



# Exile and Self-Actualization in Pauline Kaldas's “He Had Dreamed of Returning” and “Airport”

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Received: 04-10-2016

Accepted: 10-12-2016

Advance Access Published: January 2017

Published: 01-03-2017

doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.2p.207

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.2p.207>

## Abstract

Against common pessimistic readings of exile in postcolonial fiction, this article employs the notion of “self-actualization” that argues for people’s desire to accomplish everything they are capable of and their need to realize their potential. Within a comparative context and using identity theory and diaspora studies, the article illustrates how self-actualization keeps the immigrants from experiencing exile in two Arab American short stories by Pauline Kaldas: “Airport” (2009a) and “He Had Dreamed of Returning” (2009b). This article shows how the main characters of “Airport” and “He Had Dreamed of Returning,” Samir and Hani respectively, fulfill the American Dream and how Hoda, Samir’s wife, pictures America as the place where she can realize her ambitions. However, Nancy, Hani’s wife, achieves her potential in Egypt rather than America, where she feels needed as a teacher. Thus, Samir and Hani do not get dislocated in America, and Nancy has a sense of belonging in Egypt. Hence, the article utilizes the American Dream and a reverse side of it, and it shows how Samir’s, Hani’s, and Nancy’s self-actualization is a counter to feelings of exile. In other words, the three characters do not experience loss of identity and displacement in the countries they emigrate to. Rather, they fulfill their dreams there and find/create new identities which have been suppressed in their hometowns, which enhances a view of identity as fluid rather than fixed. Briefly put, this article presents the self-actualization of immigrants in new locales as a counter to different levels of dislocation and exile.

**Keywords:** Pauline Kaldas, “He Had Dreamed of Returning,” “Airport,” Arab Americans, exile, self-actualization, identity, immigrant literature

## 1. Introduction: Arab Diaspora and Exile

Postcolonial Arabic literature (fiction and non-fiction) abounds with negative treatments of exile and the contingent trauma caused by this exile. And since this exile is often imposed, such treatments are legitimate and valid. The picture is still gloomy even when exile is not an obligation but a social, educational, or cultural necessity. Obviously, Edward Said holds such pessimistic views on exile, asserting in *Representations of the Intellectual* (1996) that the ability of the intellectual to “speak the truth to power” (p. XVI) is enhanced by the fact that the intellectual experiences exile. According to Said, exile is inevitable, and it is “ONE of the saddest fates” (p. 47). He points out:

The exile ... exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another. Being skilled at survival becomes the main imperative, with the danger of getting too comfortable and secure constituting a threat that is constantly to be guarded against. (p. 49)

In addition, western readers of Said’s memoir *Out of Place* (2000a) and his related essay “Reflections on Exile” (2000b) might be accustomed to a pessimistic version of the experience of exile. In the latter piece, for example, Said commences his argument with an assertion that “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (p. 173). Said stresses the inescapability of exile, contending that exile is never “a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you” (p. 184) and “never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure” (p. 186).

Moreover, readers of the postcolonial Arabic fiction of Kanafani are well aware of the bitterness of exile and the humiliation of banishment from Palestine. In his 1962 novella *Men in the Sun*, for example, three Palestinian refugees struggle in vain to achieve material comfort in Kuwait after having lost their land and die miserably in the process while trying to cross the Iraq-Kuwait border in the stifling heat inside a water tank. The driver of the lorry—astonished at their lack of resistance—disposes of their bodies and returns thinking: “Why didn’t you knock on the sides of the tank? Why

didn't you say anything? Why?" (1999, p. 74). As opposed to some positive forms of immigration and self-fulfillment, this kind of exilic dislocation is apparently destructive, sucking life will and resulting in death.

However, is there an alternative, maybe less hostile, conception of this experience of dispossession and dislocation? This article explores this option in the context of Arab American immigrant fiction by looking at two short stories by Pauline Kaldas who was born in Egypt and immigrated with her parents to the United States at the age of eight in 1969. Kaldas spent her childhood in the suburbs of Cairo. In America, she received her graduate and undergraduate education and majored in English and creative writing. She visited Egypt many times and had a chance to reestablish a connection with her roots. Such visits gave her the opportunity to re-connect with her family and re-familiarize herself with her culture. In the case of Kaldas, cultural diversity allowed for a period of intense artistic and personal growth. It is this positive and hopeful version of dislocation that we call "self-actualization" and that we project in this article as a counter to the negative experience of exile.

Critics like Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) define diaspora, which is derived from the Greek meaning "to disperse," as "the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions," asserting that "the practices of slavery and indenture ... resulted in world-wide colonial diasporas" (p. 61). Throughout history, many Arabs emigrated from their homelands to other countries willingly or as refugees, and the number of Arab immigrants increased dramatically over time, due to the political events that took place in the Arab world among many reasons. One of the countries Arabs often emigrate to is America. The Arab diaspora constitutes an integral part of the American society. Arabs from different countries and of different religious and political affiliations have emigrated to America, seeking a better life, and despite the differences among them, their culture and values have united them and made life away from their real home easier.

Abdelhady (2013) refers to three waves of Arab immigration to the United States. The first waves of Arab immigrants to the United States (1880-1918) were mainly Syrian-Lebanese Christians who were driven to emigrate due to sociopolitical and economic factors. These sojourners wanted to improve their economic conditions and then return home. They never felt that they belonged to the American society. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Syrian-Lebanese sought to be characterized as whites in order to be able to use the white only restrooms and restaurants, and after they were characterized as whites, they became legal citizens and more Americanized. World War I and the restrictive quotas to immigration limited the number of Arab immigrants to the United States. During the period between the two world wars, many Arabs returned to their homelands, and many others did not, seeking Americanization and attempting to prove themselves and to assimilate into the American society. By the end of World War II, Arab Americans almost lost their Arab identity. However, the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine in 1948 united many of them. Many Arabs including Palestinians emigrated to the United States at the time, and most of them were highly educated. The second waves of immigrants (1948-1965) were very interested in homeland politics, and they had some political and religious views that set them apart from other Americans.

Since the 1960s, a lot of Arabs could emigrate to America, due to the loosening of the immigration restrictions. They migrated because of the civil wars in Lebanon and Yemen and the Palestine-Israel, Iraq-Iran, and Iraq-Kuwait conflicts. Most of the third waves of immigrants (1965-2001) were also highly educated. After the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, the Arab community in America became visible. Arab immigrants expressed their attachment to their homelands after this war that united them. In Pauline Kaldas's "He Had Dreamed of Returning," Hani and his family emigrate from Egypt to America after the 1967 War, as many Egyptians and Arabs did, while Samir in Kaldas's "Airport" emigrates to America after he wins permanent residency in a green card lottery. Both pieces of immigrant literature interrogate notions of identity construction and self-actualization as a counter to dislocation and exile.

Since they set foot in America, Arab writers have proved brilliant and influential. Arab American writers have addressed issues like home, nostalgia, belonging, and identity, and they still investigate the ideas of multiculturalism, home, exile, racism, and stereotypes. Popp (2001) refers to Al-Rābitah al-Qalamīyah (the Pen League) that was founded in 1916 in New York to promote Arabic language and literature, and to promote a sense of identity among the Arab-Americans living in the United States. Among the members of the Pen League were Kahlil Gibran and Ameen Rihani. Majaj (2008) states that these authors produced the Mahjar school of Arab-American writing, and they were as the bridges between the West and the East, attempting to prove themselves worthy in America. Up until the 1960s, the Arab writers attempted to gain acceptance by the whites in America, by distancing themselves from the Arab culture, and by stressing their Christianity and assimilation into American culture. Thus, they tried to establish a new sense of identity for themselves, and a successful one in that.

The political events that happened during the period between the 1967 War to September 11, 2001 affected Arab American literature. The issues of home, belonging, and identity were highly addressed in Arab-American literary works at the time, and they are still addressed by the Arab American writers of the twenty-first century like Randa Jarrar, Diana Abu-Jaber, and Pauline Kaldas. Öztarhan (2015) states that Nidali in Randa Jarrar's novel *A Map of Home* (2008), who grew up in Kuwait and Egypt and emigrated to America after the Gulf war, finds her way home through a process consisting of three phases: "The first phase is the quest of home as a result of the uneasiness of non-belonging. The second one is the realization and the acceptance of her in betweenness, thus reconciliation with having no home. The third step brings out her celebration of non-belonging to any particular home" (p. 62). In addition, Aida in Randa Jarrar's "Lost in Freakin' Yonkers" is a young Muslim Arab American woman who challenges her family, breaks away from home, and refuses to abort her child and to conform to her religion and cultural values. Moreover, Yousef (2010) refers to two novels: Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (2000) and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003), stating that "both

novels try to build bridges of cultural understanding that would eventually lead to a harmonious coexistence and cultural integration,” and that the first novel “highlights the conflict and the clash of Western and Arab culture and the problems resulting from their encounter,” while the second one “underscores the inherent differences between ethnic communities and the ways to transcend them” (p. 229). However, Pauline Kaldas chose to ignore the problems immigrants may encounter in the countries they immigrate to, by presenting exile positively as a means of realizing dreams.

As previously mentioned, Kaldas was born in Egypt and immigrated to the United States when she was eight years old in 1969. Kaldas is a contemporary poet and a short story writer. She has published a collection of short stories entitled *The Time between Places: Stories That Weave In and Out of Egypt and America* in 2010. In this collection of stories, Kaldas investigates the lives of those Egyptians who desire to immigrate to America, seeking a better life. She also examines how some Egyptians in America long to return to their homeland. Along with Mattawa, she edited an anthology of Arab American fiction entitled *Dinarzad's Children* (2009) that includes thirty short stories investigating themes like immigration, cross-cultural encounters, relationships, home, and shaping identities. Among the short stories the anthology includes are Kaldas's “Airport” and “He Had Dreamed of Returning.” Samir, the protagonist of the first short story, encounters some difficulties when he arrives in America, but then he proves successful in his job and becomes satisfied with his life there. In the second story, Hani dreams of returning to Egypt at first, but he gets dislocated and alienated when he goes there, on the grounds that he is unable to fulfill his ambitions in Egypt, unlike his wife Nancy who quickly assimilates into the Egyptian community, for she feels needed there as a teacher. Hence, the article argues that Samir and Hani fulfill the American Dream, and it refers to a reverse side of the American Dream because of the fact that Nancy achieves her potential in the Arab world rather than America. In addition, the article shows how Samir's, Hani's, and Nancy's self-actualization is a counter to dislocation and exile because the fact that the three characters realize their ambitions in the countries they emigrate to keeps them from falling victim to dislocation and exile.

## 2. Discussion: Dislocation and Self-actualization

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) refer to a term used to describe displacement or the experience of dislocation and estrangement, namely “Heidegger's term *unheimlich* or *unheimlichkeit* – literally ‘unhousedness’ or ‘not-at-home-ness’ – which is also sometimes translated as ‘uncanny’ or ‘uncanniness’” (p. 65). In addition, they define dislocation as “a term for both the occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event,” and they refer to the things that result in dislocation like “transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location” (p. 65). Accordingly, they contend that “diasporic communities formed by forced or voluntary migration may all be affected by this process of dislocation” (p. 66).

Some Arabs immigrated to America voluntarily with the intention of improving their living and working conditions, while some immigrated unwillingly, due to wars and other reasons. These two cases are exemplified in the two short stories investigated in the present article. Samir in Kaldas's “Airport” immigrates to America after winning permanent residency in a green card lottery, whereas Hani and his family in Kaldas's “He Had Dreamed of Returning” emigrate after the 1967 Arab–Israeli War. Neither Samir nor Hani feels exiled or dislocated in America. Rather, they have room to prove themselves and develop their skills there. The three Arab characters Samir, Hoda, and Hani seem to feel out of place in Egypt, for they are well aware that Egypt is not the place in which they can develop their skills. Hence, Samir enters a green card lottery, Hoda agrees to get married to a man in America she does not know, and Hani returns to America to live there forever. However, Hani's American wife, Nancy, immigrates to Egypt with him and refuses to go back to America, for she does not seem to feel out of place in Egypt; on the contrary, Nancy finds herself there. In a sense, Nancy finds her identity in Egypt, not in her country, thus achieving a reverse side of the American dream and proving that identity is not necessarily place-bound.

The three Arab characters in the two stories, Hani, Samir, and Hoda, are arguably displaced in Egypt, experiencing an identity crisis there. Hall (1990) suggests that we “think ... of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (p. 222). He contends that identity is not stable, but rather dislocated, fragmented and decentered; the individual is no longer seen as an integrated or “unified subject” (1996, p. 596) in late modernity, as there are contradictory identities within the individual. He states that the “loss of a stable ‘sense of self’ is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject,” arguing that individuals are not only displaced from “their place in the social and cultural world” but also from themselves (p. 597). Hall makes reference to various concepts of identity, suggesting that identity is not coherent. He points out that the postmodern subject has no fixed or permanent identity, and that the identity of the sociological subject reflects “the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness that this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to ‘significant others,’ who mediated to the subject the values, meanings, and symbols - the culture - of the worlds he/she inhabited” (p. 597). Thus, identity is subject to change, due to the continuous interactions between the subject and society. The three characters do experience an identity crisis in one way or another and at a certain stage. In America, Hani longs to return to Egypt, yet after he returns to Egypt, he seems to feel de-centered and out of place there. Hani, Samir, and Hoda all believe that their dreams can never be realized in Egypt. In Egypt, their abilities are not highly regarded. They all have the feeling that they are de-centered and marginalized in their hometown, which explains why they experience displacement there.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) argue that place and displacement are very important in forming one's sense of identity. They state that the sense of place may be disrupted "by imposing a feeling of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies; by physically alienating large populations of colonized peoples through forced migration, slavery or indenture; by disturbing the representation of place in the colony by imposing the colonial language" (p. 161). However, it should be noted that the characters in both stories are neither displaced nor alienated. Rather, they form new identities in the places they immigrate to, where they can fulfill themselves and hence save themselves from displacement. The characters in both stories do not feel displaced although the language and way of life in their hometowns are radically different from the language and way of life in the countries they choose to settle in.

Some immigrants experience loss of identity and they get displaced in the countries they immigrate to, due to cultural incompatibility or other reasons. However, others find their identity after they immigrate. Consequently, identity can be acquired in a new location, for it is dynamic rather than essential. Hall (1990) links identity with diaspora, describing diaspora identities as aware of "a necessary heterogeneity and diversity" (p. 235). He also states that a diaspora identity "lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity." Diaspora identities are dynamic, "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (p. 235).

Bhabha (1994) refers to the notion of "liminal" space, arguing that the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (p. 4). Accordingly, liminality and hybridity "go hand in hand" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007, p. 118). The importance of the liminal lies in the fact that it describes the "'in-between' space in which cultural change may occur" (p. 117). As Bhabha (1994) points out, "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (p. 37). According to Bhabha, identity is forged in an ambivalent Third Space, and thus it is hybrid, for purity of cultures is not possible and "all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity" (p. 37). All in all, hybridity celebrates "cultural difference and fusion" (Marwan, 2008, p. 1) of distinct identities and celebrates cross-cultural contact which "involves movement of some sort" like "the movement of people through migration" (p. 5). Accordingly, identity is not fixed. Rather, it is dynamic, and forming an identity is an ongoing process. This explains why Hani and Samir manage to assimilate into the American community and Nancy into the Egyptian one, constructing new identities in the process.

In fact, the construction of identity has been argued by many critics and within postcolonial discourse contexts. Neimneh and Zyoud (2013) argue that constructionist views on identity deem it as "the site of negotiation, social interaction, and linguistic performance" (p. 57) changing over time and place. Identity theorists also distinguish between individual identity and group identity. The latter refers to a sense of belonging to a group of people or a community. This kind of belonging can weaken one's sense of individual identity. According to Cerulo (1997), attachment to this kind of group identification or "ethnic identity" "stems from a culturally based need for community-community lacking individual cost" (p. 389). Characters like Samir and Hani in Kaldas's fiction do not have the immediate support of an ethnic group in America. The same applies to Nancy in Egypt. Therefore, the experience of immigration and dislocation in itself necessitates self-reliance and allows for the emergence of an individual sense of identity necessary for self-fulfillment and success. Samir, Hani, and Nancy do not get dislocated in the countries they immigrate to because they can "actualize" their dreams there.

Actually, the term "self-actualization" emerged in scientific discourses before it got used in cultural/literary or psychological studies. It was first coined by the organismic theorist Goldstein in his book *The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man* (1939). According to Goldstein, self-actualization signifies "the tendency to actualize, as much as possible, [the organism's] individual capacities" (1995, p. 140). In addition, this term is developed by Maslow in "A Theory of Human Motivation" (1943) where he proposes the theory of "hierarchy of needs." The basic needs in Maslow's hierarchy include the psychological needs, the safety needs, the belongingness and love needs, the esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization. Maslow maintains that everyone has a desire for self-actualization or self-fulfillment, has a tendency "to become actualized in what he is potentially," and has "the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (1970, p. 46). In other words, people desire to accomplish everything they are capable of, and they need to realize their potential. Maslow also asserts that the form of the desire varies from person to person; some desire to be ideal mothers, where others desire to be good athletes, artists, inventors etc. In the literary texts we discuss, Nancy does not return to America with Hani, for she feels that she can fulfill her potential in Egypt, where she feels needed as a teacher. However, Hani and Samir show their potential as a precise accountant and as a repairman respectively in America, so they choose to live there. Rogers (1959) describes the individual that works continuously in order to become self-actualized as a "fully functioning person," believing that every "individual has an inherent tendency toward actualizing his organism," and that individuals become self-actualized and fully functioning if their "self-concept" is congruent with their "experience" (p. 234). In other words, one has to work so hard toward self-actualization; these three characters are arguably fully functioning as they willingly choose the environment in which they can develop their skills and abilities and hence fulfill themselves.

As previously mentioned, many Arabs left their homelands in the twentieth century unwillingly for political reasons. For example, after the 1967 War, a lot of Arabs emigrated to America due to the political events that took place at the

time. In Kaldas's "He Had Dreamed of Returning," Hani's brother and many young men have been called to military duty during Gamal Abd El-Nasser's reign. The short story makes reference to the Six-Day War that started on June 5, 1967. The Egyptians lost the Sinai as a consequence of the war. As a result, people lost their faith in Abd El-Nasser's regime. Hani's brother died in the war, so Hani's family goes to America.

In America, Hani feels attached to Egypt that he has left when he has been fifteen years old, and he dreams of returning to it to "find the place he had lost" (Kaldas, 2009b, p. 341). Hani returns to Egypt willingly with his wife Nancy, hoping that he will find an identity in Egypt. His cousin helps him find a job at an accounting firm, and his wife works as a teacher. In the airport, Hani chooses to enter with his Egyptian passport "to officially reclaim his identity" (p. 347). Hani starts to feel displaced the moment he arrives in Egypt. When the officer in the airport asks him why he has decided to come back and if Egypt is his country or America, Hani gets irritated, believing that the officer does not have the right to ask such questions. Hani feels dislocated in his hometown because dislocation, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) put it, is "a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location" (p. 65). Hani left for America when he was young, and he returned to Egypt after staying for twenty years in America. These twenty years are adequate to shape Hani's new identity and to make Egypt an unknown location for him.

In Egypt, Hani does not feel comfortable among his family because he does not know the people others talk about. In addition, Hani does not feel at ease with his coworkers because he realizes that he is the only one working, and yet his colleagues are socializing. Hani is once asked to work on a project, and he writes a report showing the mistakes the company has made. He is not rewarded for being precise. Rather, the boss tells him: "Egypt is not America. In your America, everything can be precise but here sometimes we need to help our customers" (Kaldas, 2009b, p. 352), and he gets Hani to sign. In addition, he tells Nancy that he cannot remember "how much is five times four" (p. 354). Hani starts to recall his life in America where "there was no family continuously evaluating his success or failure," and he also recalls "his simple accounting job that he had felt was tedious and found some comfort in the memory of clear columns where each number had its precise place" (pp. 354-355). Hani finally makes up his mind and tells Nancy that they should go back to America, where their life is better, and that this is not the life he has imagined. Nancy does not want to leave; she loves her friends, her job, and Hani's family. She wants to stay in Egypt, where she feels needed. Hani does not go back to the office, and he tells his family over the phone that he will travel. He does not want to meet them and answer their questions. In addition, Hani tells Nancy not to come to the airport. This makes the conflicting nature of identity and the politics of belonging the thematic crux of the story.

Hani, at first, has been so excited and enthusiastic about returning to Egypt. However, when he goes back and lives and works there, he starts to feel out of place or dislocated. Feeling out of place at his home makes him an exile there. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) define exile as the "separation and distancing from either a literal homeland or from a cultural and ethnic origin" (p. 85), and they maintain that the "conditions of localized alienation or exile could sometimes contribute to the generation of new social and cultural practices and the questioning of old traditions" (p. 87). In "Reflections on Exile," Said (2000b) states that "Exiles feel ... an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people" (p. 177). Although Hani loves Egypt and has dreamed of its winning the war and his returning to it, he cannot see it as the place in which he can excel, develop his skills, and belong. Rather, he realizes that he fits in with the Americans who value individualism, privacy, hard work, and precision. In America, he can do whatever he wants without being questioned, and he can do his job precisely without being blamed. That is why he decides to leave everything behind, not caring about anyone, even his wife who has a sense of belonging to Egypt. Both Hani and Nancy belong in the places where they can achieve something and feel satisfied with their jobs. The fact that Hani leaves his family, his job, his wife, and his homeland, preferring life in America, implies that Hani experiences dislocation in Egypt, not in America, where he can get a chance to apply himself to improving his skills at accounting, and where he is encouraged and rewarded for being hardworking and accurate rather than blamed. Hence, self-actualization acts as a counter to feelings of exile and dislocation, which explains why many intellectuals living in exile turn to writing.

Unlike Hani who gets married to an American woman, Samir asks his brother to find him a wife from Egypt. However, Samir does not want the woman to be a typical Egyptian woman, but rather an independent one like any average American woman, "not one who would lean on him, who would expect to be at home while he worked," but rather "someone who could stand in this world next to him, perhaps even lead him a little" (Kaldas, 2009a, 25). Samir insists that he wants an educated woman who is capable of speaking English and eager to work, though his brother tells him that such women are troublesome. This indicates that Samir gets critical of the Egyptian or Arab community, where women are expected to be submissive. Samir's brother manages to find him an independent lady, Hoda, who is not content with her life in Egypt.

Samir and Hoda are like many Arabs who would love to have a chance to pursue the American Dream. Samuel (2012) states that the term "American Dream" was coined by James Truslow Adams in 1931 in his book *The Epic of America*. Samuel points out that according to Adams, the American Dream is "a vision of a better, deeper, richer life for every individual, regardless of the position in society which he or she may occupy by the accident of birth," and it is a dream of having "a chance to rise in the economic scale" and "to develop our capacities to the full" (p. 13). The American Dream is an embodiment of equal opportunities and self-actualization. It stands for the wealth and success people can accomplish individually and through hard work, regardless of where they come from and regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or race. This ideal of upward social mobility embodied in the American dream allows some characters in Kaldas's fiction to achieve some distinction and self-satisfaction integral to their sense of self.

Samuel states that for newcomers to America, the American Dream is “a user-friendly vehicle of assimilation, allowing one to express one’s Americanness while still retaining one’s ethnic identity” (p. 197). The three Arab characters, Samir, Hani, and Hoda, pursue the American Dream, and Samir and Hani manage to fulfill their potential in America that provides equal opportunities for everyone. Nancy does not pursue the American Dream as the Arab characters. Rather, she pursues her dreams in Egypt. Nancy believes that Egypt, in which her abilities are fully appreciated, provides a better opportunity for her than America does.

Both Samir and Hoda firmly believe that America provides equal opportunities for everyone, unlike Egypt. Samir has studied agriculture in Egypt, and he is aware that if he stayed in Egypt, “he would end up another man with a college degree selling cigarettes in a kiosk” (Kaldas, 2009a, p. 21). Samir believes that there are more possibilities in America, and so do Hoda and her parents. Hoda agrees to get married to someone she does not know and she has never seen. Her parents convince her that America is more suitable for her because of her independent nature and because she loves studying. Hoda does not want to end up being a housewife doing the domestic chores. She is acutely conscious that if she stayed in Egypt, she would not get the job she dreams about, and she would have the same experience the other Egyptian women have, while in America there is a possibility “of having a real job, of doing research, of working with someone who would take her seriously, not turn everything back around to her femininity” (p. 25). Both Samir and Hoda are dislocated in Egypt, and they hold a belief that in America they will get a chance to prove themselves.

Samir manages to fulfill the American Dream though he encounters some problems when he arrives in America, for he has little money and education and has a problem communicating with others in English. At first, Samir works in a restaurant washing dishes. Samir has an instinct to fix things, and he once manages to fix the radio in the kitchen, where he works. The manager of the restaurant asks him to fix his stereo although he has doubts as to whether Samir will be able to fix the stereo, but when Samir fixes it, the manager thanks him. Samir gets “puzzled by how a boss could lower himself to thank an employee” (p. 24). The manager fully appreciates Sami’s abilities and sends him to the shop, where he has not been able to get his stereo fixed. Samir proves himself in the shop and gets hired.

Hani also finds his niche in America and realizes the American Dream. In America, Hani proves to be a hard-working student, so his teachers encourage him to go to college. At college, he recognizes “the way people created their identities and shaped themselves into who they wanted to become,” noticing that “his classmates built themselves out of thin air with nothing to attach them to their origins” (Kaldas, 2009b, p. 345), unlike people in Egypt whose ideas are grounded in the foundation of their family. Hani studies accounting, a major he loves, and he meets Nancy, an American lady, who is majoring in education, and to whom he gets married. He works for an accounting firm after he graduates. Hani takes his decisions by himself, shaping his identity as an American, and assimilating into the American society.

Abdelhady (2013) states that “assimilation refers to the ways members of an immigrant community became absorbed by the dominant society through various mechanisms such as language absorption, socioeconomic mobility, and intermarriage” (p. 18). She also states that while adapting to the new community, “migrants are expected to give up distinctive cultural and social attributes so as to become indistinguishable from members of the new society” (p. 18). Hani gets married to an American woman, and he is able to speak English as well as a native speaker. There are also no references to racism in the story. On the contrary, Hani’s teachers encourage him to go to college since he is a hardworking student, and he gets a good job. He is not discriminated against though he is an Arab because he manages to prove himself and fully assimilate into America, looking like an American, and speaking and thinking like any average American. However, Nancy assimilates into the Egyptian community and lives a reverse form of the American dream there; she establishes friendships with other teachers and learns how to cook Egyptian food and how to speak Arabic. Because they assimilate into the countries they immigrate to and realize their dreams there, Samir, Hani, and Nancy do not experience dislocation after immigration.

### 3. Conclusion: Countering Exile

In conclusion, many Arabs immigrated to America in the twentieth century, and they still immigrate for different reasons. The two relevant short stories investigated in this article include characters who emigrate from Egypt to America, but they turn immigration into a positive form of exile through the process of self-actualization. In Kaldas’s “He Had Dreamed of Returning,” Hani and his family emigrate to America after the 1967 War, and in “Airport,” Samir immigrates after winning permanent residency in America, hoping to improve his working and living conditions there. In these two short stories, Kaldas investigates themes that are commonly tackled by Arab American writers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries like home, exile, and identity. Kaldas’s fiction works at the intersection of two cultures, a Middle Eastern one and a Western one. In a sense, it sheds light on the richness and complexity of bicultural and even multicultural experience.

The article has employed the notion of self-actualization that argues for people’s desire to accomplish everything they are capable of. The article has illustrated how self-actualization keeps the immigrants from experiencing exile and dislocation in the two stories by Kaldas. In addition, it has shown how Samir and Hani fulfill the American Dream and how Hoda pictures America as the place where she can achieve her potential. However, Nancy realizes her ambitions in Egypt where she feels needed as a teacher. Hence, Samir and Hani do not get displaced in America, and Nancy does not experience exile in Egypt. In other word, acts of self-fulfillment negate the experience of exile, which counters the pessimistic readings of exile and subsequent trauma in typical readings of postcolonial literature.

Samir is fully aware that he cannot fulfill his hopes in Egypt. He encounters some problems as soon as he arrives in America because he has little money and little knowledge of the English language, and he asks his brother in Egypt to find him an independent Egyptian wife. However, it cannot be contended that Samir is dislocated in America. On the contrary, Samir finds his niche in America in that America gives him the chance to prove himself as a repairman. Moreover, Nancy does not feel displaced in Egypt, for she is content with her job, and she is on friendly terms with the people there. However, Hani gets dislocated and exiled in Egypt when he goes back because he cannot fulfill his ambitions in Egypt, and he does not feel at ease with his inquisitive family, his sloppy co-workers, and his manager who condemns precision. Thus, Hani returns to America alone even though he has always dreamed of returning to Egypt to recapture what he has lost when he has immigrated. Hani is very much like Samir in that he is given a chance to prove himself in America, where hard work, precision, and individualism are highly regarded. All in all, Samir and Hani do not feel dislocated in America because they are able to fulfill their dreams there. In addition, Nancy does not experience exile in Egypt, for she feels worthy and needed there. Samir, Hani, and Nancy do not suffer loss of identity in the countries they immigrate to. Rather, they find, or rather forge, their identities there. Consequently, self-actualization makes the three characters find a new identity that has been suppressed in their hometowns. And against the negative feelings of exile and the shortcomings of ignorance, multiculturalism emerges as an asset for those who can successfully negotiate different cultures and find a key to success.

The fiction of Kaldas seems to argue the case that our reactions to immigration and dislocation are bound by the circumstances we have and what we encounter in multicultural settings. The assimilation and self-actualization accomplished by characters in Kaldas's fiction indicate that immigrant writers can be more tolerant and more positive in their treatment of the theme of exile in particular and diaspora in general. Such a position is typically and understandably different from that of other writers writing within a postcolonial context and communicating an experience of exile directly related to the bitter loss of land and abhorred dispossession.

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