

## **Bridging Worlds: Dual Cultures in Arab-American Short Stories**

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### **Abstract**

In the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, the concept of 'biculturality' and 'double-consciousness' has taken on heightened significance for immigrant Arabs in the United States. This study delves into how individuals navigating these dynamics have evolved, particularly among those who embraced integration within American society while preserving their ties to their original cultures. This choice has engendered a complex existence of dual identities, reflecting a profound 'in-betweenness'. This state of 'in-betweenness' has given rise to a binary psychological framework characterized by the interplay of 'pulling' towards their adopted homeland and 'pushing' towards their cultural roots. This exploration occurs within the theoretical realms of Du Bois' and Bhabha's conceptualizations of 'double-consciousness' and 'in-betweenness'. Within this context, the analysis focuses on three distinct short stories, each highlighting a female protagonist whose experiences embody varying degrees of 'biculturality'. Through these narratives, the research sheds light on the intricate negotiation of 'assimilation' and 'preservation', ultimately illustrating the nuanced psychological landscapes that emerge from the interstice of two cultures.

**Key Words:** In-betweenness, biculturality, preservation, assimilation.

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The term "bicultural," originally coined by Laura Uba in 2002, captures the essence of the "in-betweenness" described by Homi Bhabha as a central aspect of the Arab immigrant experience in the United States. This state of "in-betweenness" encapsulates the ambivalent nature that marked the lives and literary creations of Arab immigrants. Published in 2004, the anthology *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction*, expertly curated by Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa, signifies a transformative shift from a diasporic condition to a fully acknowledged state of existence. Within this anthology, a noteworthy transformation occurs—one that mirrors the journey of Arab Americans from a sense of dislocated diaspora to a recognized and distinct cultural presence. The anthology deftly captures the dual dynamics of "assimilation" and "preservation," revealing the intricate facets that characterize the narratives of these short stories. The interplay of these forces is akin to a multifaceted prism, through which the unique experiences of Arab immigrants refract. This amalgamation of themes highlights the profound complexity of the immigrant narrative, where the pursuit of integration into the American fabric and the yearning to retain one's cultural heritage coexist. The result is a collection of stories that are inherently diverse yet share a common thread—an intricate narrative of existence that defies monolithic categorization. By capturing the essence of these dual dynamics, the anthology celebrates the richness of Arab-American experiences, casting a spotlight on the variegated shades of their identity formation. This narrative tapestry

underscores the profound resonance of the "bicultural" concept as an analytical lens, offering insights into the interplay between integration and heritage preservation within the framework of Arab-American short fiction.

The current investigation aims to address a void within the realm of Arab-American fiction critique by leveraging the conceptual frameworks of W. E. B. Du Bois and Homi Bhabha. Departing from the backdrop of Arabs' earnest endeavors towards assimilation and their poignant struggle with the ordeal of "straddling two worlds" as observed by Ragovin (2004), the scholarly journey delves into the profound insights offered by Bhabha and Du Bois. These theorists elucidate the manifestations of this "hybridity," encapsulating its nuances through the lenses of "in-betweenness" and "double consciousness." This study seeks to elucidate and analyze these symptoms as articulated by Bhabha and Du Bois, thereby contributing a novel perspective to the discourse surrounding Arab-American fiction.

Du Bois perceives the concept of "double consciousness" as the constant perception of oneself from an external perspective – a state where an individual evaluates their inner self through the judgmental gaze of others. It's akin to measuring one's inner essence using a standard set by a world that observes with a mix of derisive disdain and sympathetic sorrow. Within this construct, a sense of duality emerges: the coexistence of two distinct identities, two parallel streams of thought, and two unharmonized endeavors. This division engenders a clash of ideals within a single corporeal form,

encapsulating the complexity of this psychological phenomenon (Du Bois, "The Souls" 3).

Despite their resilient and determined efforts to integrate, Arab immigrants faced systematic marginalization, casting aside any presumptions of gradual assimilation. This marginalization, executed through a meticulously structured policy, left these immigrants staggered in their pursuits. However, an underlying predicament plagued them – that of being internally divided or torn between the influences of two distinct cultures. This internal division eroded the purity of their experience, subjecting them to a ceaseless struggle characterized by a constant pull and push, as elucidated by Cherif (2003). Consequently, they embarked on a journey of attempting to reconcile their deeply ingrained traditions from their native culture with the demands and requisites of the newly adopted one. Du Bois accentuates this dualistic perception as the existence of a fragmented individual, a self divided into two contrasting components that are starkly at odds with each other. Within a single individual, a profound schism emerges, representing the coexistence of two fundamentally disparate inclinations (Du Bois, "The Souls" 3).

Similarly, Bhabha advances his exploration of minority collectives by emphasizing their fragmented and disconnected connections with both their contemporary and historical cultural contexts. This dynamic culminates in the emergence of what he terms "in-betweenness," a condition that renders these groups incapable of fully aligning with either of the cultures. Consequently, these minority communities find solace in maintaining a firm grip on

both cultural realms, opting to embrace a "bicultural" identity rather than relinquishing their connection to either one. Within his framework, Bhabha encapsulates the notion of "biculturality" through the lens of "hybridity," a categorization that he divides into three distinct groups: those in a "mid-position," those rooted in the "past-oriented" paradigm, and those oriented toward the "present-oriented" context, as illuminated by Majaj ("The Hyphenated," n.pag). This cultural hybridity mirrors the inner division experienced by these individuals, a perpetual oscillation between a culture that once was and another that has fully materialized. Bhabha further contends that these "minorities" occupy a contested and tumultuous space characterized by a constant ebb and flow within their cultures ("Don't Mess," n.pag). Bhabha postulates that these minorities bear an inherent, indecipherable duality, embodying a distinctive "split and doubled" nature (Locations 206). Their identity transcends clear classification, emerging not as "One nor the Other" but as an entity existing "in-between," a term he has meticulously coined (Locations 219). This "in-betweenness" underscores the precarious position that minorities ambiguously inhabit within the nation's landscape, as described by Bhabha ("Cultures" 57). Simultaneously, he disavows any direct affiliation with the historical traditions of these "in-betweeners" (Locations 5), diagnosing their movement between the past and the present as "interstitial passages" that have given rise to the unique concept of the "bicultural" (*Locations* 217-18).

Bhabha delves deeper into the dynamics of this perpetual endeavor to bring the past into the present, characterizing it as a

form of "negotiation of discursive doubleness" or a strategic embracing of "hybridity" ("Cultures" 58). This strategic approach finds its embodiment within a "liminal space," that is, an in-between realm, which effectively resists the solidification of identities into rigid dichotomies. This "interstitial passage," situated between two firmly established identifications, acts as a catalyst that prevents these identities from succumbing to simplistic polarities. Instead, it facilitates a unique and fluid interplay between them, giving rise to what he terms "cultural hybridity." In essence, Bhabha's concept suggests that this liminal space, positioned between fixed historical and contemporary identifications, enables a dynamic interaction that transcends mere binary oppositions. This interaction provides a platform for the emergence of cultural hybridity, where differences are not only acknowledged but also embraced. Rather than confining individuals or communities to either a past or a present identity, this approach fosters a state of continuous negotiation and transformation. Through this perspective, cultural hybridity thrives, celebrating the nuanced and multifaceted nature of identities that exist within this interstitial realm. Of significant importance, Bhabha underscores the concept of "cultural difference" and the incorporation of "hybrid hyphenations" ("Cultures" 55) as pivotal elements in his discourse. He contends that these aspects contribute to what he describes as the "split screen of the self and its doubling" (Locations 113-14). Intriguingly, even the trajectory of the hybrid identity extends into what he terms an "interstitial future," one that

emerges within the space between the historical legacies of the past and the contemporary necessities of the present (*Locations* 129).

The paper achieves its analytical objectives through the selection of three stories from the anthology "Dinarzad's Children," which effectively exemplify diverse forms of cultural hybridity commonly found among both newly immigrated and U.S.-born Arab-Americans. These chosen narratives are "Manar of Hama" by Mohja Kahf, "How We Are Bound" by Patricia Sarafian Ward, and "Airport" by Pauline Kaldas. These stories center around three female protagonists who find themselves entwined in the intricate complexities of 'biculturality.' Within this collection, Manar and Madelaine's experiences unfold within the context of the new nation they inhabit, representing a form of 'biculturality' already in motion. On the other hand, Huda's narrative is distinct; she is positioned on the brink of this new 'nation's space,' depicted through a retrospective narrative riddled with frequent shifts in time. This portrayal highlights the moments leading up to her departure from Egypt to America. The essence of these migrations is one of necessity, evident in the stories of Manar and Madelaine, whose circumstances push them to leave their places of origin due to war. In contrast, Huda's impending departure is prompted by the looming pressure of exceeding a suitable age for marriage. These migrations, carefully crafted by the authors, carry an undertone of compulsion, reflecting the complex socio-cultural factors that propel these characters towards new horizons. Notably, the reader is left to contemplate Huda's imminent journey through the reflections of

Huda and her husband Khaled, mere hours before her flight. This unique narrative approach adds layers of introspection to her imminent migration, creating a rich tapestry of experiences that embody the intricate intersections of cultural identities and choices.

The initial story, "Manar of Hama," introduces us to Manar, a Syrian woman who finds herself in the aftermath of the Hama massacre, a tragedy that claimed the lives of her family and led to her departure from her home country. Manar stands as a poignant embodiment of the 'cultural hybridity' predicament. The narrative commences by illuminating Manar's struggle to acclimate to her new surroundings, where she finds the food unpalatable and the meat's odor repulsive (129). Her unsettling revelation unfolds as she realizes that staples like genuine bread, coffee, olives, and cheese are absent from her new reality (129). Confronted with the harsh reality of displacement, Manar seeks solace in her husband Khaled's reassurance, who advises her to take matters into her own hands by creating her own cheese if none is available (129). This subtle hint underscores the necessity of adaptation to her new cultural environment. Khaled's words subtly encourage her to engage with the new culture rather than clinging solely to the comforts of her homeland. Despite this counsel, Manar's profound connection to her roots remains palpable. Her poignant question, "I don't know what they eat in America," resonates deeply, reflecting her overwhelming sense of belonging and the poignant contrast with her unfamiliar surroundings" (129).

Upon her arrival in Chicago, Manar experiences a profound sense of estrangement, prompting her to reminisce about her former self back home. In these recollections, she envisions herself as a capable and astute woman who confidently navigated her way through life (130). Additionally, as a conspicuous display of her inclination towards "preservation," Manar underscores her robust self-esteem. She emphasizes her ability to traverse every corner of her homeland, regardless of whether it was her native town of Hama or her husband Khaled's city, Damascus; this geographical distinction bears no consequence. Her determination remains steadfast, as she assertively proclaims that the ground itself recognizes the touch of her feet (130).

Diverging from her sense of capability back in her homeland, Manar unveils the turmoil of her immigrant experience, characterized by an inability to synchronize her mood with the new surroundings. In doing so, she exposes the sensation of 'otherness' that has come to define her state: "Here I get lost if Khaled isn't with me on every little errand; the streets all look the same in this horrible little town" (130). Regrettably, her challenge goes beyond mere navigation; she grapples with an absence of communication means, even lamenting her perceived impossibility of learning English: "I think these people invented English as a sort of mind-torture for foreigners and newcomers" (130-31). Furthermore, this "split" within her identity is exemplified by the contrasting portraits of her status. Back home, she held the position of a diligent student, consistently at the "top of [her] class," whereas in America, her self-

perception transforms drastically, labeling herself as the "queen of the dunces" (132). This comparison poignantly highlights the deep divide that she feels between her former self and her current reality as an immigrant grappling with the challenges of adapting to an unfamiliar culture.

Similarly, Manar conveys a shared sense of estrangement when she observes that even her children are becoming strangers to her. The influence of being inherently "past-oriented" compels her to confront the realization that her children are gradually becoming distanced from their original homeland, drawn into an alternate culture. An evident manifestation of this "assimilation" is the fact that her children have grown fluent in English and can communicate effortlessly, while she struggles even to exchange a few words with the school secretary. Reiteratively, she highlights the contrasts that underscore her state of "in-betweenness" and "biculturality." She accentuates this contrast by remarking that her children engage in behaviors that defy her understanding, as if these actions were entirely normal (129). The specific behaviors she alludes to are innocuous by American standards, such as boys conversing with girls and vice versa, sitting next to each other in school – practices that are emblematic of American culture. In her original cultural context, such interactions would be accompanied by a more pronounced separation between genders. In this context, her concerns escalate into an enduring anxiety, leading her to reluctantly concede her only "choice" of enrolling her children in American schools, despite her deep-seated belief that Americans are "leaders

in immorality" (129). The internal conflict she faces underscores the complex dynamic of preserving her original cultural values while simultaneously navigating the pull of assimilation into a culture that contradicts her beliefs.

The comparison persists and lays bare Manar's internal conflict as a "split" persona, burdened by the weight of alienation and "otherness." This becomes evident when she voices her sense of isolation in America, expressing that she lacks anyone to confide in, save for a single Arab family – an engineer and his wife, a Palestinian born in America who has lost touch with her cultural roots . Adding to the strain of their relationship, this woman converses with Manar in an inelegant, disjointed Arabic, further deepening the feeling of distance (130). The stark contrast continues through Manar's perception of her friend's clothing, which she finds in stark misalignment with her cherished home traditions, deeming them as "tasteless, ill-bred, and unbecoming" (130). In essence, these two women epitomize the divergent paths that many immigrants tread: the "past-oriented" and the "present-oriented," corresponding with the patterns of "preservation" and "assimilation" (Huseby-Dravas 20). These paths have culminated in the distressing experience of "in-betweenness," a sentiment intensified by the ongoing deliberations surrounding the "negotiation of discursive doubleness" and the intricate "hybrid strategy" (20).

Manar's commitment to "preservation" is further underscored by her resolute rejection of various American aspects that encroach upon her personal sphere. Evidently, she staunchly rebuffs the

prevailing American sense of arrogance when she faces sharp criticism for her unfamiliarity with the existence of any place beyond Sonora Falls, Illinois (130). In a similar vein of dismissal, she expresses incredulity at the American sport of soccer, observing that its players seem intent on colliding with one another in a manner akin to "mad beasts" (130). Such sentiments lead her to forbid her son from participating in the sport. Meanwhile, the evolving psyche of Manar is tinged with a profound sense of contemplation, leaving her to ponder her geographical distance from her roots: "where [she's] ended up in Chicago, the farthest afield" (130). As her internal conflict deepens, Manar's perception of self begins to transcend the physical realm, as she describes herself as "a ghost from a nonexistent place" (130). This sentiment, infused with a sense of absurdity and division, is balanced by a conscious recollection of that very "nonexistent place" and the stubborn memories she clings to. In her heart, she yearns for someone to proclaim that the events she has experienced were mere fabrications, and she yearns to return to "the house where [she] grew up" (131). However, her desires collide with the harsh reality of her American existence, a "foreign place" where life seems to lack the essence of vitality (132). Her bitterness stems from the agony of leaving behind her familiar people, landscapes, and all that was known, compounded by the stark realization that life in America fails to infuse her existence with its true essence. This disheartening sentiment is exacerbated by her struggle to replicate the flavors of

her homeland, compounded by the absence of key spices like allspice and cardamom.

Beyond the confines of her home, Manar openly admitted to harboring concerns about the potential of feeling "lost" (134) and facing the prospect of being "misunderstood" by her surroundings (134). Yet, her emotional landscape shifted dramatically when the familiar fragrance of "allspice" wafted to her senses. This aromatic trigger evoked a wave of profound nostalgia, serving as a bridge to her cultural roots. In a captivating manifestation of this attachment, Manar felt compelled to "follow" the aroma, viewing it as a tangible link to the comforting scent of her homeland (135). This compelling experience led Manar to undertake an unexpected course of action. She chose to trail behind a girl in a Volkswagen buggy, drawn towards a destination that became a symbolic battleground where she endeavored to confront and overcome her internal "in-betweenness" and the complexities of "biculturality." In doing so, she embarked on a journey that mirrored her inner quest for equilibrium amidst the cultural shifts that had left her straddling the boundary between two worlds.

Amidst the external world, the distinctive words "la ilaha illa alla" – the fundamental Islamic declaration – reached Manar's ears, triggering a profound resonance within her as a Muslim (132). Encountering someone who could communicate with her in a language she understood, she sensed a gradual diminishment of her pronounced "difference." This newfound connection represented a powerful reassurance that bridged the gap between her and the

unfamiliar surroundings (132). Within this setting, nine individuals were reciting the Islamic testimony in a manner reminiscent of Sufi practice. However, her initial inclination towards this interpretation shifted as she observed that their appearance was incongruent with her understanding of Sufism, particularly due to their attire of cut-off jeans. Consequently, she posited that they might be "gypsies," drawing a tentative conclusion. Additionally, as she contemplated departing from the location, an unexpected touch on her shoulder jolted her senses, evoking a "cultural" shock that she encapsulated in her exclamation: "A man – touching me!" (132). This incident marked a stark departure from the cultural norms and boundaries she was accustomed to, further highlighting the dichotomy she experienced as she grappled with the unfamiliar realities of her new environment.

The incident involving the "allspice" girl is deftly orchestrated to serve as a desperate attempt to bridge the chasm between Manar's past and present, urging her to embrace the realm of the "nation's space." Positioned within a liminal "mid-position" straddling two cultures, Manar instinctively follows the beckoning of her sense of smell, evoking memories of the fragrance of her homeland. However, her journey quickly reveals its limitations, as her identity as an Arab woman compels her to distance herself from the unconventional practices of the perceived "gypsies" . This episode becomes emblematic of her delicate dance between her heritage and her new surroundings. Crucially, the act of following the aroma also highlights Manar's enduring "cultural difference."

She firmly rejects the notion of participating in mixed company, a context where men and women interact closely and physical contact is shared openly. This rejection underscores her commitment to the cultural norms of her upbringing and her resistance to certain behaviors that diverge from her established beliefs. In essence, this incident encapsulates her intricate negotiation of her identity, as she grapples with the duality of her "in-betweenness" and the complexities of navigating her "biculturality."

Interestingly, Manar's curiosity and her earnest quest to establish a foothold in her American life prompted her to inquire of the girl, "Are you Muslim?" (136). Much to her surprise, the answer she received was as vast as the world itself, a response that diverged sharply from her expectations. Instead of finding clarity, she found herself ensnared in a state of "interstitial hyphenation," accentuating the widening divide within her "split" nature. Concurrently, the new land did not entirely push Manar to the outskirts of belonging; rather, it offered a glimmer of hope, facilitated by the multifaceted cultural landscape it encompassed. This diverse milieu appeared to beckon her towards a form of "assimilation." Nevertheless, a dichotomy persisted within her – the coexistence of "two souls, two thoughts, two warring ideals" ("The Souls" 3). This inner duality manifests as an ongoing process of comparison and contrast. On one hand, she engages in a continuous internal comparison, juxtaposing her past against her present circumstances. On the other hand, she navigates the contrasting pulls of two divergent cultures that shape

her evolving sense of identity, creating a complex interplay within her psyche.

In a manner reminiscent of "biculturalism," Patricia Sarrafian Ward's narrative "How We Are Bound" delves into a similar dynamic, where protagonists Madelaine and her husband Amin navigate the intricate terrain of "in-betweenness." Madelaine, like Manar in "Manar of Hama," is a Lebanese wife who has relocated to the United States due to the upheavals of the ongoing war in Lebanon. From the outset, the story portrays her as maintaining strong emotional ties to her homeland while grappling with a disconcerting position in her adopted land. This internal struggle is manifest in the palpable sense of nostalgia accompanied by a surge of anxiety, akin to a door being reluctantly opened (4). Her memories transport her back to the summers spent in Sabhiyyehsin Zoghorta, accompanied by the melodic symphony of water flowing from above and the harmonious laughter of women engaged in culinary pursuits (4). These recollections, rich and vivid, "collide with one another," encapsulating the complexity of emotions she experiences . In parallel, she's haunted by the auditory void of her apartment, a silence that echoes like a resounding absence in an empty room. This silence, as a recurring motif, serves as a powerful tool to highlight her alienation and estrangement. Within the context of this silence, it carries a cascade of negative associations – from denial and rejection to depression and threat, thus becoming a companion of isolation, seclusion, and obscurity (Richard Teleky 205). The story effectively employs this motif to dramatize

Madelaine's intricate predicament. The vacant, quiet room becomes an extension of her very identity, reflecting her sense of isolation (Hollis 21). This space, imbued with the weight of silence, serves as a poignant metaphor for her emotional state and her struggles to reconcile her past and present, all while grappling with the sense of displacement that accompanies the "in-betweenness" she embodies.

Madelaine's sense of isolation extends further as she voices her dissatisfaction to her husband, lamenting her state of being "friendless in this country" (1). His suggestion to befriend Zeina is met with a sardonic response: "she is a zero-on-left" (1). Through this exchange, Madelaine constructs a clear rejection of her in-laws, Adel and Zeina, effectively grounding her refusal in her broader disapproval of life in America. She harbors a distinct aversion to their apparent full "assimilation" into the new culture, coupled with their seemingly materialistic outlook on life. In this way, Madelaine's internal conflict, emblematic of her "in-betweenness," continues to unfold, underscored by an intensifying homesickness and estrangement. Her stance remains resolute – she has little inclination to embrace her new life, consistently ruminating over the past months (4). This trajectory further exacerbates her emotional isolation, severing the tenuous threads of social warmth she had assumed might endure in her new environment. The narrative deftly portrays the ongoing tug-of-war between Madelaine's deep connection to her homeland and her struggle to reconcile it with the realities of her present circumstances, resulting in a complex emotional landscape.

Similarly, Madelaine's husband, Amin, experiences a parallel sense of estrangement and displacement. In the American context, he perceives himself as a precarious element, apprehensive that any movement he makes might dismantle the very structure of the environment around him, as if his presence threatens its stability (10). This metaphorical reflection on the fragility of the American way of life subtly underscores the solidity and coherence of his original existence back home, thereby accentuating his poignant feelings of loss and longing. During an argument with his brother Adel and Adel's wife Zeina, Amin's sentiments crystallize further. He emphasizes the drawbacks of migration and openly voices his desire that he could reclaim his former life, yearning for the familiarity and comfort it held (10). Within the context of his experience in America, Amin perceives a disorienting inversion – his identity is 'split' and his life is thrust into the "interstitial passage," leaving him suspended "in-between." This precipice forces him to grapple with the competing forces of his deeply ingrained cultural heritage and the pressures of the newly embraced, albeit fragile and somewhat inauthentic, American culture. This stark conflict within Amin's inner world serves as a poignant portrayal of the complexities inherent in the immigrant experience, as he navigates the tenuous balance between past and present, between familiarity and the unknown.

In his state of internal conflict, Amin perceives his predicament as the consequence of having chosen a less favorable job as an employee in America, over a potentially more fulfilling

one back home. This sense of disappointment becomes evident through the lens of his wife, Madelaine, who notices the "burn-mark of shame" in his demeanor as she assists him with tasks he ostensibly requires no help with (2). This undercurrent of bitterness intensifies when his brother's wife, Zeina, repeatedly questions his decision to be in America if he harbors such aversion, urging him to return if his discontent is so profound (3). Amin, however, shifts the responsibility for his dissatisfaction onto his brother, who he perceives as having embraced complete 'assimilation' into the new lifestyle. Amin yearns for Adel to acknowledge his yearning for the familiar sights of Zghorta and Jouneih, and for him to admit to his regrets about abandoning their homeland amidst the conflict (3). His persistence in this endeavor appears as an attempt to "break the surface of things and reveal the truth of his brother's disdain for what it was, a hatred of the self" (3). Amin's grievances also extend to Zeina, his own wife, whom he blames for pushing Adel away from his original culture and into the embrace of the new one, deepening the sense of internal and external conflict within their relationships. This portrayal underscores the complexity of emotions experienced by immigrants like Amin, where cultural dynamics, personal aspirations, and familial bonds intersect, leading to a web of intricate tensions and internal struggles.

Caught in the throes of his inner turmoil, Amin's experience of "double-consciousness" manifests as a pervasive sense of inadequacy within the new culture, to the extent that he feels even voicing his discontent about the country is beyond his eligibility (3).

Yet, paradoxically, he finds himself lamenting the very war that compelled him to embark on this journey. Amin's loyalty vacillates along the borders of "biculturalism," as he grapples with the conflicting sentiments he holds towards his homeland – a place that embodies cherished memories and promising professional prospects – and the new nation, which offers him a measure of security and stability. This intricate nexus of emotions gives rise to the palpable sense of 'biculturalism,' emerging within the contours of his profound bewilderment and the ongoing negotiation of his shifting allegiances and identities.

As a result, signs of partial 'assimilation' become overtly evident, culminating in a jarring revelation when Madelaine shares her concern about their daughter Shereen's unexplained absence. To her astonishment, her newly 'assimilated' husband responds with an unsettling coldness: "Don't worry. This is America. You worry too much" (3). Displaying a disconcerting level of indifference, he further reveals that any transformation in him has been purely geographic. He describes merging his keys from Lebanon with those in America, alluding to the notion that he has mingled his belongings from different worlds, striving to prove that no two places are alike (7). In this shift, he asserts that "one key [is] just like the other," emphasizing his conviction that the distinction between places has blurred. This pronounced transformation that has taken hold of him serves as a marker of his "ambivalent" disposition, his "double-consciousness," the fragmentation of his identity, and his "bicultural" stance. The shift in Amin's perspective starkly highlights

his evolving relationship with the two cultures, mirroring the inner complexities of an individual undergoing profound changes in their outlook and sense of belonging.

Similarly to his wife, Amin also experiences the pangs of estrangement and a deep yearning, symbolized by his perception of "the breadth of silence" (10). In this context, silence becomes a vessel for unexpressed sentiments – a reflection of the underlying perplexities and uncertainties felt by Madelaine. This dynamic resonates with aspects of Arabian culture, where silence often conveys meaning more eloquently than words, as Hollis observes: "It is our silence, then, that speaks more eloquently of our condition than we could possibly express otherwise" (14). Nonetheless, despite their shared understanding of this silence and their sense of 'biculturality,' Amin and Madelaine find themselves unable to seamlessly integrate into the foreign culture. Instead, the prevailing environment insists on keeping them within the confines of 'hyphenation,' perpetuating division and marginalization. This dynamic restricts their ability to transcend the boundaries imposed by their minority status and ethics. Their realization stems from the interplay between the compounding effects of the conflict in their homeland and the need to demonstrate gratitude to the new nation that has sheltered them. This intricate interplay contributes to the widening of the 'bicultural' chasm, highlighting the complexities of their identities as they navigate the interstice between their past and present, and between their allegiances to their heritage and their new surroundings.

Amid their disillusionment, a significant facet of "biculturality" emerges through the contours of Madelaine's relationship with her daughter, Shereen. The dynamics of this relationship underwent a transformation upon their move to America. While Madelaine remained deeply connected to her cultural roots, Shereen's identity began to embody elements of 'biculturality': she was immersed in Arab-oriented teachings at home, yet concurrently exposed to the liberal traditions of American society through her college and work experiences. This dual exposure led her to wholeheartedly adopt certain American practices, even mingling with peers from her community college and donning jeans with deliberate holes (2). In contrast, Madelaine displays some resistance to the idea of her daughter entering a romantic relationship with someone from a different cultural background. This reflects her attachment to traditional values and her desire to uphold her cultural heritage. On Shereen's side, she grapples with the tension between striving to fulfill her parents' expectations and navigating the pressures and opportunities presented by her new life. This internal struggle illuminates the challenges and complexities inherent in balancing the cultural expectations and norms of their heritage with the allure and pull of their adopted American identity.

Furthermore, Shereen's unexplained absence serves as an emblem of her defiance against the conventions of her original tradition, which would never sanction such unmonitored autonomy. Her actions propel her into the role of a fully 'assimilated' individual,

as her absence casts a shadow of disillusionment over her parents. This is evident when an American officer addresses her as "Sherry," a transformation that signifies a loss of her Arabic identity (13). Madelaine vehemently resists this alteration, as she sees her daughter's name as the last vestige connecting her to her Arabian heritage. Amin aligns with his wife's sentiment, echoing her rejection of erasing their daughter's identity by emphatically declaring, "No, Amin said Shereen. Shereen" (13). This incident crystallizes the clash between the preservation of their cultural roots and the pressures of assimilation in their new environment. Shereen's shift from her original name to a more Americanized version illustrates the tension between honoring one's heritage and accommodating the expectations of the host culture.

Surprisingly, as the story nears its conclusion, Madelaine experiences a sudden realization that the opportunity to reclaim their former life in their homeland has irreversibly slipped away. She comes to understand that their daughter will bear the repercussions of their immigration, caught in a perpetual oscillation between her Arab and American identities, ultimately feeling a sense of belonging to neither (Abdelrazek 78). In light of this, Madelaine's epiphany marks a shift in her perspective. She acknowledges that the chance to return to their past has vanished, and she comes to terms with their attachment to the new culture. She envisions America as an expansive and enigmatic landscape, where hidden truths and mysteries lie beneath the surface. Amid this realization, a phrase emerges in her mind: "We are bound to this place." This declaration

signifies her acceptance of their ties to the new land, acknowledging the irreversible transformation they have undergone and the complex interplay of their dual identities.

In the third story, "Airport," Pauline Kaldas explores the experiences of Arab immigrants who, for various reasons, make the decision to seek a better life in America, either to improve their opportunities or escape specific challenges in their home countries.

The two central characters in the story, Samir and Huda, embody contrasting perspectives, each awaiting the realization of their marriage, aspirations, and ambitions. They share a common fear of their prospects diminishing in their respective home countries. Samir, who pursued studies in agriculture in Egypt, anticipates a future where he might find himself reduced to "another man with a college degree selling cigarettes in a kiosk" (173). Similarly, Huda, an ambitious young woman, rejects the limited opportunities available to her, such as analyzing blood and urine (177), instead of being granted the chance to advance her education through a master's program that could elevate her societal standing. Furthermore, Huda begins to sense the urgency of time as an Eastern woman, recognizing the pressure to seize opportunities before surpassing the marriageable age. She fears being perceived with either "pity or suspicion" (177) if she doesn't act swiftly. This shared apprehension among Samir and Huda underscores the challenges they face in striving for personal and professional advancement within the constraints of their cultural context.

The story commences with the narrative voice depicting Samir's state of "irritation" while he waits in the airport's lounge. He is observed "entering and exiting" (171) the space, drawing the gaze of others due to his consistent and repetitive movements. His actions seem to captivate the attention of those around him, almost as if his actions have an enigmatic quality akin to a "ghost of his movement" (171).

Samir is depicted as a newcomer in this foreign environment, still finding his footing in this unfamiliar territory. He is portrayed as being somewhat "frightened," concerned that he might not comprehend the language used in the "menus." Similar to Manar's experience in "Manar of Hama," the taste of the food is "unfamiliar" to Samir, a stark contrast to the sense of "certain security" he associated with his mother's cooking. The loss of this comforting familiarity accentuates the fragmentation of Samir's identity, characterized by a sense of being "split" and "hyphenated," as well as an inner "conscious" that is plagued by doubt. However, as the story progresses, Samir's trajectory changes. He gradually finds his bearings and establishes himself as a fully "assimilated" individual within his new surroundings. This evolution in his experience illustrates the transformative power of adaptation and his journey toward a more integrated identity.

Similarly, Huda's personal struggle unfolds within the confines of her home, where she grapples with societal pressures while striving to establish her own identity and assert her "independence" (174). Her dilemma is rooted in her refusal to

passively accept the prevailing norms within her community. Instead, she persistently strives to carve out her own space in a society that seldom offers avenues for self-distinction. This internal conflict places her at a crossroads: she must choose between the prospect of remaining at home, with limited prospects for both independence and marriage, or embracing Samir's proposal and embarking on a new journey to a foreign land with its distinct culture. Ultimately, much like Samir, Huda comes to terms with her choices. She finds herself gradually open to the idea of "assimilation" into this new culture, albeit with certain reservations. This progression mirrors her transformation and adaptation, highlighting the complex interplay between personal aspiration and the external forces that shape one's path.

Thus, the "bicultural" essence of these two characters becomes apparent in tandem – Samir, who waits anxiously for Huda's arrival, and Huda, who is busily preparing for her impending flight. The narrator skillfully juxtaposes their actions, shedding light on each individual's current state. Samir's perspective is depicted as follows: "The clock had just struck eleven on a Sunday morning. Samir had risen early, shortly before six, even though he had stayed up late meticulously cleaning his apartment. Glancing at his wristwatch, he observed that there was still an additional hour to go before the scheduled arrival of the plane. He extended his steps along the waiting area, his gaze fixated on one of the arrival gates, particularly Flight 822 arriving from Egypt by way of Switzerland" (172). In contrast, Huda's perspective is unveiled: "The clock

displayed eleven on a Saturday morning. Huda had risen early, just before six, even though she had stayed awake into the late hours bidding farewell to friends and family. Her first task was to dial the airport's number to verify the scheduled departure time. It was Flight 822 bound for Boston, taking the route through Switzerland" (173).

Consequently, this shared feeling of "irritation" serves as a symbol of both characters' transformative journeys. Samir has placed the responsibility of choosing a wife and handling all related arrangements onto his brother's shoulders, with the condition that the chosen woman must possess certain traits – being well-educated, proficient in English, ambitious to work, and capable of navigating unfamiliar waters, both literally and metaphorically (177). These qualities not only represent the prerequisites for adapting to life in America but also symbolize the alternate identity Huda needs to adopt to navigate her own sense of "bicultural[ity]." This adaptation underscores her struggle with feelings of marginalization and being "in-between."

Huda's inner thoughts and apprehensions are eloquently captured by the narrator as she engages in the act of packing her belongings, signifying her impending relocation to a foreign land (172). The uncertainty of her situation looms large over her, as reflected in her internal query, "would he be there?" (174), a question that encapsulates her deep-seated concerns about a marriage to a man she has not had the chance to truly know. Despite her character being inherently "independent," Huda's rejection of Samir's proposition, in which he authorizes his brother to handle the

administrative aspects of their marriage and immigration (173), underscores her determination to maintain her autonomy and make her own choices. Originating from a period of frustration within her own home, Huda's aspirations were stifled by societal limitations and the confines of an autocratic environment. Her individuality was marked by her distinct ambitions, and even her physical appearance deviated from the "traditional Egyptian sense" (177), displaying a slim figure without the customary roundness associated with hips and legs. This deviation was a result of her frequent "walking" (172), a consequence of high taxi fares and overcrowded buses. Consequently, the invitation to a new country found Huda, although understandably irritated, apprehensive, and vigilant, in a position where she could logically respond. This invitation was essentially an opportunity to step into an unfamiliar culture, a new environment, and a fresh realm of existence.

Huda's forthcoming journey appears to embody the concept of an "interstitial future," poised "in-between" the claims of her current circumstances and her past experiences (Locations 12). She finds herself caught amidst conflicting forces, with her prospective husband exerting a "pull" toward a new cultural sphere while her parents exert a "push" away from her original one. Her parents' motivation for this push lies in the fact that Samir hails "from a good family" and is in America, a feat not easily achieved by many (174). They argue that America aligns with her "independent nature," given the value placed on education and educated individuals in that country. This strategy of pushing resonates deeply with Huda,

especially considering her situation at home. In Egypt, she felt like an unrefined piece of wood in need of smoothing (174). However, amidst her burgeoning desire to pursue a master's degree in Chemistry, her parents' advice intersects with their contentment, viewing their twenty-one-year-old daughter's priority as seeking a husband. Her past experiences include accepting a proposal in which the suitor insisted she abandon her studies to focus on homemaking, leading to the eventual "breakdown" of the engagement. Consequently, when Samir's brother appeared with a "plane ticket and the approved visa," Huda was left reeling, her thoughts in a whirlwind (174).

Thus, the tapestry of Huda's "bicultural[ity]" begins to weave in tandem with that of Samir's. The elongated process leaves her moments of forgetfulness regarding her engagement and her impending journey to America. However, when Samir's proposal from America arrives, her "hesitation" appears minimal. Moreover, the contrast with the Egyptian women around her amplifies her inclination towards the idea of relocation. The seeds of "bicultural[ity]" take root in her mind, accentuated by her repudiation of the image she envisions – an image that once terrified her as it hinted at her potential future (176). She stands caught between the negative portrayal of women back home and the potential status she might attain in the host nation. On one side, the women around her are depicted "dragging their chores like chains," performing household tasks, cooking, and cleaning, or marrying young and sometimes for love, only for their "spirits [to] dissipate

like sugar crystals in water" (176). In stark contrast, Huda's character embodies the potential to "swim in deep water." As a child, her mother pulled her out of the traditional domestic sphere, yet she was later found "mixing starch and water, baking soda and vinegar" out of curiosity (176). Over time, her ambition led her to delve into chemistry books and persevere through a master's program, an endeavor met with irony from her male peers and professors alike. However, this scientific mindset is eventually compelled to embrace the unknown, symbolized by the "roll of dice that would lead her to America" (177).

Both Samir and Huda see the prospect of becoming "bicultural" as a potential transformation that could elevate their lives to a more refined level. They envision a chance for real job opportunities, research endeavors, and being taken seriously in their fields, without being constantly redirected to their gender (177). Huda is well-equipped for assimilation, as her strong command of English, learned through scientific studies, positions her favorably for integration. Samir, the prospective husband, is the central focus of Huda's considerations, hoping he won't be chosen "as if picking a number out of a hat" (177). Likewise, Samir has embarked on his path of assimilation, having successfully navigated preliminary challenges to become an accepted 'other.' Arriving in America with a mix of "hope and trepidation" , he struggles to transcend his previous fears associated with mundane jobs, such as "standing inside the kiosk." For Samir, America represents a land of "more possibilities" (175). However, the barrier of language isolates him

from genuine communication with society. In response, he enrolls in a language course, although grappling with its convoluted grammar compounds his challenges. Even in his initial job washing dishes, his linguistic repertoire is limited to basic phrases like "good morning, how are you... see you later." However, his skill in "fixing things" lands him a task of repairing his restaurant manager's stereo. This incident marks a pivotal moment for Samir, enabling him to "[find] his niche in this country" (176). The distance between his initial contemplation of "email[ing] the green card lottery" (174) and his current position feels vast to him.

In this manner, Huda and Samir have arrived at a resolute choice to embrace "biculturalism" and embark on their journey of assimilation into the new culture. Unlike Manar and Madelaine, their original culture might not exert the same compelling "pull," but they also do not explicitly reject it. This sentiment is encapsulated in the closing lines of the story: "She couldn't put into words exactly what she desired, only that it lay beyond this place. Huda took a deep breath, as if gathering the reins of a horse, and began to pack the suitcases" (177). In this passage, Huda appears deeply entangled in uncertainty, profoundly affected by the prospect of her future. Her struggle to put her desires into words could hint at her acknowledgement of the value of her original culture. However, as she "catches her breath," it signifies the compelling force drawing her towards the new culture, urging her to establish a connection beyond her old traditions. This internal tug-of-war is reflected in her practical decisions: "She meticulously counted her dresses, skirts,

and pants, and then halved the numbers—those were the pieces she intended to take. She applied the same method to all her other belongings" (177). By choosing to divide her clothing items in half, Huda symbolically illustrates her "split" identity and "double consciousness." This pre-departure decision reveals her intention to leave a portion of herself behind in her homeland even before arriving on American soil. This act speaks to the concept of the "interstitial passage" and the state of "in-betweenness" that will define her future existence.

In conclusion, the complex issue of Arab immigrants to America remains a subject of ongoing debate, encompassing discussions about the challenges and opportunities they face in their marginal lives. This issue also raises questions about Western attitudes and the influence they exert on immigrant communities. The central themes of identity, double-consciousness, and biculturalism are undeniably prevalent among immigrant Arabs, shaping their experiences and interactions with their host country. The choice faced by these characters is weighty and consequential: either assimilate into the new society, leaving a part of their original identity behind, or reject the new culture entirely. The characters navigate the duality of their existence, grappling with double consciousness and a sense of being caught between two contrasting cultures. Yet, this dual existence serves as a means of survival in an environment of cultural and societal contrasts. Despite their efforts to adapt, each character maintains a connection to their original culture. Manar's nostalgia for the scent of her home, Madelaine and

her husband's longing for Lebanon in the face of humiliation, and Huda's decision to divide her belongings between two cultures all reflect a deep attachment to their roots. While they demonstrate loyalty to their heritage, they simultaneously accept the need to integrate into their new surroundings in order to thrive. In essence, these Arab women exemplify the complexities of identity and adaptation faced by immigrant communities. Their stories depict the intricate interplay between their original cultures and the new one they've embraced, showcasing the intricate balance between loyalty and adaptation. This ongoing negotiation shapes their experiences, illustrating the enduring struggle of living between cultures while striving to retain a sense of self and connection to their roots.

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## وصل الجسور: الثقافات المزدوجة في قصص عربية-أمريكية قصيرة

### ملخص

في أعقاب مأساة الحادي عشر من سبتمبر، اكتسب مفهوم "ثنائية الثقافة" و"ازدواجية الوعي" أهمية متزايدة للعرب المهاجرين في الولايات المتحدة. تنظر هذه الدراسة ملياً في كيفية تطور الأفراد الذين ينتقلون في هذه الديناميكيات، لا سيما بين أولئك الذين اثروا الاندماج داخل المجتمع الأمريكي مع الحفاظ على روابطهم مع ثقافتهم الأصلية. لقد ولد هذا الاختيار وجوداً معقداً للهويات المزدوجة، مما يعكس "بينية" عميقة. وقد أدت حالة "البينية" هذه إلى ظهور إطار نفسي ثنائي يتميز بالتفاعل بين "الانجذاب نحو الوطن البديل الذي تم تبنيه و"الدفع" نحو جذورهم الثقافية. يحدث هذا الاستكشاف ضمن المجالات النظرية لمفاهيم Du Bois و Bhabha لـ "الوعي المزدوج" و"الوسط". في هذا السياق، يركز التحليل على ثلاث قصص قصيرة متميزة، كل واحدة منها تسلط الضوء على بطلة تجسد تجاربها درجات متفاوتة من "الثقافة الثنائية". من خلال هذه الروايات، يسلط البحث الضوء على المفاوضات المعقدة حول "الاستيعاب" و"الحفاظ"، ويوضح في النهاية المناظرة النفسية الدقيقة التي تنشأ من تداخل ثقافتين. الكلمات المفتاحية: بينية، ثنائية الثقافة، حفظ، استيعاب.