

**Acculturated Identities in Hanan Al-Shaykh's  
*Only in London***

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## **Acculturated Identities in Hanan Al-Shaykh's *Only in London***

### **Abstract**

Hanan Al-Shaykh's novel *Only in London* (2001) represents an embodiment of John Berry's theory of acculturation in the sense that her characters cross borders to a new culture that necessitates various degrees of adaptation. Those characters have been gathered on a turbulent plane operating from Dubai (East) to London (West) in their attempts to reconstruct their deformed identities. At home, conditions differed for each one of them and imposed a certain kind of psychological exile that hindered any specific social or economic fulfillment. Thus, acculturation has been their fatal choice, and each one has come into contact with the host culture through Berry's acculturation strategies: separation, marginalization, assimilation and integration. The study investigates the four cases of acculturation in light of their original culture and reflects on the degree of fulfillment; if any, to which they could be evaluated as acculturated identities. In addition, it uncovers the hindering factors that contributed in thwarting full acculturation of the four protagonists.

**Key Words:** Berry, acculturation, separation, integration, marginalization, assimilation

## الهويات ذاتية الثقافة في رواية حنان الشيخ : لندن ياعزيزي

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### مستخلص

رواية حنان الشيخ **لندن ياعزيزي** (2001) تمثل تجسيدا جليا لنظرية جون بييري للذوبان الثقافي بمعنى أن شخوصها يعبرون الحدود إلى ثقافة جديدة تتطلب درجات متفاوتة من التكيف. فالشخوص يتجمعون على متن طائره أصابها الخلل في رحلتها من دبي (الشرق) إلى لندن (الغرب) في سعيهم لإعادة تشكيل هوياتهم المشوهة. وقد تباينت الظروف في أوطانهم وفرضت عليهم نوعًا من المنفى والعزلة النفسية التي منعت بدورها أي نوع من الرضا الاقتصادي أو الاجتماعي. وبذلك كان الذوبان الثقافي هو خيارهم المصيري وكان إتصالهم بالثقافة الجديدة في إطار إستراتيجيات جون بييري التي تشمل الانفصال ، التهميش ، الإستيعاب ، الإندماج. والدراسة الحالية تفحص حالات الذوبان للشخوص الأربعة في ضوء الثقافات الأصلية وتعكس أبعاد الرضا لديهم- إن وجد- حتى يمكن الحكم إذا كانوا قد أنجزوا الذوبان الثقافي أم لا. وتكشف الدراسة أيضا النقاب عن العوامل التي أسهمت في منع اكتمال الذوبان الثقافي للشخصيات الأربع .

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** بييري ، التثاقف ، الانفصال ، الإندماج ، التهميش ، الإستيعاب .

## Introduction

Hanan Al-Shaykh is one of the contemporary Arab writers whose oeuvre include novels, short stories and plays. She was born and raised in a conservative part of Beirut called Ras al-Naba; went to a Muslim primary school for girls; then, to Egypt to attend to the American University. Later, she lived in Saudi Arabia before moving to London in 1982. She is the author of the collection *I Sweep the Sun off Rooftops*(1994), and her novels include *The Story of Zahra*(1980), *Women of Sand and Myrrh* (1994), *Beirut Blues*(1992), and *Only in London* (2001). Al-Shaykh's childhood was exceptional and the circumstances of her family had an impact upon her; her mother divorced her father and left home; she had to afford to her father's needs and face up to early challenges outdoors. Of the reasons that made her want to be a writer she states: "I was on my own all the time and lived without a mother at home.....So I think being alone and discovering things on my own during my childhood made me want to become a writer".(EL-Geressi,2018).Thus, Al-Shaykh could crystalize several experiences and fathom different and varied social habits. In 1990, she settled in London where she could complete her acculturated circle that has been reflected in her current novel, *Only in London* .

*Only in London* involves four protagonists on board on of a turbulent plane operating from Dubai to London. The plane represents a symbolic movement from eastern to western culture, and the transference of the characters is viewed as a migration from indigenous to exogenous arenas in quest of new versions of existence in the host country; an image which "encapsulates the novel's main narrative of uprooting, migration, exile, and loss, experienced in different ways by all four lead characters" (Schlote, 2002). Three of the four protagonists come from different parts of the uproarious Arab world: Lamis is an Iraqi divorced woman, Amira is an impertinent Moroccan prostitute, Samir escapes his family living in Sharjah, and Nicholas, the British man, who is infatuated by the magic world of eastern art of daggers in Oman. All of them remain in a state of transition.

All of the four characters seek acculturation in different senses. Lamis, the Iraqi woman has been divorced as a result of an incompatible marriage although she had a child who is now living in London with her ex-husband. When she arrived in London, she decided to adapt to the new life through learning English, loving Nicholas, and setting new acquaintances. She represents the strategy of assimilation. Amira, unlike Lamis, tackles the process of separation that allows her to preserve her original culture and behaves accordingly while rejecting full adaptation to the new culture. Samir represents a third type of acculturation; namely, marginalization, through which he is in minimal contact with his original culture and the new one. The last type is that of integration which is conducted by Nicholas, the British man who is partially involved in the Arabian culture through trading in 'daggers'; additionally, through getting into a relationship with Lamis .

The four characters end up in disappointment as none of them could fully adapt; they found themselves left on the margins with no tangible achievements inspite of the serious attempts to adjust. Lamis failed to fulfill her marriage project with Nicholas because their approaches contradicted each other; at a time she seeks in Nicholas a new harbor of safety after the failure of her first marriage; indeed, Nicholas was sincere enough to declare: "I don't want an affair. I want a commitment, a framework for my life".(Al-Shaykh, 2001, p.276). In like manner, although Lamis has a British passport, "she felt that the country was remote from her; that she was still on the margins" (Al-Shaykh, 2001,267). Similarly, Amira ended up disappointingly when her feigned role of a princess had been scandalized and she had been a subject to an Arab prince's mercy; also, she has realized that "whores are not part of the society" (Al-Shaykh, 2001,255); thus, has been reprimanded by her mother who assured her that her sisters were still pure. Samir has failed neither to stay home nor to adapt in the new culture. He has been involved in smuggling diamond into the bowels of a monkey without any pre-knowledge; London, to him, was freedom that he lacked at home whereas his family at Sharjah has represented a daily burden to him; and thus, this left him deeply frustrated. His homosexual tendencies

have exposed him to various humiliating situations. Samir, at last, ended up empty-handed; he could not afford to neither his family needs nor his personal inclinations. As a representative of integration, Nicholas could successfully preserve his original culture and integrate in the other Arabian one.

### **Acculturation**

Acculturation occurs when “two independent groups come into continuous first-hand contact over an extended period of time” (Redfield,1936,p.149). Those groups undergo various phases of experiences that fall within the frame of “psychological acculturation” (Graves,1967, p. 337). The ensuing attitudes those groups embrace vary according to the social distance they allow themselves to adopt; these attitudes represent groups’ stances towards the host culture; their variations are a matter of degree, not of kind. In other words, the attitude or the strategy adopted by a specific group is determined by the degree of freedom a person sets for himself towards the other culture and by the obligations imposed on him by the foreign community. These strategies are: “assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization”. (Berry,1974, p.46).

Berry (2006), still, believes that acculturation is accomplished and studied individually when groups live in countries other than their own; additionally, he categorizes those groups into: voluntary immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and sojourners. Voluntary immigrants are defined as those people who willingly leave homeland in quest of better economic opportunities, marriage, employment or to join their family members who had already settled in the new country; refugees are viewed as the category who involuntarily transfer or are displaced because of reasons like persecution, war, or natural disasters; asylum seekers unwillingly seek acculturation owing to political persecution or any similar reasons; and finally, sojourners are those who relocate for a specific period of time to achieve a specific purpose and come back when it is accomplished.(cited in Schwartz, 2010, 240)

Thus, acculturation becomes a case of cultural change that reflects degrees of adaptation and adoption practiced by the concerned groups or persons who, most probably, are immigrants; moreover, it is a case of cultural change that takes place when groups of different ethnic backgrounds come together. For this reason, M.A.Gibson (2001) believes that acculturation is part of the immigration process whereas those immigrants show various cultural differences in matters like language, food, clothes, creed...ect. (pp.19-23)

In this sense, Gibson further illustrates various modes of acculturation:

The first is the traditional of linear acculturation and assimilation whereby the immigrant groups advance economically and are integrated socially, culturally and politically into the middle class....The second is one that I have termed accommodation and acculturation without assimilation. Primary features of this type are a strong ethnic enclave coupled with the deliberate presentation of the homeland culture.....The third leads downward into poverty and keeps immigrants trapped at the bottom of the economic ladder. (pp. 20-21)

In like manner, Berry (1970,74,80) had set a similar categorization of acculturation modes and a two-dimensional framework. He believes that people should determine whether they would retain their original culture or would they prefer interaction with the new one. This sort of adaptation involves four processes of cultural change:

- Assimilation is defined when people set aside their heritage and interact with the new culture.
- Separation is defined when individuals are inclined to preserve their original culture and reject adaptation to the new one.
- Integration is highlighted when they try to preserve their original culture and try to integrate into the new one.

-Marginalization is established when they reject both preserving original culture and interaction with the new one.

In addition, cultural psychologists have recognized that acquiring the beliefs, values, and practices of the receiving country does not automatically imply that an immigrant will discard the beliefs, values, and practices of her or his country of origin (Schwartz, 2010, 240). Simultaneously, Weinreich (2009) believes that “enculturation” refers to the process of selectively acquiring or retaining elements of the original culture while also selecting other elements of the new receiving one. (p.127). After all, the similarity between both cultures can help determine how much acculturation is needed to achieve full adaptation (Rudmin, 2003, p. 31).

In the same vein, Gordon (1994) classifies assimilation into seven types: Cultural (absorbing the cultural norms, beliefs, and behavior patterns of the “host” society), Structural (entering and becoming integrated into the formal social, political, economic, and cultural institutions of the host country and developing numerous long-lasting personal friendships with the members of the majority group), Martial (large-scale intermarriage), Identificational (developing of [a] sense of peoplehood based exclusively on host society), Attitude Receptional (absence of prejudice), Behavior Receptional (absence of discrimination), and Civic (absence of value and power conflict). (cited in Zidan, 2014, p. 37)

Thus, among acculturation levels, integration seems to be the best option as it keeps its holder in between both cultures. On the other hand, separation and marginalization compel the subject to abandon his original values, particularly if they are embraced altogether, while assimilation has a duality that grants the holder the advantages of the new culture at the expense of his original one.

### **Assimilation**

As a strategy of acculturation, assimilation is embodied by Lamis, the divorced wife who is striving to find herself in a different arena in her attempts to forget her harmful marriage experience. One of the

main causes of the failure of her marriage was the impotency of her husband while another was her depression as her son was still living with his father in London. Leaving her life in Najaf, Iraq, and heading to London represents a possible way out of her frustration; she declared very early that she “want[s] to assimilate” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.53); indeed, she “wish[ed] to be part of a group and explore others’(p.62); thus, following two major tendencies of assimilation. In order to achieve her assimilation, Lamis has to pass through several experiences of contacting the English culture: first, she decided to take language lessons to speak like natives, to see the other London, to love and wish to marry Nicholas, to communicate with the English people, to cross the state of in-betweenness, and, finally, to overcome all connections and memories that might draw her back home.

Lamis, accordingly, set her assimilation requirements, in light of Berry’s concept that “assimilation is a system in which people from different backgrounds came to share a similar society” (Berry, 1951, p.217), in seven points:

This is going to become my country. I’ve stopped living a temporary life.

- 1)I’ve just arrived in London and this is a hotel.
- 2)Learn English properly
- 3)Look for a job, any job. Start to save money. Take the tube or the bus. No taxis, unless it’s an emergency.
- 4)Make friends with some English people.
- 5)Find somewhere else to live as soon as possible.
- 6)Stop eating Arab food- not because the garlic and coriander make my breath smell, but because this kind of food makes me feel safe and secure and reminds me of childhood and home. (Al-Shaykh,2001, p.19)

Realizing that language is the first basic requirement of being assimilated in the new culture, Lamis contacted an English teacher; when the teacher asked her why she wanted to perfect her English, she responded that because she wanted to live in London; though, she arrived in London thirteen years ago with her Iraqi husband, but

lived in a completely Arab environment that prevented her from being fully adapted. In a manner that strengthens the assimilating process, the teacher advised her to “keep away from anything Arab, even in her mind; you should stop eating Arab dishes, because subconsciously you’ll be saying their names”. (Al-Shaykh,2001,p.53), but, unfortunately, when Lamis remembered a type of food, she subconsciously uttered its name in Arabic. She, accordingly, complained to her teacher: “my memory’s all in Arabic. As if I’m a parrot. Don’t parrots ever lose their memories”. (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.180), in a hint that reflects her serious attempts to set aside her original heritage.

When Lamis arrived in London, she recognized that she did not have any acquaintances but for Mr Collins, her gynecologist who represents her early steps towards assimilation. Mr Collins , she believes, was the one who knew she’d remained a virgin after her marriage owing to the impotency of her husband; he knew when she lost her virginity and when she became pregnant. Thus, he remained the only English hand to plunge inside her as he could “guide another Arab out of her” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.17). Consequently, as Lamis perceives, between Arab women and their doctors, there develops a specific sort of relationship that allows them to “ask for pills to make [them] want to have sex with their husband[s]” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.17). Although seeing her doctor was a matter of necessity, yet it remains one of the ways to make friends in England.

Another way was her falling in love with Nicholas whose advances have wrapped her entirely. Her relationship with her husband through thirteen years of marriage was void of any physical or emotional closeness, and she remembers that she’d never once lain naked side by side with her husband” (Al-Shayks, 2001,p.128).These memories come up vividly when she was beside Nicholas on the bed; she felt “as if her eyes had left her body and were hovering above her, watching them as man and woman- Adam and Eve” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.128).This sort of physical and social assimilation reflects a case of dryness that she previously suffered in London with her husband, but this time she wanted the other

London, not that of the Arabs. Thus, Nicholas has been the second man to physically and emotionally plunge into her being; also, “the feel of him made her cry from her long orgasm, and forget the feel of wood forever’ (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.128). Having regained her sense of womanhood, Lamis continued pressing Nicholas for love-making more frequently; as a newly assimilated woman, she has decided “not to hide anything”.(Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.203); moreover, she speaks: “I don’t want to go back to being the person I used to be. I don’t care about my pride” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.203).

In her strategy to make friends in England, Lamis gets into contact with a group of Nicholas’s acquaintances while waiting for his arrival. He has been so keen to introduce her to his friends so that “[she doesn’t] go on being alone” (Al-Shaykh,2001,p.151).Lamis felt language barrier hindering distances of closeness, but still, she insists on crossing them; her first impression of their conversation was that it “moved quickly in a sphere of which she had no knowledge, total Englishness” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.151); their topics were quite far from her; her attempt to speak out a single sentence stuck in her throat until one of the guests referred to his previous job in Emirates as a ‘falcon breeder’; she sensed it was possible to speak, but retreated for fear that she be asked about falcons and because “she was unused to talking in a large group of English people” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.153). On the contrary, when they started asking her about her country and her relationship with Nicholas, her responses were adequate enough particularly when she realized that Anita’s English was broken like hers as she was from Denmark. In addition, Lamis assured Nicholas that she is looking for a job (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.161), a step, together with language, reflects her insistence to be assimilated in the new society

Lamis developed her friendship with Anita with whom she was seeing the other London, and became extremely uninhibited. For the first time, she enjoyed “revealing her body in its natural state” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.194) unlike the case with her family who never saw her body. After her visit to Edgware Road with Anita, she tried to go up the BT tower to “see London from above” (Al-Shaykh,

2001,p.263); her request was denied at the beginning, but later BT office approved it when she justified her need to go up: “the tower guides me like a lighthouse, as if I am a lost ship” (Al-shaykh, 2001,p.263).Later, she decided to live with Nicholas as the furthest step towards full assimilation, simultaneously reminding herself of her basic requirements: “my son, love, learning English, and work) (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.194) .

Contrary to her aspired course of assimilation, Lamis’s relationship with Nicholas comes to an end causing her a new turning point that sent her back home in quest of the remains of her identity; Nicholas sent her a letter in which he justified the urgent need to halt their relationship, preventing by so doing, the assimilation circle to complete.

### **Separation**

The strategy of separation in *Only in London* is represented by Amira-born under the name of Habiba Mustanaimi into a poor family in Morocco -who arrived in London as a migrant who rejected her status at home and tried to commit suicide until she met with a British tourist in Morocco; “she walked along with the tourist and felt as if London were walking beside her ... Habiba thought how nice 'London' was, and how well mannered, and she no longer wanted to take her own life" (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p. 170). Her family wished she were a boy and “wished that this baby girl could return to the womb, and stay there while they prayed to God to change her sex" (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.68). Amira started to think of her body early at home when “her uncle pulled her hand and forced it against his crotch” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.169); moreover, in London, she worked as a maid, and when she was molested by her employer, she decided to become a high-class prostitute for members of London's Arab community.

When Amira arrived in London, she found out that the city is a ‘melting pot’ of several ethnicities where Arabs used to violate their taboos. Of the scenes that ignited her curiosity and shaped her coming business scheme was that of an Arab princess at the hotel in

Dorchester; Amira and her friend Nahid sat stunned, looking at the table of the princess; soon afterwards, Amira made up her mind and told Nahid:

I'll pretend to be a princess and you'll be one of my companions. We'll get another two, as well. And our profits will be at least five thousand, if not more, for every trick I divide everything fifty-fifty. (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.109)

M.A.Gibson's view is most relevant here as he believes that acculturation is a part of the immigration process (pp.19-23). In her separation process, Amira places value on her original culture; she rejects full adaptation to the new one. The matter with her is that of context change or transmission which originates from ecological and demographic change caused by her impinging society at home.

Moreover, Amira, in her separation process, observes her attitude and behavior; in other words, she determined that she would impersonate a princess just to hide her original identity that might not lead her to the wished-for conclusions; however, she plans her scheme through the aid of others to complete the necessary framework. The only variable is the context of 'London' that made all difficulties possible to resolve. At home, she resisted falling a prey to domestic assaults, but in London, she decided to run the process with new acculturation tactics through hiding her true identity behind veneers of impersonation and tricks.

In her separation process, Amira made an immigrant's choice through which she preserved her ethnic identity and rejected any communication with the new culture; thus, the victims of her tricks and business scheme have been only Arabs for several reasons: first, to avoid English (although she speaks more than one language) as a language of communication that might cause her any misunderstanding or pitfalls, second, to excel in playing her tricks on people of her skin that she knows inside-out, and third, to achieve maximum financial benefits from rich figure who are accustomed and known for their lavish expenditure.

In her disguise, Amira plays tricks on an Arab man who happened to

be at the bank while she was pretending to check for an alleged bank transfer with the teller and expressed her indignation for not having any; the man soon falls in her trap and hurried asking whether he can be of any help; in a hint that strengthens and consolidates her belief and pre-knowledge of Arab men's infatuation by women of their skin. This glaringly marks her separation strategy that mainly relied on geographical displacement, national culture and even on Arabic as a language for communication. In her process of acculturation, Amira's ethnic profile is clearly oriented towards her ethnic group; additionally, London has always been the foreign context that paved the way for revealing her shameless conduct without any sort of preservation.

It was her original ethnicity that uncovered and threatened her being an immigrant; this is conducted when her trick against a real prince has been revealed and she had to face an investigation by Scotland Yard officers. Her acculturation tactic depended on renting a neighbouring room to that of the prince; consequently, she has been exposed to suspicions. The matter was settled when the truth was revealed that she only needed money to pay her room and the prince agreed to that. The Scotland Yard officer exclaimed; "the Arab mentality was a puzzle. The prince had made a complain, then forgives the woman' (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.166).

Nahid's death has deeply influenced Amira. To Amira, Nahid's death and the burial was an interval that granted Amira an opportunity to pause and reconsider her status; she reflected on one of the reasons that sent her away, namely, the loss of her innocence. Amira, moreover, recalled the memory of her fiancé whom "she left because she was humiliated by and angry about his mother's spiteful treatment of her when her own mother failed to provide the promised dowry for a lounge suit" (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.270). Thus, she decided to disappear and only return when she becomes rich.

In short, in her acculturation process, Amira represented a type of character that could proceed with a sort of existential balance in order to reach her goal. Also, her separation has been proved to be very effective a tactic that did not rob her her ethnic and cultural

identity.

### **Marginalization**

Marginalization is the third strategy set by Berry in his theory of acculturation. It assumes the migrant's rejection of both his original culture and the host one. The representative character in *Only in London* is Samir, the Lebanese man who was living with his family in Sharjah; he prefers being on the margin either at home or in London. He got bored of life burdens with his family and thought of going to London when war broke out; London was the symbol of freedom for him. Freedom is a key issue to Samir owing to his queer inclinations which were foreign to his society. The fact is that, Samir has developed female tendencies: had a homosexual relationship with his teacher Salah, used to wear women clothes, rejected all nurse's advices to prevent him to contact a male like him when he was admitted at the hospital. Consequently, he found himself on the margins of both his society and the host one occupying a pariah position. It was his mother who had him admitted to a mental hospital when she saw him wearing a dress, and repeatedly, she "caught him singing and dancing on the roof terrace wearing her blue nylon nightie, her lipstick and high heels when he was eleven years old" (Al-Shaykh, 2001,150). This is, indeed, exactly what occurred and pushed him away.

Unlike Sharjah, London, to him, was where he felt free. There, he missed no one, even his wife and children. London, to him, is where he felt in the heart of things and behaved freely. There, he

make [s] people laugh, and he was being paid for it rather than doing it for nothing as he had for so many years. There was a respect here for everything, even for laughter, it was his job, a career, like any other, just like being an engineer, a doctor or a bus driver. (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.149)

According to Bhaba (1994), "it is in the emergence of the interstices- the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness,

community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (Intr to The Location of Culture, p.xi). This is the interstice where Samir is located and where he has opted to lead a marginal life. The main reason of his status has been the result of social rejection either at home or in the host land. His mother was the first opposition factor who rejected his queer practices and resisted his shameful consequences; even in London; moreover, Samir was opposed by the nurse at the AIDS centre who advised him to take a test; besides, she wondered when she realized what Samir wanted was against law and nature; but, unfailingly, Samir carelessly left and “patted the box of condoms in his pocket” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.93), in a hint that refers to his future plans.

In his marginalized space, Samir resumed his attempts to find a partner with whom he wished to find satisfaction. His clothes represented the contact point with the boy at the bus stop; the boy and his friend admired Samir’s scarf which he pulled off and handed it over to them; besides, since then, Samir used to “wear the most beautiful clothes he could find” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.174). With these two art students, Samir started moving towards the centre of attention when he decided to look for Mrs Cunningham who once worked for the British embassy in Lebanon. When she was at the psychiatrist’s hospital for treatment, coincidentally Samir was also there as a patient. Mrs Cunningham admired Samir’s pullover which his mother had knitted; she asked her to knit more ones and paid for that. Later, when she returned to London, she “thanked her in a postcard...which Samir preserved for ages”.(Al-Shaykh,2001,p.175). Paradoxically enough, Samir failed in his attempt to adapt in London; Mrs Cunningham, instead of becoming his passage towards being accepted and adopted, she herself was deplorably worthy of caregiving.

Samir’s ‘interstice’ turns narrower when his intentions continued revolving only around his queer practices; thus, his marginalized status kept in progress. Ironically enough, he demanded someone to make him laugh in much the same way he makes others do. This refers to his tentative attempts to adapt, but, failingly after all, he

finds himself on the margin in need for a company. Thus, he wavers between rummaging his memories with his teacher, Salah, on the one hand, and longing for the Tabbulah boy on the other.

Within this 'marginalized' space, Samir had to afford to his living. With a mentality of a man on the margin, he "went round the streets looking for cars parked in spaces where the meters were about to run out, he fed the meters with coins, then waited for car owners" (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.270) to pay him in return for saving their cars from being clamped. At night, he used to go to Arab haunts entertaining customers with tales of his monkey.

Thus, Samir had his own life in the shade, and could never move towards the centre either at home or in the host country.

### **Integration**

According to Berry, integration is the strategy through which people keep ties with their original culture, and attempt to adapt with the new one. Nicholas, the British character is the one who represents that type of acculturation reversely. Accidentally, Nicholas was on board of the turbulent plane with the other characters coming back from Oman; indeed, he is so deeply interested in the Arab art and has been influenced by their tradition. When he was first asked by Lamis about what attracted him to the Arab world, he responded:

Chance too. I met an Omani who collects Islamic daggers. He asked me to help him build his collection, and I accepted. A heave-sent opportunity. I seem to be having a lot of them lately-it was extraordinary luck that I had to go to Leighton House that afternoon. (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.101)

Nicholas has previously been inspired to the Arab world by his friend Liz's stories about Arabs. The fact is that since he started working in Oman, Liz has showered him with several stories related to that part of the world: "an article about Saddam Hussein, another about Arab belly dancers hiring bodyguards because they feared Islamic fundamentalists, news of Hafez al-Asad's illness".(Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.43). Thus, integration seeds started to sprout in

Nicholas; he began to think of his plane companions of whom Amira was the link. When he reaches Edgware Road where Amira lives, his eyes catch appearances of the Arab community there. He noticed that the word ‘halal’ appeared on all restaurants in reference to its frequenters, but, deeply in his mind, he was puzzled that Arabs use the word for meat and women; consequently, he concluded that he needed an in-depth knowledge of their language to be able to solve that enigma and communicate .

Nicholas also smelled an un-English food at the entrance of Amira’s block that determined the existence of a dominating community. That smell ‘transported him back to Oman with its private houses and permanently drawn curtains” (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.48). Out of his curiosity and desire to show integration with the Arabs, he asked Amira whether that smell was coriander or cumin; additionally, his puzzlement increased when Amira has shown him a type of women not compatible with the image in his mind

On a further level, Nicholas relationship with Lamis refers to the possibility of full integration as it crosses the borders of preservation. To Lamis, he was a source of consolation for her failed marriage as he made her remember that she was still a normal woman; with him, she was so fragile, weak, and submissive. This physical sort of integration completed the other dimensions for Nicholas, as he fathomed both the Arab culture and body at the same time:

When he entered her, she thanked God that she was normal.....She drew Nicholas to her spontaneously, she who’d always wondered what sex was. He was on top of her, his face just above hers, his hands out in front of him like the Sphinx , so as not to put his weight on her. His lips only left her mouth to move down to her breasts; he was looking so intently at her that she felt dizzy. (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.105)

Thus, Nicholas has not only been culturally, socially, economically integrated, but also physically. Lamis’s body, for him, was the foreign culture he is seeking to identify, and every time he meets

her, he looks for any untouched area of that body that might uncover any enigmatic enquiries inside him.

This part of his integration process has not been fully accomplished. A bit later, Nicholas has abruptly tended to let his imagination run away with him and to let suspicion harden into a grudge. The fact is that, he suffers from an English literalism and rationalism that blind him to Lamis's true feelings and make him too stilted to reach out to her. Nicholas has successfully controlled his connection with Lamis and decided to terminate it. Through a letter, he explained the wavering developments that marked their relationship and justified his intention to stop it:

I felt that our relationship was a burden to you and that I was putting pressure on you, to the extent that you felt you had to lie to me.....I didn't answer your messages because I was scared they were the result of other emotions masquerading as love: a sense of loss, the attachment to a habit, a feeling of waste, pride, not wanting to turn your back on a challenge, even mere curiosity.(Al-Shaykh, 2001, p.273)

Furthermore, Nicholas has openly expressed the consequences of contacting a foreign culture and put it in a theoretical framework that underlines a comparison between his status as a British citizen who is able to determine the situation of his country and the political situation of other countries. His integration could be leveled with Weinriech's 'enculturation' as he selected elements of both cultures to create the balance incurred in the integration process. He has been quite objective to diagnose the social and political standpoint of his culture in spite of his full integration with another. In short, he could positively reflect the notion of integration in the full sense of the concept keeping ties with both his culture and the other foreign one:

The more contact I have with other cultures, the more I find us naïve. We really don't understand the political situation in your country. And the more I travel, the more I discover ways in which we English are odd. In my childhood, I thought we were quite normal; yet now I

think of the English as being introverted, shy, clumsy. We lack self-assurance. We have so many taboos- over money, wealth, religion and especially sex.....That's quite a list. (Al-Shaykh, 2001,p.161)

## **Conclusion**

*Only in London* is a book that refers to the possibility of adaptation in a foreign society; its characters represented Berry's four acculturation strategies with various degrees of accomplishment. Their transitory movements were marked by geographical displacement which resulted in various cases of separation, incorporation and tentative adaptation. Each, inspired by the ethics of his original culture, attempted to achieve full adjustment to the new culture. Some of them like Lamis, Amira, and Nicholas could partially do part of the process of acculturation, while Samir could not and remained on the margin. The fact remains that, the significance of the title uncovers Alshaykh's pre-concept of the necessity of being away to acculturate her characters into a new culture; London has been the best arena for that purpose; she installed her four protagonists within the large demographic fabric of this multi-ethnic metropolis, but the pressure of the original culture continued in effect as no one of them could be fully acculturated. The experiences of the four characters differed in terms of the causes of transition being economic as in the cases of Amira, Samir and Nicholas, and social as in that of Lamis, but the fates of them are evaluated similarly in terms of the consequences expressed by Nicholas's father that there is always a willingness for dialogue, regardless religion or nationality

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