Of Homelands and Crossings: Middle-Eastern Diasporic Identities in Brazilian Contemporary Fiction[1]

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Abstract: There is a trend in contemporary Brazilian literature to illustrate in a novel way the transnational matrix of identity and belonging which characterizes Brazilian society, as it was formed in waves of free and forced migration and displacement. To address the struggles over identity formation in/as diaspora, this paper close reads three contemporary novels depicting characters from Middle Eastern diasporas and their actual or imagined returns to the ancestral homeland, namely *Dois irmãos* by Milton Hatoum, *Os Malaquias* by Andrea del Fuego, and *A chave de casa* by Tatiana Salem Levy. By addressing tensions, frictions, incompleteness, or even the impossibility of the travel "back home", these literary texts invite the reader to question the meaning of 'home' within the framework of migration history and to explore different forms of mobility which can be used in the (re)creation of signifying places.

Keywords: home, Middle Eastern diasporas, Brazilian literature, transnationalism, return

Contemporary patterns of migration and transnationalism pose challenging questions about our understanding of the notions of "home" and "abroad." People

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have been migrating since time immemorial, but the development of modern transportation and communication technologies has allowed for easier and intensified contact with families left behind, material culture from the place of origin, and places of emotional attachment. Studies on "diaspora consciousness," developed predominantly in the field of Cultural Studies (e.g., the seminal works of Paul Gilroy, Édouard Glissant, or Stuart Hall), engage with the notion of "multi-locality," as identified by Steven Vertovec in his review of transnationalism as a concept and a field of study. This "Caribbean paradigm" of theorizing diaspora and diaspora identity building invites us to view "the collective identity of homeland and nation [as] a vibrant and constantly changing set of cultural interactions that fundamentally questions the very ideas of 'home' and 'host'" (Cohen 127). However, the deconstruction of such binaries does not imply that there is no home, no space of belonging. As argued by Sara Ahmed, the "journey between homes provides the subject with the contours of a space of belonging, but a space which expresses the very logic of an interval, the passing through of the subject between apparently fixed moments of departure and arrival" (330).

Moreover, recent social science research has contributed to a better understanding of how the notion of "home" is negotiated precisely in the contemporary context of more efficient (and affordable) physical and virtual contacts with the homeland and of the flourishing market of "diaspora tourism." Interestingly, Huang, Hung, and Chen show in the case of the Chinese residing in North America that different migrant generations conceptualize their idea of "home" in different ways and bear different levels of attachment to their hometowns (mostly relevant for first generation) or to their home country (more important than hometowns for the second generation onward). However, not only does generation matter, but also the way that migrants try and recreate their dreams of home. Etemaddar, Duncan, and Tucker introduce the concept of "moments of home" to offer a more dynamic framework for discussing "numerous ways in which different forms of travel and mobility can allow diaspora people, families and communities to experience home in different ways and in different geographic locations" (516). Their research indicates that "homecoming" does not exclusively imply leisure tourism in the home country and/or visiting friends and relatives there, as it is considered in most tourism research, but also consists of (re)creating memories, tastes and experiences

through other forms of mobility—for example, trips within the country of residence, hosting friends and relatives, or visiting them in yet another country. This framework allows for a more dynamic and flexible conceptualization of the notions of "home."

Brazilian culture, woven through centuries of transatlantic waves of forced and voluntary migration, offers an inspiring foundation for exploring the concept of "moments of home" from a Cultural Studies perspective. The early European colonization with its drastic consequences for Indigenous populations; the transatlantic slave trade; and subsequent waves of labor migration in the 19th and early 20th centuries (with workers coming from all over the world, including Japan) all together created a stimulating yet challenging basis for the formation of the idea of nation and of national identity. On the other hand, diaspora communities needed to negotiate their sense of belonging to this multicultural nation and to their (imagined) homeland(s), as reflected in an inspired way in Brazilian contemporary literature. As argued by Cimara Valim de Melo, "the works produced since the late twentieth century in Brazil have in common, by and large, greater social referentiality and more straightforward concerns with transnational issues, broadening the concept of spatial imagination" (108).

The migration from the territories of the former Ottoman Empire has made a significant contribution to such a transnational remapping in Brazilian cultural production. References to the "Orient" can be found in literature, cinema, cuisine, architecture, Carnival performances, and soap operas. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam point out, there is a clear ambivalence between the well-established position of people of Middle Eastern descent in Brazilian society and the neo-Orientalist tendency of such representations (120). Importantly, Shohat and Stam highlight "the uneasy tenderness that the Moors and the Sephardi, as Janus-faced figures, have provoked in the Americas, in ways that disturb any facile dichotomy between East and West, and North and South" (156). In particular, prominent contemporary Brazilian writers "have done away with essential categories like "Orient" and "America" in order to renegotiate new notions of belonging" (Ferreira 292). Writers like Raduan Nassar in *Lavoura arcaica*, Milton Hatoum in *Relato de um certo Oriente*, and Miguel Salim in *Nur na escuridão* depict the life of families who are faced with the need to rethink their ties of belonging to both their new and ancestral homelands from generation to generation. The family as a symbol for nationhood or other form of collective

identities rooted in history is a recurring motif in literature since "it is a convenient device to represent the synchronic group of an 'imagined community' as well as the cross-generational succession that links public and private history" (Wegle 2).

Brazilian fiction depicting Middle Eastern diasporas situates the family as the central narrative axis to address the diverse frameworks of identity building. However, I argue in this essay that the process of renegotiation of diasporic identities becomes particularly thought-provoking in the motif of "return" to the "Oriental" homelands. The objective of this paper is thus to analyze the struggles over identity formation in/as diaspora within the framework of travel narratives in three contemporary novels: *Dois irmãos* by Milton Hatoum; *Os Malaquias* by Andrea del Fuego; and *A chave de casa* by Tatiana Salem Levy, addressing in particular tensions, frictions, incompleteness, or even the impossibility of traveling "back home."

Hatoum's *Dois irmãos* tells the story of a Brazilian family of Lebanese origin living in Manaus, capital of the Brazilian state of Amazonas. A violent and long-lasting conflict between twin brothers Omar and Yaqub disintegrates the family ties and forces them and other family members to confront themselves with such epistemological questions as "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong to?" The dysfunctional relation between the two brothers, between the mother Zana and their sons, and between Omar and the younger sister Rânia, who feels responsible for his well-being, form the core of the narrative and, to a great extent, define the psychological development of the characters. However, the conflict ranging within the family texture frequently stimulates emotional reactions, revealing several layers of the characters' cultural identity.

In fact, the usage of the Portuguese and Arabic languages in different scenes and contexts is one of most significant examples of the "liminality" of the diasporic life experience, which as Homi Bhabha argues "is no less a transitional phenomenon than a translational one" (321). The cultural difference, expressed through language, is precisely called upon in situations when the strained family ties need to be reinforced and when Arabic works as a bonding reference. There are no dialogues actually written in Arabic in the book, but the narrator (who is a son of a native servant and, presumably, of one of the twins) informs the reader about the instances of code switching, for example, when the father Halim greets Yaqub on his return from Lebanon, or when the mother Zana signs her name in

Arabic characters in a letter asking for her sons' reconciliation (Hatoum 14, 228). Arabic is then clearly a language of personal emotions and community belonging, while Portuguese is a language of communication, of establishing contacts and transmitting memories, as it can be seen on the occasion of Yaqub's return to Brazil. Since his command of Portuguese is clearly diminished after a stay of several years in Lebanon, his reunion with family members and friends is marked by silence: "Ele falava pouco, pronunciando monossílabos ou frases curtas; calava quando podia, e, às vezes, quando não devia. Zana logo percebeu. Via o filho sorrir, suspirar e evitar as palavras, como se um silêncio paralisante o envolvesse" (Hatoum 16).

Although the Arabic language and associated elements of material culture, such as cuisine or smoking narguile, seem to be crucial identity references both for the parents, born in Lebanon, and for the children, born in Brazil, there is a clear distinction between the emotional ties to this Middle Eastern homeland among the generations. For Zana and Halim, and especially for Zana's father Galib, Lebanon is a concrete reference in time and space, a point of origin in their personal histories. Zana frequently recalls her childhood memories about life in Biblos, bathing in the Mediterranean Sea, and her father's experiments with traditional food, an experience which he later used in his restaurant in Manaus. For Zana, a first-generation migrant, home is imagined, tasted, and experienced through the memories of her hometown, a tendency identified in the research by Huang, Hung, and Chen. It is through recurrent conversations with her husband that Zana recreates the "moments of home"—as theorized by Etemaddar, Duncan, and Tucker—symbolic, imaginary travels back to her infancy and the space of her origins:

> O pai a levava para banhar-se no Mediterrâneo, depois caminhavam juntos pelas aldeias, eles e um médico formado em Atenas, o único doutor de Biblos; visitavam amigos e conhecidos, cristãos intimidados e mesmo perseguidos pelos otomanos. Em cada casa visitada, o doutor atendia o enfermo e Galib preparava um prato de raro sabor. . . . Cozinhava com o que havia nas casas de pedra de Jabal al Qaraquif, Jabal Haous e Jabal Laqlouq, montanhas onde a neve brilhava sob a intensidade do azul. A beleza misteriosa, bíblica, dos cedros milenares nas

> ondulações brancas, às vezes douradas pelo sol invernal. (Hatoum 62–63)

However, despite these emotional ties to Biblos and a sense of cultural belonging, Lebanon becomes at a certain point a distant place for Zana and Halim, both in a purely geographical as well as in a more symbolic sense. While Galib decides to return to his homeland, dreaming about the Mediterranean, about the "país do mar e das montanhas," and dies there, Halim sees this transatlantic crossing as an ultimate separation, a definitive cutting of ties of belonging:

> "O oceano, a travessia. . . Como tudo era tão distante!", lamentou Halim. "Quando alguém morria no outro lado do mundo, era como se desaparecesse numa guerra, num naufrágio. Nossos olhos não contemplavam o morto, não havia nenhum ritual. Nada. Só um telegrama, uma carta. . .". (Hatoum 55, 57)

Interestingly, Halim's reflections on the importance of staying put in the place where one chooses to live may be influenced by his deep regret of having sent Yaqub to his family in Lebanon (Hatoum 56). In his mind, his father-in-law's one-way travel seems inseparable from his son's traumatic experience, and, as a consequence, Manaus becomes Halim's Oriental homeland, while the Lebanese village becomes a distant memory.

Zana's identity, though, is anchored on the two shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Lebanon is for her a place of happy childhood memories, while the harbor area of Manaus and, especially, the family's house are inhabited by ghosts and nightmares conjured in her mind by the feeling of abandonment caused by the disappearance of her son Omar and the death of Galib and, later on, that of Halim. However, both spaces, although separated by thousands of kilometers of bodies of water, are represented as constitutive parts of her identity. In fact, the distance between Biblos and Manaus's harbor area seems to be purely geographical, because at a symbolic level the two spaces of belonging are intertwined, especially when Zana strolls in her Manaus garden recalling Biblos:

> Zana teve de deixar tudo: o bairro portuário de Manaus, a rua em declive sombreada por mangueiras centenárias, o lugar que para ela era quase tão vital quanto a Biblos de sua infância: a pequena cidade no Líbano que ela recordava em voz alta, vageando pelos aposentos empoeirados até se perder no quintal, onde a copa da velha seringueira sombreava as palmeiras e o pomar cultivados por mais de meio século. (11)

This opening passage of the novel is interpreted by Ribeiro in terms of the spatial construction of the concept of difference, which is understood as the foundational matrix of Hatoum's narrative. Different instances of movement depicted in this scene (immigration, moving houses, walks in the garden) create a sense of "juxtaposition of Lebanon and the Amazon," and the reader "is confronted with the fact that it is not the first time she has to leave somewhere and that places and displacements are going to be a prominent theme in the novel" (Ribeiro 41–42).

However, this sense of belonging to two different physical and cultural spaces—highlighted throughout the novel by a juxtaposition of the Amazon and the Orient—does not seem to cause Zana any feeling of rootlessness. Her identity is located within the circle of her family relations and includes new references related to her life experience. For Yaqub, though, Lebanon is an unfamiliar and emotionally distant place which does not offer him any kind of "social and spiritual location" (Smith 59). As Anthony D. Smith argues in his essay "National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent," it is precisely in that location that "lies a sense of security, so indispensable to the much-desired individuality and uniqueness of persons and families alike; it is through such claims to uniqueness that dignity and power are conferred in society" (59).

The concept of "social and spiritual location" may be a useful tool to contribute to the discussion on Brazilian regionalist literature, which Hatoum reworks in his novels, according to Tânia Pellegrini. In her article on *Dois irmãos* and *Relato de um certo Oriente*, Pellegrini pinpoints the tension between the national and the foreign as the core of the regionalist literature of postcolonial Brazil:

> Juntamente com a urbana, a ficção regionalista representa, no processo de desenvolvimento da literatura brasileira, uma das

> faces da oposição entre o local e o universal, entre o particular e o geral ou ainda entre a periferia e o centro, que a alimentaram desde o nascimento. Essa terminologia, diversa para cada enfoque teórico, expressa, na verdade, uma mesma ideia: a dificuldade de explicitar a tensão que liga o nacional e o estrangeiro, componentes do cerne das culturas coloniais e que, com modificações mais ou menos importantes, no Brasil veio se mantendo até por volta dos anos 60. (125)

However, how to define the "national" and the "foreign" in the diasporic contexts as those depicted by Hatoum? Where is Zana's or Galib's home located? These binary terms are deconstructed in the in-between space of the diasporic experience. Instead of a clear-cut border between here and there, between homeland and abroad, those characters draw a map of multiple and overlapping "homes" which host both the Lebanese smells and flavours and the Brazilian (or Amazonian) landscapes. Nevertheless, those maps of relations need to be (re)negotiated by the second generation of immigrants in order to represent their experience of identity formation. This narrative constellation of identity anchoring is a challenge to the widespread, yet deadly, tendency to compartmentalize identity as identified by Amin Malouf.[2] In Hatoum's poetics of remapping of the Lebanese community in Manaus, "everyone's roots become routes" and "location and planetary framing are conjoined in new maps of unsuspected proximities," and those routes follow different trajectories within the community (Chambers 9).

In fact, Yaqub sees the voyage to his ancestors' land as an exile and keeps asking himself why it is he who has to leave and not his brother (Hatoum 20). His stay there is not a period of acquisition of new experiences and of personal development but, on the contrary, of forgetting and unlearning. Not only does he return to Brazil using a limited Portuguese vocabulary, but he also does not know the basic social norms of behavior anymore. This change, clearly visible on his

[2] As Maalouf argues: "For a long time I found this oft-repeated question ['what do you really feel, deep down inside?'] amusing, but it no longer makes me smile. It seems to reflect a view of humanity which, though it is widespread, is also in my opinion dangerous. It presupposes that 'deep down inside' everyone there is just one affiliation that really matters, a kind of 'fundamental truth' about each individual, an 'essence' determined once and for all at birth, never to change thereafter" (2).

arrival, is highlighted in the scene when Yaqub urinates against the wall of a bar in Cinelândia, in Rio de Janeiro, despite the laughter of passers-by and his father's embarrassment.

Yaqub's experience may be better understood in the context of the destructive impact of exile on one's identity. Édouard Glissant introduces a distinction between the concepts of exile and errantry precisely to pinpoint different effects of distancing from one's emotional homelands, saying, "Whereas exile may erode one's sense of identity, the thought of errantry—the thought of that which relates—usually reinforces this sense of identity. . . . while one can communicate through errantry's imaginary vision, the experiences of exiles are incommunicable" (20). Indeed, the stay of Yaqub in Lebanon is untold. When asked by his sister about his experience, he is very evasive, almost irritated, and reveals only that he was taking care of a flock of sheep (38). His attitude derives not only from the simple unwillingness to talk, but is a deliberate act of forgetting, as revealed in the dialogue with a neighbor who wants to know if Yaqub misses Lebanon. "Que Líbano?" asks Yaqub:

> "Não morei no Líbano, seu Talib". A voz começou mansa e monótona, mas prometia subir de tom. E subiu tanto que as palavras seguintes assustaram: "Me mandaram para uma aldeia no sul, e o tempo que passei lá, esqueci. É isso mesmo, já esqueci quase tudo: a aldeia, as pessoas, o nome da aldeia e o nome dos parentes. Só não esqueci a língua. . . ". (Hatoum 118–19)

Oblivion is an intrinsic element of the process of selection and organization of memories. As Benedict Anderson stresses, all "profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivion, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives" (204). However, in the case of Yaqub, the trauma caused by the forced separation from his family and the prolonged stay in a place which he did not really consider his own was too deep to allow for the creation of an alternative narrative of his exile. This rupture influenced not only his relation with the ancestral homeland, but also the way he looked at "his" Brazil:

> A dor dele parecia mais forte que a emoção do reencontro com o mundo da infância. . . . Eu via, em relances, o rosto sério de Yaqub, e imaginei o que teria lhe acontecido durante o tempo em que viveu numa aldeia no sul do Líbano. Talvez nada, talvez nenhuma torpeza ou agressão tivesse sido tão violenta quanto a brusca separação de Yaqub do seu mundo. (Hatoum 116)

While in *Dois irmãos* Yaqub's and Galib's journeys to Lebanon are the key elements to understand the dynamics of their family and the strategies of identity building the different generations adopt, in *Os Malaquias* it is the unfulfilled travels which are most meaningful. In Andrea del Fuego's family saga the reader gets to know the Levantine diaspora only through the adoptive family of Julia Malaquias, one of three siblings whose parents died by a lightning strike. However, Julia's life in the house of rich Leila is confined to the domestic, private realm. She never actually participates in the supposedly luxurious parties and dinners happening in the house but spends her time with two servants, Dolfina and Ludéria. Ludéria is characterized on her arrival to Leila's house as "uma cozinheira que sabia fazer banquetes árabes, bebidas dos sultões" (Fuego 42). As in *Dois irmãos*, cuisine is an important identity reference, which gains almost a status of a cultural fetish. However, this fetishization of cultural otherness, represented in both novels through traditional recipes and ingredients, is not an instance of the "exoticist spectacle" which Graham Huggan observes in different degrees "in the production, transmission and consumption of postcolonial literary/cultural texts" (20). Here, these Oriental references are called upon to showcase the never-ending play of difference in the characters' identity configurations. For Leila, hiring a cook who is able to prepare an "authentic" Arabic drink which would satisfy the taste of a sultan is like a proof that she did not lose her ties to the ancestral homeland. Here, the (re)creation of the idea of home is achieved by traveling from the original homeland to the migrants' new space of belonging, a direction often overlooked in migration and tourism studies as noted by Etemaddar, Duncan and Tucker.

Interestingly, it is not Leila's individual identity that is being negotiated in such a symbolic and material travel between the "moments of home," but rather her family's identity. As in *Dois irmãos*, it is the woman—or more precisely, the mother figure—who is represented as the central figure transiting between the

different spaces of belonging. Like Zana strolling through the Manaus gardens and picturing Biblos in her eyes, Leila's careful preparations reveal the tension between the two distinct, yet complementary notions of home as identified by Brah: home as a "mythic place of desire" to which there is no return and home as "the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells" (192). Positioning the female characters as the actors negotiating the family's idea of home, the two family sagas feed also into the academic debates on the urgency to reconceptualize the predominating patriarchal imaginary of the Brazilian family that dates back to the publication of *Casa grande e senzala* by Gilberto Freyre in 1933 (Samara 27).

The actual return journey 'home' is represented in *Os Malaquias* through the character of Dolfina, although the maid's destiny is rather mysterious. The narrator informs the reader that Leila sends the servant to "fazer companhia para a irmã de Leila em outro continente," but the old woman supposedly dies on board during the long journey (Fuego 42),. However, only at the end of the book, it is revealed that Dolfina is actually working as a servant on board a ship which circulates between the Brazilian interior and an unnamed port city. The ship, which Julia's siblings use to escape from their farm, flooded as a consequence of the construction of a dam, is presented in a way that highlights the golden tones of the prow and its overwhelming size. For Nico, it is a biblical ark offering a safe passage for his family: "O navio tem beirada de ouro, é maior do que essa cidade aí em baixo, é coisa de outro mundo, de regalar a cabeça de gente" (Fuego 240).

Dolfina, now "[u]ma senhora muito idosa [com] mãos fraquinhas, mas pulsos fortes," seems to be caught in an eternal travel (Fuego 264). Whatever her destiny is, whether she dies on board or continues working on the city-like ship, she never reaches the other shore. She is kept in the middle passage, as if symbolizing the experience of belonging to a liminal space and recalling us of Stuart Hall's definition of cultural identity:

> a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being." Far from being grounded in a mere "recovery" of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves

> within, the narratives of the past. (225)

Hall's "narratives of the past" within/into which diasporas map out their identities are also a structuring element of Tatiana Salem Levy's prize-winning debut *A chave de casa*. For the female protagonist, the journey to Turkey, the homeland of her Jewish ancestors, is a necessary catalyst to move forward both physically and psychologically. The novel opens with the young woman paralyzed and confined to her bedroom who then decides to narrate her own story and that of her family. The act of writing, of naming and narrating is presented as a parallel to taking the first steps, a rite of passage to "mudar a direção do barco" and to take control of her body and her life (Levy 12). The story that follows is built out of episodes taking place in different locations and at different points in time of the family's story: the grandfather's decision to move to Brazil in search of better life opportunities when unable to marry a woman he loved; the mother's imprisonment and torture during the dictatorship followed by her exile to Portugal, and her lost fight against cancer decades later; the protagonist's violent, abusive love relationship; and the subsequent travel to Turkey and then to Portugal (the latter being her birthplace) are all interwoven in meta-narrative reflections. As observed by Valim de Melo, the unstructured character of the novel allows for the text's opening: "A non-linear narration based on memory uncovers different exiles attempted by the narrator, whilst she engenders a narrative made of dialogic connections between characters, and provokes a tangle of voices in a 'becoming narrative' and a 'narrative of becoming'" (116).

The grandfather offers his immobilized granddaughter a key to his house in Smyrna, Turkey: "Tome, ele disse, essa é a chave da casa onde morei na Turquia" (Levy 14). The act of safekeeping the home key when departing in exile is, in fact, an old Jewish tradition, a material metonymy of the experience of travel and displacement (Maura 19). As observed by Sara Augusto, the key to a door that does not exist anymore is the symbol of the grandfather's history, which "representa uma impossibilidade de retorno físico às origens, um movimento muito particular onde se equacionam perdas e ganhos" (7). In fact, Raphael, a Turkish cousin whom the nameless protagonist finds in her quest (re)discovering ancestral origins, openly asks her why her grandfather did not come by himself to try and open the door (Levy 174). This unanswered question is printed on a separate page, constituting a two-verse chapter of this

multilayered narrative. This visual/editorial ceasure highlights the rhetoric character of this question; it is not simply unanswered, but unanswerable.

The material and symbolic meaning of the key as a metonymy of home can be better understood within the theoretical framework of fetishism that Thomas Blom Hansen develops in his analysis of strategies of creating and maintaining ties of belonging of South African Indians with the Indian subcontinent. The fetish is in this context a "lie that works," a mask embodying certain powers or ideals, even though those who believe in it are aware that "there is no clear identity between the mask and the ancestral power it is said to represent" (Hansen 112). The key in the novel is an object embodying the idea of homecoming, a promise of return despite the consciousness that there might be no door to insert the key in: "Uma chave desse tamanho não deve abrir porta nenhuma," the protagonist concludes upon closely examining the object (Levy 18). This tension between "desire" and "disavowal" is for Hansen precisely at the core of the diasporic experience of the (imagined) homeland (112). The granddaughter's nightmare in which she finds the house, but cannot find the right key as more and more keys appear in her handbag, highlights the tension between familiarity and othering in the experience of traveling to the ancestral homeland by second and third generation migrants. In the dream, the door opens and the woman is welcome by her family, all "com um certo ar familiar" and speaking Portuguese, as she notes with surprise (Levy 51–52). She is invited to sit by the table to taste local food. However, the scene alternates between moments of familiarity/recognition and estrangement and culminates with the protagonist's desperate attempt to escape from the house when noticing she is being observed by the relatives like "um animal exótico vindo da selva" (Levy 52). In this scene, estrangement is not a state, but precisely as Sara Ahmed theorizes, "a process of transition" inherent to the lived experience of migration, in which "the process of moving away involves a reliving of the home itself: the process of moving is a movement in the very way in which the migrant subject inhabits the space of home" (344).

This nightmare episode seems to function as an hyperbolic, oneiric prelude for the actual meeting with the lost relatives. When the protagonist finally reaches Smyrna and is invited for a family dinner, language becomes a challenge, as expected by the protagonist. In the dream, the relatives' proficiency in Portuguese is presented not simply as odd, but even uncanny and disturbing, as it

is decontextualized. During the visit, the elders seem to resent the protagonist for not being able to speak ladino, an important identity marker for the Sephardi Jews. Her instinctive, yet contained, reaction when her grandfather's cousin announces only ladino could be spoken by the table is to "sair correndo, gritar, em português, que não tinha nada para fazer lá" (Levy 165). However, some sense of familiarity and belonging is established through cuisine – by recognizing that the same dishes were prepared in her family home, and the protagonist finally makes the head of family smile. The recurring motifs of language and traditional food as ways of making you feel at home challenge the simple (and simplistic) binary of "home" and "away." Rather, in the transnational, diasporic context, there is a multiplicity of "homes" and each lived experience of being-at-home "involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other*" (Ahmed 341).

However, Smyrna is not the protagonist's final destiny in her travel to reconnect with her roots (or routes?), but rather a middle passage in between her visits to the touristic cities of Istanbul and Lisbon. The logistics of her travel is very revealing of the institutional "moorings" in place—to use the concept introduced by Hannam, Sheller, and Urry to describe the infrastructure as well as the institutional and legal frameworks that enable and/or constrain the potential of mobility (3). By arriving at the Istanbul airport, the protagonist is required to purchase a tourist visa, which triggers a stream of self-(re)identification, of self-positioning in relation to both the history of her family and to the current geopolitical context: "portugueses precisam de visto. Mas não sou portuguesa, sou brasileira. Não, não sou brasileira, sou turca" (Levy 41). The stamp in her passport becomes thus a signifier for the idea of citizenship that is non-representative, incongruent with the reality of the globalized movement of people. Nonetheless, this symbolic act of identifying someone in the binary logic as either national or alien defies the romanticized grand narrative of mobility, criticized especially in feminist studies on travel and mobility (Hannam et al. 211). "Definitivamente, não sou turca," the woman concludes (Levy 41).

The travel to Turkey becomes a healing journey for the protagonist, but it is not a return within a here vs. there dichotomy. Rather it becomes a new route in her trajectory, rooted in the past, yet open to the future. Visits to a local hammam and bazaar allow her to engage with her genealogy in a new spatio-temporality.

In this sense, the protagonist's home becomes both "a mythic place of desire" and "the lived experience of locality," in an eternal play of recognition and estrangement (Brah 192). At the bazaar, she buys a ring which she would like to give to her prospective, desired daughter just like she received herself a ring her mother had bought in Egypt three decades before. Such artifacts represent for the protagonist "segredos do passado," traces and ruins which lose their meaning if completely restored (Levy 122). The scene of the purchase of the ring seems to point out towards the role of narratives we build out of small traces of the past—like the ring or the key in the novel—to position ourselves within the diasporic thread of interwoven routes. In fact, the very narrative structure of *A chave de casa* is such a thread of alternative (hi)stories built around signifying objects, places and people.

Story lines weave the past, the present, and the future to try and sketch the contours of one's home, which is nonetheless not easy to grasp in an eternal play of recognition and difference. Genealogical, diasporic fiction of *Dois irmãos*, *Os Malaquias*, and *A chave de casa* opens up narrative routes across the waters of the Atlantic to offer inspired insights into such a dynamics of belonging and homecoming. Their characters' journeys "back"—or, I would rather argue "forth"—invite the readers to question not only the very meaning of home but also the grand narrative of mobility as a prerogative of the contemporary, globalized world. Rather, the narratives engage in various "moments of home," using the theoretical framework of Etemaddar, Duncan, and Tucker, showcasing the diversity of diasporic experience. While *Dois irmãos* and *A chave de casa* explore the way in which different migrant generations imagine and recreate their sense of belonging to a distant homeland, *Os Malaquias* reminds us of the important role that forms (and directions) of mobility other than visiting friends and family play in the building up of the interval space of a diasporic home. Whatever routes the characters in these novels might follow, it is their stories that bear witness to their varied experience of homecoming, even if unspoken. Thus, in the work of Milton Hatoum, Andrea del Fuego, and Tatiana Salem Levy, writing becomes a literary vehicle, another imaginative form of mobility that allows us to explore the entangled routes of diasporic identifications in the Global South.

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