as one of acceptable difference" (p. 137). Norlisa Binti Abdullah sees in it "a new normal," reflecting a degree of acceptance to the status quo. She, nevertheless, depends on humans' sense of responsibility and solidarity in the face of this "new" normal mood of living:

of a new normal...

was yesterday even something that we should always be proud of?
Last time I checked,
the world healed a bit these days, without our touch.
Perhaps the time has come for us to reflect,
on our actions, our doings,
And how to start afresh (p. 15)

To think that the world "healed" a bit these days gives the poet comfort and courage to claim that it is time to see different things differently. This resistance mechanism paves the way for the brighter side of the pandemic.

4. Liminal Thinking and Trajectories of Mitigation

Despite the abovementioned dark sides of being on the threshold, there are a number of positive aspects inherent in liminal thinking. Given the permanent nature of liminality, Thomassen (2014) has pointed at Arpad Szokolczai's diagnosis of modernity itself as a particular form of "permanent liminality" since:

Liminality became established at the core of the modern project....All the most evident aspects of liminality linked to human experience took a central stage within cultural, political and economic modernity. Simultaneously, at the level of thought, the human sentiments of fear, anxiety, skepticism and doubt (quintessential liminal sentiments) were established as anthropological foundations. (p. 14)

Thomassen also finds that "Turner preferred to see liminality as a fascinating and necessary shaking of routines, a cultural space of human creativity" (p. 10). Roberta Sferrazzo (2020) shares Mayerhofer and Iellatchitch's attitude that rites of passage are important for creating a sense of job security (p. 30). Homi Bhabha (1994) has seen liminality as a positive expression of cultural hybridity:

Once the liminality of the nation-space is established, and its signifying difference is turned from the boundary 'outside' to its finitude 'within', the threat of

cultural difference is no longer a problem of 'other' people. It becomes a question of otherness of the people-as-one. (p. 215)

The change in the nature of work experience in this liminal world has led job-crafting academics to believe that "workers can experience a higher level of job autonomy, with connected implications for their skills, talents and identities" (Sferrazzo, 2020, p. 33). With this in mind, the positive sides of liminal thinking during COVID-19 pandemic need more elaboration.

4.1. Sense of Freedom

Once detached from the old systems and established hierarchies, people start to enjoy a sense of freedom. This is backed with Thomassen's (2014) hint that liminality is a form of experience. For him, "liminality explains nothing. Liminality *is*. It happens. It takes place. And human beings react to liminal experiences in different ways" (p. 7).

During the pandemic, people have reacted in various ways to the containment measures. They have resorted more and more to working and learning online, deepening their sense of freedom as well as creativity. In liminal spaces, such as hotels and beaches, there are moments of freedom and escape from the daily routine (Preston-Whyte, 2004, p. 350). Preston-Whyte calls these spaces "limbo-like" since they are often beyond normal social and cultural constraints. By the same token, behaving during the pandemic has given people a degree of freedom and sense of self-esteem. Norlisa Binti Abdullah ends her poem stressing this high self-esteem and solidarity:

Our responsibilities
Our sincerity
Our faith
that define us.
that we shall never forget,
no matter how we'd be facing this pandemic..
this covid-19.. (p. 16)

With a sense of responsibility and deep faith in human ability to withstand difficulties and respond creatively to the hazards of liminality, the poet ensures the human victory over the pandemic.

In "Confrontation with Death," Elena Abigail Dilani Anthony voices a doctor who has the freedom and courage to face the virus. In a soliloquy-like scene, the doctor asks Death not to take the souls of his patients:

Stop right there, Death
Be gone, Death
Do not claim the souls of those sufferers
My patients, their lives
Under the clutches of the deadly Corona
They do not deserve such demise
They do deserve a life to live, yes a second chance to
live. (p. 17)

The valor with which this warrior-doctor speaks has its basis in their sense of freedom from any constraints and focus on the main mission: to overcome the Corona virus. This second chance reminds the readers that they are still in the liminal world and need to act positively to enter into the post-liminal phase, equipped with a sense of being initiated into a new form of life:

But the light will shine; the sun will rise to give me a new
day and hope
Cure, the Cure will I find till my last breath
Fight, will I to the end
Death, be gone! (p. 19)

The kind of freedom one enjoys in this liminal world is flexible enough to allow for novel approaches to all aspects of life. Christina Garsten (1999) finds in the flexible liminal workplace a great deal of fruitful results. For her, "the flexibility discourse' is ripe with positive images of versatile organizations employing likewise versatile employees, challenging the traditional institutions of stable, enduring organizations and workforces" (p. 601).

After a solemn prayer to God to save the world from the Corona virus, Kakoli Debnath reminds all humans that they are free and can react flexibly to difficulties:

Time is upon us now to stand tall and strong amidst adversity.
Let us witness the fore bearer of evergreen prospects,

Behold a dawn of endless possibilities, where
Perseverance shall highlight our paths
Come now— let us chant Harmony's Prelude! (p. 24)

The "dawn of endless possibilities" gives comfort for those souls around the world that have had enough of the anxiety and fear resulting from the spread of the virus. Instead of standing still in sorrow, the poet looks positively to the future and seeks harmony among humans. The word "Prelude" resonates with the "dawn of endless possibilities." In the liminal world, humans are free and able to choose whatever path they prefer.

The agreement between these lines and Turner's (1966) identification of liminality is obvious. In liminality, for Turner, religious, rather than secular, attitudes and behaviors are maximized (p. 111). People find in the Divine a haven from their suffering and sense of deep uncertainty. The closer they get to the Deity, the less stressful and freer they become. Debnath prays: "Let us offer this prayer, invoke the Gods/ And plead to banish Pestilence from the world" (p. 23). Nazirah Binti Mohamad Abdullah makes a similar prayer:

O Allah, The Responsive, we want to return home
O Allah, The Forgiving, forgive our sins
O Allah, The One, The Glorious, destroy the Corona virus
O Allah, The Merciful, we want to return home. (p. 21).

The previous secular ties vanish and all become siblings and equal. The Buddhism Zen formulation "all is one, one is none, none is all" applies best to this liminal world where everything has become possible.

4.2. Identity Reformation

The liminal nature of pandemic periods entails a change, if not a loss, of one's former identity. Identity is related to self-concept and is viewed as changing all the time. Sferrazzo (2020) finds that one can enjoy multiple identities which constitute that self-concept. These can be negotiated since they are socially constructed. A remarkable feature of identity formation is that these multiple identities are "mutable" and "coexist within a self that remains stable across situations and over time" (p. 33).

Gregory Forth (2018) finds that painful experiences that one may, or even has to, undergo during liminal periods can be conceived as "ordeals that subjects must survive in order to achieve a new, desirable status; they have also been interpreted as producing dissonance, thereby making the transition especially memorable and valued" (p. 3). Separation from one's customary lifestyle and being thrust into this threshold state makes it plausible that one needs to reformulate their identity. Liminality, as such, is an opportunity for all people to reconsider their self-concepts: who they are and what they wish to be. St. Clair (1991) finds in compensation a major strategy to overcome the "depression" or at least the "suppression" resulting from the loss of the old culture: an essential part of their self (p. 142).

The basic step in the reformation of identity process is avoiding difference of any kind. Once and again, Turner (1966) stresses this loss of previous identities in liminality. "Liminal phenomena," he states, "offer a blend of homogeneity and comradeship" (p. 96). A change in status and in self-concept are akin to liminal thinking. "Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (Turner, 1966, p.97).

Ravindran Raman Kutty echoes these ideas in his poem "Together We Can" where he values comradeship and equality as the basic cornerstones of the new identity of people after the pandemic:

Together we can
Put our difference aside
Put our feelings aside
Put our religious beliefs aside
Put our differing political ideologies aside
Together we can
Put Corona to rest
Put People at ease
Put Humility as our priority
Put Humanity before superiority (pp. 25-26)

5. Conclusion

The spread of COVID-19 pandemic by the end of 2019 has initiated humanity into a threshold, a liminal situation in which people experience both suffering and relief. They suffer a deep sense of uncertainty, yet they enjoy the freedom of acting differently and creatively. According to liminal thinking, the cognitive dissonance and the *infodemic* experienced during the pandemic can be quenched by identity reformation through following the three strategies of overcoming the inevitable change in worldview: the avoidance of the imposed conflict, the devaluation of the threats and the acceptance of the new worldview. This balance between the negatives and positives of being on the threshold prepares the world for the post-liminal phase where people have new identities and rejoice in the freedom they have enjoyed.

Works Cited

- Aguirre, M., R., Quance, & P., Sutton (2000). *Margins and thresholds: an enquiry into the concept of liminality in text studies*. The Gateway Press.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Festinger, L. (1968). *Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford University Press.
- Forth, G. (2018). "Rites of Passage." *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. John Wiley and Sons Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea2002>
- Garsten, C. (1999). "Betwixt and between: Temporary employees as liminal Subjects in Flexible Organizations." *Organization Studies*. 20(4):601-617. doi:[10.1177/0170840699204004](https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840699204004)
- Horvath, A., Thomassen, B., & Wydra, H. (2015). *Breaking boundaries: varieties of liminality*. Berghahn Books.
- Ibrahim, M., (2021). "The world reeling from a global pandemic: COVID -19 and its social and psychological repercussions." *Journal of Scientific Research in Arts*. 22(1), 54-80. https://jssa.journals.ekb.eg/article_153887.html
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020). "The impact of COVID-19 on employment and jobs". <https://www.oecd.org/employment/covid-19.htm>
- Preston-Whyte, R. (2004). "The beach as a liminal space," in A. A. Lew, C. M. Hall & A. M. Williams (Eds.) *A Companion to tourism*, (349-359). Blackwell Publishing.
- Sferrazzo, R. (2020). "The construction of workers' identity in liminal spaces." *PuntOorg International Journal*. 5(1), 29-41.
- St. Clair, R & Koo, J. (1991). "Rites of passage across cultures." *Intercultural Communication Studies*. 1(1), 131-146.
- Thomassen, B. (2014). *Liminality and living through the in-between*. Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Thomassen, B. (2015). "Thinking with liminality: To the boundaries of an anthropological concept. In A. Horvath, B. Thomassen, & H. Wydra (Eds.), *Breaking boundaries: Varieties of liminality* (39-58). Berghahn Books.
- Saladino, V., Algeri, D., & Auriemma, V. (2020). "The psychological and social impact of Covid-19: New perspectives of well-being." <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577684/full>
- Sharma, M. (2013). "The liminality of contemporary culture." *Bohdi: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), 109-119. <http://www.ku.edu.np/bohdi>
- Silvest, R. S., & Ganapathy, M. (2020). *COVID-19 Pandemic Poems*. Vol. III. Cape Comorin Publisher.
- Turner, V. (1966). *The Ritual process: Structure and anti-Structure*. Cornell University Press.
- Van Gennep, A. (1909). *Rites of passage*. Monica Vizedom and Gabrielle Caffee (Trans. 1960). University of Chicago Press.
- World Health Organization (2021, April 19). "Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems." <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-10-2020-impact-of-covid-19-on-people-s-livelihoods-their-health-and-our-foodsystems#:~:text=The%20economic%20and%20social%20disruption,the%20end%20of%20the%20year>

