Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

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LITERATURE IN SPITE OF ALL: ON MEMORY AND EXILE IN THE WORKS OF ANDRÉ ACIMAN

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ABSTRACT

The present research proposes a reading of the works of the Egyptian-born, America-based writer, André Aciman, through the lenses of nostalgia and memory theories applied in diasporic literature studies. In his novels, Aciman, who identifies himself as an Exile, is constantly writing about a past that is long gone but still directly affects the very notion of "self" of the author, as we read in his memoir *Out of Egypt*, or of his characters, as seen in his novels *Call Me by Your Name, Harvard Square, Enigma Variations,* and *Eight White Nights*. It is the main goal of this research to understand how Aciman's past as an exiled person influences his body of work and how the author proposes an individual-centered exile literature, rather than a general approach, by focusing on issues such as identity, memory, desire, and loss.

KEY WORDS: Nostalgia, Identity, Memory, Desire, Loss, André Aciman

RESUMO

Este trabalho propõe uma análise das obras do escritor egípcio, residente nos Estados Unidos, André Aciman, através das lentes das teorias sobre nostalgia e memória aplicadas aos estudos literários de diáspora. Em seus romances, Aciman, que se identifica como exilado, está constantemente escrevendo sobre um passado que há muito se foi, mas que ainda continua afetando a noção de "si" do próprio autor, como lemos em sua memória *Out Of Egypt*, ou de seus personagens como lemos nos romances *Me Chame Pelo Seu Nome*[1], *Harvard Square, Variações Enigma* e *Eight White Nights*. É, então, o principal objetivo dessa pesquisa entender como o exílio sofrido pelo autor influencia seus trabalhos e como ele propõe uma abordagem da literatura de exílio centrada no indivíduo e não em questões gerais, focando-se em questões como identidade, memória, desejo e perda.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Nostalgia, identidade, memória, desejo, perda, André Aciman

To my family and friends for their patience; thank you for your support along the way.

To Svetlana Boym for her writings on the beauty of getting off the main road in look for alternative paths. As she put it in her book *The Off-Modern*: "We have to chart a new road between unending development and nostalgia, find an alternative logic for the contradictions of contemporary culture."[2]

Finally, to André Aciman for the inspiration.

ACKOWLEDGMENTS

One of this thesis' main theoretical lines of thought is Boym's concept of diasporic intimacy in which the author claims that some of the most personal moments in an immigrant's narrative occur against a foreign background. In other words, intimacy does not require per se an inward movement. Here, I would like, then, to borrow this idea and use it to acknowledge some people whose support was crucial along the way. For as lonely as writing and researching might be, we are still social beings. Drawing on Lacan's view of language as a body, a small one; but a body, nevertheless; writing, then, becomes affected by the body of the author, the same way the author is affected by his or her surroundings. In this sense, we are constantly reading each other.

This study is, therefore, firstly dedicated to people that like the authors who appear in these pages, keep on writing, telling stories, and preserving memories despite the harsh conditions that a forced displacement inflicted on them. All this given, I also would like to thank:

My family again, for all the support during my master's research, all the love and encouragement was more than I could ever have asked for.

Julia, who unannounced entered my life and made me understand an Andrew Solomon quote I read many years ago: "I started this book to forgive my parents and ended it by becoming a parent. Understanding backward liberated me to live forward."[3]

The friends I made during my master's program: Talita – for helping me with my MLA revisions. Michelle – my companion in many academic discussions at Cabral's bar. Professor José de Paiva dos Santos whose classes introduced me to posthuman theory. João Patrick, for the friendship and for helping me with legal theory and any doubts concerning International Law and Refugee's rights.

Gabriel, Edson, Laura, lifelong friends.

Laura Severo, who four years ago was my student, became a good friend and now listens to me talking about André Aciman non-stop.

Finally, Professor Burns. For the patience and attention given to this research, and above all for teaching, as Viet Thanh Nguyen once said: "All wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory." To this, I would like to add something else that I learned from a novel called *A Wild Sheep Chase* by Haruki Murakami that goes like this: "Time really is one big continuous cloth, no? We habitually cut out pieces of time to fit us, so we tend to fool ourselves into thinking that time is our size, but it really goes on and on."

What it all boils down to? As Whitman beautifully wrote it: "I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me wherever I go, / I am fill'd with them, and I will fill them in return…"[4]

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"Once they had left their homeland, they remained homeless, once they had left their state, they became stateless; once they had been deprived of their human rights, they were rightless, the scum of the earth."

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

INTRODUCTION

"What is behind me still remains ahead of me. Can't a man rest?"[5]

"You Americans are so naïve. You think evil is going to
come into your houses wearing big black boots.
It doesn't come like that. Look at the language.
It begins at the language."[6]

A lot is associated with memory and its theories, whether it is from a psychological, neurological, or even philosophical perspective; however, throughout this entire thesis, two main questions will be constantly addressed: the first asks us to think if it is really possible to deal with trauma by remembering it, instead of just forgetting the cause of one's distress; the second will consider the representation of memory and forgetting in art, especially in literature; what is and what is not possible to be represented? As Squire claimed in his book *Memory and Brain* (1987), long-term memory is the one most affected by traumas. Since this kind of memory is responsible for filing indefinitely informative knowledge; forgetting a traumatic event is, then, linked to the suppression and inability, whether momentarily or indefinitely, caused by physical or psychological trauma, to retrieve the information. In a sense that data is not lost, but out of the person's reach.

Memory needs context and because of that, it is both personal and collective – notice how despite our remembrances being innately our own, during our lives our parents influence who we become and consequently these same memories. It is a self-reflective act by an individual within a specific social and historical moment, (Smith and Watson 2010), hence, the first question, about the possibility of dealing with trauma by remembering it, has a complex turn when we considered the context of the memory and not just the memory itself. As Rancière stated in his essay "Documentary Fiction: Chris Marker and the Fiction of Memory": "Memory must be created against the overabundance of information as well as

against its absence… much like that 'arrangement of incidents', that Aristotle talks about in the *Poetics* and that he calls *muthos*: not, as it were, a 'myth' that points us back to some sort of collective unconscious, but a fable or fiction" (Part IV). Memory needs to be evoked, and memory is validated because of that same context that influences, changes and edits it.

Fiction can act, therefore, as a historical document, for it has been produced by people in a specific context, to quote Rancière again, "memory is an orderly collection, a certain arrangement of signs, traces, and monuments. The Great Pyramid, the tomb par excellence, doesn't keep Cheop's memory. It is that memory" (Part IV). The representation becomes the memory; fiction and documentary are not opposites in this sense, like an (auto)biography or novels by the same author, the two complement each other. In other words, as Lowenthal (2016) via Wallace Stegner put it: "I remember what I have written not what happened" (196).

- **Dealing with trauma in literature**

In his work "A Unique Approach of Memory Narrative Therapy in Diasporic Contexts: An Analysis of the Bonesetter's Daughter and the Kitchen God's Wife by Amy Tan," Lotfi[7] (2014) writes about memory and the use of literature as a possibility for dealing with traumatic experiences; focusing his study on the diasporic subject. The author claims that memories, despite not being a faithful description of the events that happen to a subject, might be the pillar upon which one builds his or her narrative and therefore, his or her identity, for "the very act of remembering is already a process of narration and interpretation (Lotfi 2014; Smith and Watson 2013), in a way that "to know who we were" and interpret it, "confirm who we are" (Lowenthal 197). Since this process of fixation on the past, and, memories might be stronger in individuals that have suffered traumatic experiences, the individual has to create his or her own sense of self; here, understood as Baumeister (1999) defined: "the individual's beliefs about him or herself.": the haunting power of memories,

intensified in traumatic incidents, forces the individuals to create an eligible picture of the past; this would ensure a secure sense of self'(1912).

When confronting the correlation between memories and one's sense of *self*, hence, one's identity, one must face the fact that memories, although a tool through which one recollects the past to narrate it in the present time (Smith and Watson 2010), are an interpretation of those past events and not just a reproduction of them; therefore, they are deeply connected with an attempt by the individual to create a linear and logical narrative of his or her own life. This process is influenced by internal factors, as seen in Lotfi (2014): "… the mind, proficiently, distorts the past and the outcome is representation of erratic memory. Repudiating the legitimacy of the presented images of the past means the existence of fashioned memory (…) to fabricate a holistic picture" (1912). Or even external ones: "Production of different versions of memory narratives is a cultural process and it's governed by the cultural context of the individuals who express them" (1920).

Identity, complementarily, is also a hard concept to define. Who am I talking about when I answer the question who am I? Someone that I used to be or someone that I perceive myself as now, at the present time? How does memory affect identity and how are those concepts connected? Lotfi (2014), when talking about the migrant subject, states: "the formation of identity is closely linked to the autobiographical memory and grants a 'sense of personal continuity and consistency over historical time that forms the backgrounds for individual interaction with others'…" (1913). Not only is the identity connected to memory, but it is also a part of a process of differentiation[8]. So, "autobiographical acts involve narrators in 'identifying' themselves to the reader. That is, writers, make themselves known by acts of identification, and by implication, differentiation" (Smith and Watson 2010:38)

It is impossible, however, to read all memory and self/identity theories and how those concepts appear in the literary text for a single thesis, so in search of a narrower scope for

this particular research, this study will be focused on memory and identity of the diasporic subject, more precisely, how this subject reads nostalgically his or her past in hopes of finding a firmer ground in the present to deal with the question "who am I?". Even so, that is still a rather broad scope. In search of a better understanding of this phenomenon, this thesis will read the works of fiction and the memoir of the Egyptian-born, America based writer, essayist, and academic professor, André Aciman. A body of work centered on the author's own exile experience and memories and focused on remembrances and nostalgic reminiscences.

- **"Home is altogether elsewhere"[9]: reading André Aciman**

"I was born in Alexandria, Egypt. But I am not Egyptian. I was born into a Turkish family, but I am not Turkish. I was sent to British schools in Egypt, but I am not British" (Aciman 2012:185). That is how the author begins to define himself in the first paragraph of his essay entitled "Parallax"[10] – published as an afterword to his essay collection *Alibis: Essays on Elsewhere*. Aciman continues: "I am an unreal Jew, the way I am an imaginary European. An imaginary European many times over" (185). The author after having been forced to flee Egypt with his family like many Jewish people who lived in the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria; a multicultural place but doomed to be radically changed by a new political regime, tries to make sense of his own past and identity through literature, using his narratives, as Lotfi (2014) suggested, as a process of or attempt at healing. By always writing about people that, like him, are forced to leave a piece of themselves behind; this piece being family, country or a part of one's own identity.

Aciman writes about a displaced and fragmented subject that is simultaneously here and elsewhere, now and then; but never in the present, never as a whole. As the author writes, when talking about the German writer W.S.Sebald "[He] wrote about people whose lives are shattered and who are trapped in a state of numbness, stagnation, and stunned sterility. …

The past interferes and contaminates the present, while the present looks back and distorts the past" (190). This circumstance becomes clear in Aciman's novels, where he writes about the damaging experience of exile in distinctive ways, such as having the body of a lover as an exciting and welcoming new land of which one can have a taste but never become citizen, as seen in his acclaimed novel *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) or how loss is what unites the exile's narrative and is strong enough to overcome the differences between a Jewish Ivy League student and his new friend, an Arab immigrant taxi driver as narrated in *Harvard Square* (2013).

In *Call Me by Your Name*, a seventeen-year-old boy named Elio, living with his parents in a summer house in Italy, meets a Ph.D. student tutored by his father, Oliver, who has come to spend the summer with them as his father helps the guest with his dissertation. Both are in this utopian place, apart from the rest of society – throughout the whole novel, we only get glimpses of what happens outside the summer house, but never enough to change the focus of the narrative – which is Elio and Oliver's encounter. They meet each other. They talk about books, philosophy, about loneliness and desire to the point where they fall in love with each other. Elio and his family are "Jews with discretion" (19) as he describes them in the novel, because they live in a Christian majority region. On the other hand, Oliver, despite being away from home, does not share Elio's concerns about being a Jewish man in a place with almost no other Jewish people. They complete each other and that is what brings them together. "I liked how our minds seemed to travel in parallel, how we instantly inferred what words the other was toying with but at the last moment held back" (9). They see in each other a mirror of their detachment from the real world, getting to the point where they both call each other by their own names during sex:

> I had, as I'd never before in my life, the distinct feeling of arriving somewhere very dear, of wanting this forever, of being me, me, me, and no one else, just me, of finding

> in each shiver that ran down my arms something totally alien and yet by no means unfamiliar, as if all this had been part of me all of my life and I'd misplaced it and he had helped me to find it. The dream had been right – this was like coming home …which was when I must have begun using obscenities that he repeated after me, softly at first, till he said, 'Call me by your name and I'll call you by mine,' which I'd never done in my life before and which, as soon as I said my own name as though it were his, took me to a realm I never shared with anyone in my life before, or since. (133-34)

In *Eight White Nights* (2011), a man, the narrator, meets a woman named Clara at a Christmas party in Manhattan. After this first contact, they are immediately attracted to each other and spend the next seven days meeting and wandering through a snow-covered city. As they grow closer, they face their differences and the trajectories that have brought them to that place where they first met. *Eight White Nights* becomes a novel about trying to find space for the present in a past-obsessed life. Drawing on Boym's thoughts on nostalgia and longing, the search for a home that one has never had and never will is at the center of the nostalgic feeling. This search, however, prevents the subject from fully connecting with his or her surroundings, for even when one can trace back a point of origin or destination. Even when one can return to the desired place, one does not find what was missing because nostalgia is a yearning for a place in a specific time, not just a physical one (*The Future of Nostalgia* 2016). This search and frustration appear at the core of *Eight White Nights*. Perhaps, the most nostalgic novel from an author who identifies himself as a *nostographer* ("Alexandria: The Capital of Memory"). "(…)I sat alone thinking ahead of myself, hoping to trace the pattern my life might take, and never for a moment realizing that the questions I had asked of life then would come bobbling back to me years later in the same bottle, unanswered" (*Eight White Nights* 111).

In Aciman's *Harvard Square*, we follow the steps of two completely different men for a summer on an empty university city campus as they are brought closer and closer by one single event in both of their lives: the exile experience they have lived. One of them is a Jewish man, echoing Aciman's background, far from home, studying at Harvard, and even though living with all the privileges of being an Ivy League student, is a young émigré and is constantly reminded by his surroundings that he is not at home; the other man, is an Arab taxi driver from Algeria. The differences between those men could not get any bigger:

> (…) he was new to the States but managed to speak to almost everyone in Cambridge; I'd been a graduate student for four years at Harvard but went entire days that summer without a soul to turn to… He was absolute in all things, compromise was my name. (…) Neither of us had any money, but there were days when I was far, far poorer than he. For he there was no shame in poverty; he had come from it. For me shame had deeper pockets, deeper even than identity itself. (51)

The shared experience of feeling out of place is something so big in their lives that they overcome their differences and engage themselves in a friendship that will change them for good. Being an expatriate – no matter what the reasons that drove them to that situation, is the common experience that unites their narratives in a new, single one: a diasporic narrative. "In another country, another town, another time, I would never have turned to him, or he given me the time of the day…" (52). The exile experience is something that cuts so deep that it can overcome even religious differences: "He had little patience for Islam as I for Judaism" (58) or linguistic ones that act as a middle ground: "… and yet, what finally cemented our friendship from the very start was our love of France and of the French language, or better yet, of the idea of France … that dated back to our respective childhoods in Colonial North Africa" (56).

Finally, in *Enigma Variations* (2017), we read the story of Paolo / Paul's life[11] as he goes from lover to lover and from one place to another in search of somewhere or someone that he can truly belong to. Describing his first love, a cabinet-maker called Giovanni, Paolo says: "yet my life started here and stopped here one summer long ago, in this house, which no longer exists, in this decade, which slipped away so fast … you made me who I am today" (59). Years later, in America, after running into Chloe, a girl from his college years, Paul states: "You make me like who I am and what I want.' 'Haven't others?' 'Not like you'" (181). As the title suggests, *Enigma*'s main character is a variation of the same theme: a man's search for his own life, or his attempt to make sense out of it. The title of the novel is inspired by the work of composer Edward Elgar, originally called "Variations on an Original Theme", that comprises fourteen variations of an original theme, and the novel presents us with variations in the life of the same character and how he is constantly negotiating, through the places he lives and people he meets, who he is.

Thus, like the ancient Roman god Janus, who is portrayed as a two-headed man looking both forward and backward, the narrative of Aciman's novels is always stuck between what could have been and what is. It is a fiction built upon the paradox between the need to remember and the distress caused by these remembrances. "Today, the pain, the stoking, the thrill of someone new, the promise of so much bliss hovering a fingertip away, …, the desperate cunning I bring to everyone I want and crave to be wanted by, …all these started the summer Oliver came into our house."(*Call Me By Your Name* 10). So, the craving or need for something that is gone seems to be the foundation upon which his body of work is built. His characters are always looking at the past from a future point of view to better understand the present through contrast. "They [nostalgic feelings] are embossed on every song that was a hit that summer, in every novel I read during and after his stay, …, [in] smells and sounds I'd grown up with and known every year of my life"(*Call Me* 10).

In Aciman's novels, the paradise was found, but then, lost. However, it is only after loss and detachment that the idea of what was gone as a *paradise* is formed. In *Enigma Variations,* for example, we read about this nostalgic obsession with the past: "Her husband couldn't resist quoting Hartley: 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there'. Yes, the past is a foreign country. I say, but some of us are full-fledged citizens, others occasional tourists, and some floating itinerants" (193). This passage about the effects of the past seems to summarize well what the main concern of Aciman in his novels is: to rewrite the past, revisit it, in order to forget it or to deal with regret, as seen in his essay "A literary pilgrim progresses to the past*"*, "I write about exile, remembrance and the passage of time. I write -- so it would seem -- to recapture, to preserve and return to the past, though I might just as easily be writing to forget and put that past behind me" (87). However, if the past is a foreign country, regret is always its capital, and a past-centered life may lead to a regret-centered one, as we read in another passage from *Enigma Variations:*

> (…) regret is how we hope to back into our real lives once we find the will, the blind drive and courage, to trade in the life we're given for the life that bears our name and ours only. Regret is how we look forward to things we've long lost yet never really had. Regret is hope without conviction. (199)

Aciman and his family were forced to leave Alexandria, when he was still a teenage boy, as the Egyptian government used the Sinai Campaign and the dispute over the Suez Canal[12] to seize the properties and expel from Egypt thousands of Jewish families. On this moment of Jewish history, Aciman writes in "Alexandria: The Capital of Memory", "anti-Semitism rose sharply in Egypt (…) British and French residents of Alexandria were summarily expelled (…) as were many Jews" (6). In his memoir *Out Of Egypt,* the author describes how the Egyptian government harassed his family, "At midnight our anonymous caller asked us whether we had been to the theater" (299). "Then without a warning, Aunt Flora, too,

received a phone call. In her case, the voice informed her that she had two weeks to leave Egypt" (301). This topic will be fully addressed in chapter one of this thesis, titled "Impossible Homecoming". However, it is important to highlight how crucial for Aciman's works the concept of exile is:

> I begin my inward journey by writing about place. Some do so by writing about love, war, suffering, cruelty, power, God, or country. I write about place, or the memory of place. I write about a city called Alexandria, which I'm supposed to have loved, and about other cities that remind me of a vanished world to which I allegedly wish to return. ("A Literary Pilgrim Progresses to the Past" 87-88)

When talking about memory and diasporic narratives, Ahmed claims in her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* that "the stories of dislocation help to relocate, they give a shape, a contour, a skin to the past itself" (91). It is only by remembering the home that was lost that the immigrant can really define his or her relationship with the present one: "The question then of being-at-home or leaving home is always a question of memory, of the discontinuity between past and present."(91) Then, the dislocation of the narrative from the present to a past point of view helps the narrator to consolidate and better understand the traumatic experience linked to a forced departure from one's homeland.

Aciman acknowledges that even though he is writing in one way or another about his missing homeland and the fractures left in his identity by his forced departure from Egypt, he is writing about something that is long gone. In "Alexandria: The Capital of Memory*"*, the author claims that "all of it followed by predictable letdowns; the streets are always narrower than before, buildings grown smaller with time (…) there are no Europeans left, and the Jews are all gone – Alexandria is Egyptian now"(3). Thus, this contrast between past and present comes together with the contrast between memory and how the biographical events might have happened. Yet, how these elements appear within his novels and how they deal with the

concept of *exile*, since the word once possessed a religious significance in the religious texts about the Jewish dispersion (Braziel; Mannur 2005), is now a much broader concept that covers every contemporary populational dislocation and its motives and consequences, not only for the economy of the countries who receive exiles but also for the notion of identity and culture in a world more and more interconnected and globalized, and will be one of the foci of this thesis.

Thus, Aciman seems to be focused on writing his books, his works of fiction especially, not only about the past but describing the past itself as a place that we have visited before, even though we cannot forget it or revisit it. That longing to recapture a moment that is long gone is what drives his characters. They cannot escape from it. It is no coincidence that these themes have found a place in the works of fiction of a writer who is known for his obsession with the feeling of nostalgia. Aciman's novels are always dealing with the past. Everything in his pages may be already gone but how those events helped to give form to his characters or the author himself, as we see in his memories and essays, cannot be disregarded and have a crucial place in his body of work. It is as if the author was narrating a counter-memory (Foucault 2012; Tachibana, 1998; Bamberg, 2004; Lentin,2001), putting the one who remembers at the center of the narrative in the hopes of understanding his own life as a man who lived an exile experience.

As Edward Said pointed out in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2000), displacement is always a traumatic experience that leaves a deep mark on the notion of self: "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" (137). One lives in one place and belongs to another. One misses something, not only material but a part of one's own identity. Aciman, like a historian, connects the dots of a dislocated person's narrative in his novels, and tries to unite documents and texts in a single and

coherent narrative through these different perceptions of exile, home and nostalgia, which are the main lenses through which his texts explore the past of the author himself and his characters.

For this study,[13] it was decided that Aciman's body of work will be read as a whole, and therefore, his four novels will be used equally as examples in an attempt to formulate a reading of the author's body of work to better understand how he reimagines and uses his own background as an exile throughout his novels. Consequently, it offers a different perspective for exile literature studies: one that is centered on the individual and his or her own reading of the past, rather than writing about exile and emigration at a macro level.

Like film editing, the author superimposes images of past and present on each other in his novels, so that there is always a double layer in his narratives: his characters' present and their memories. Both events are happening without any proper separation. Past and present appear intertwined, and by adding one to the other, he creates his stories. It becomes important for this research, therefore, to highlight that while conceptualizing nostalgia: Boym (*The Future Of Nostalgia* 2016) via Stewart points out that nostalgia "is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetitions and denies the repetition's capacity to define identity" ("Introduction: Taboo on Nostalgia?"). The narrators of the chosen novels try, by retelling and reliving past moments, to better understand them, but because of what those memories represent is forever lost, they are always stuck with some adaptation or shadow version of the same moment. "Perhaps all I wanted was to sit and think (…) to long for her, the way we long for someone we know we don't stand a chance of meeting again, or of meeting on the exact same terms, but are all the same determined to long for", writes Aciman in *Eight White Nights*, "because longing makes us who we are, makes us better than who we are, because longing fills the heart" (89-90).

As Susan Stewart argued in her essay on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, present in her collection of essay called *The Open Studio: Essays on Art and Aesthetics* (2005), "Near the close of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid wrote, 'Time itself flows on with constant motion, just like a river, for no more than a river can the fleeting hour standstill. As wave is driven on by a wave, and, itself pursued, pursues the one before, so the moments of time at once flee and follow, are ever new' (77). This study aims to better understand Aciman as an exile writer and his memory-centered narratives that echo what Stewart pointed out on Ovid in her essay, when she argues that "Rivers appear and disappear, marshes become deserts and deserts marshes, seashells lie far from the ocean, volcanoes become extinct, bees are born in the rotting carcasses of bulls … within the silence of the tomb, ... Ovid realizes that his own account is taking place in time".

All this given, the first chapter deals with Aciman's essays and memoir to better understand the effects of his own experience as an exile upon his body of work. To support this chapter the works on exile and diaspora of Ahmed (2000), Brah (1996), Lotfi (2014) and Said (2000) are used as theoretical support. In this chapter, not only the author's personal experience but also the contemporary refugee crises, here, focusing in the United States of America, where Aciman lives now, will be addressed.

The second chapter will deal with the acts of remembering and forgetting. Why someone who dealt with exile puts the memory of his or her trauma on paper and how those memories are evoked will be addressed. The writings on ruinophilia and nostalgia of Boym (2016, 2017), and on memory by Hustvedt (2012, 2017) and Nguyen (2017, 2018, 2019) will be used as support material.

Finally, the third chapter is centered on two key ideas for non-returning narratives: the shadow-self of the displaced person and the intermediate space where his or her interactions with his or her new surrounding take place. For this chapter, the works on the psychology

behind the process of development of the self and its relation to the others by Lacan (1977), Winnicott (1957, 1971) and Hustvedt (2017) will be read alongside Aciman's novels and other complementary literary examples. Anzaldua's borderlands/*frontera* theory (1987), as well as Brah's diasporic spaces theory (1996), will be used as well.

CHAPTER ONE

IMPOSSIBLE HOMECOMING

"The dream had been right – this was like coming home…"[14]

"Neither of us belonged, but he was still the nomad, I had a ground to stand on."[15]

"I wanted to feel sorry for myself…for always wanting…and never knowing what to do or where to go beyond wanting."[16]

"I've come back for him…Not for our house or the island."[17]

Mohamed Hafezi argued that home is such a broad concept because different reasons led people to migrate[18] ("Imaginary Homeland and Constitution of a Collective Identity" 389). Their narratives become, then, deeply connected to factors such as "a healing remedy" (Lotfi 1912), and the transmission of a national or collective identity (Lotfi 1913). They are also linked to the thought of an original place and an eventual safe destination, in a sense that such narratives of non-returning are mostly about a home left behind or the subject's interactions with his/her new surroundings.

Drawing, then, on Said's thoughts on exile being a "condition of terminal loss," (*Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* 173), due to the fact that its damages on someone's sense of self leave unhealable scars and trauma, one faces a paradox to address the exile's representation in art: is there a way to represent it without dignifying it with a grand heroic narrative? Said also asks us to consider that despite the presence of displacement and forced immigration throughout humanity's history, exile narratives found a fertile soil in which to bloom in the 20th century – and 21st by extent – because of the current scale in which the problem is happening around the globe. "Modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rules" (174), made the last century, the age of mass immigration and displacement. Still on this matter, Boym (2016) posits another problem regarding such representation: since nostalgia is a longing for a home that never existed, an imagined one ("Introduction: Taboo on Nostalgia?"), an uncritical nostalgic rhetoric can be

used to justify nationalist and xenophobic acts by a government; since “the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel's dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other (Said 2000:176).

With all this given, it becomes clearer how memory and social context depend on and act upon each other at the same time. Here, I aim to begin my analysis of André Aciman’s novels, by first, taking a profound look on the historical-social context in which the author – who lives and writes in the United States – is inscribed. In a second moment, from the current American immigration crisis, this chapter will go all the way to the biblical Jewish diaspora, to give a context about how his life as an Exile from the Egyptian Jewish diaspora affects and appears throughout his novels and autobiography.

According to the Migration Policy Institute[19], MPI, in 2017 the number of people born outside the United States living in the country corresponded to 13% of the US total population, or a little bit more than 43 million people, who are living in the USA, whether naturalized, legal permanent resident or as an unauthorized immigrant. They come from different backgrounds and migrated for several reasons among which are violence, war, economic crisis, and others. According to this same census when divided by race 97.5% of them declare themselves to be from a single race separated between the following groups: 45.5% white, 9.3% black, 0.4 American Indian or Alaska Native, 27.1% Asian, 0.3% Hawaiian Native and other Pacific Islander[20], 15.2% other races and 2.2% declared themselves to be biracial or belonging to more than two ethnic groups; still race-wise, 44.3% from those numbers are from people coming from a Latino origin.[21]

These numbers get even more complex when it is taken under consideration that they represent only people who are currently living in the United States, having been granted the right to stay or not. However, they do not include refugees or asylum seekers, a group that seems to be more controversial and demanding to the public eye and tends to be perceived

nowadays as the embodiment of the displacement experience (Nguyen 8)[22]. In a recent poll[23] made by the PEW Research Center, when asked if the US should accept refugees into the country, 56% thought in 2017 that the country had that kind of responsibility but in 2018 the number dropped to 51%. Furthermore, when the same numbers are read through a partisan lens, only 26% of Republicans or Republican leaning independents believed that the United States has such a responsibility, against 74% of Democrats or Democrat leaning independents. Another meaningful data still from the same poll shows that since 1980, the year when the current American refugee program was created by the Congress, 2018 was the year with the smallest number of refugees receiving any asylum on American soil. These shrinking numbers, predictably, go along with the three years of Donald J. Trump presidency, especially since 2017, when tougher measures against immigration were taken by his administration.

It is relevant to clarify that in order to be accepted in the United States of America under the status of refugee or asylum seeker, a person must comply with two criteria determined by international and federal law: the person seeking refuge must be able to prove to be under persecution in his/her country of origin and that this persecution due to grounds of religion, race, nationality political opinion or for being part of a specific persecuted social group[24]. On a global scale, the problem is even greater, as seen in the data published by the United Nations Refugee Agency: more than 70 million people were displaced by 2018 and that number suffered an increase when compared with 2017's numbers by 3 million of people. The same agency estimates that 1 in every 108 people are currently for some reason displaced[25].

Francesca Ferrando, philosopher of the posthuman theory, and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the NYU- Liberal Studies, when writing about the importance of criticizing what we call "man" when talking about the Enlightenment ideal of all men being created equal and therefore deserving of being treated as such by the state and the law itself,

stated that: “human is a human concept, based on humanistic and anthropocentric premises. It is a deconstruction of humanism”[26]as the philosopher Rosi Braidotti clarified in her book *The Posthuman* that: “the dialectics of otherness is the inner engine of humanist Man’s power, who assigns difference on a hierarchical scale as a tool of governance” (68). Following this line of thought, the author points out that this process of attributing different weights and importance to different types of being and therefore their lives is “inherently anthropocentric, gendered and racialized in that it upholds aesthetic and moral ideals based on white, masculine, heterosexual, European civilization” (68).

Language becomes, then, not only “primarily a means of communication” (Chambers 1994) but also a battlefield for the right to exist and be granted the same treatment as his or her fellow human beings, for language as Iain Chambers wrote on his book *Migrancy, Culture and Identity,* is where “there’s also a sense of belonging” (24). The UN Refugee Center[27] defines a refugee as not only someone that was forced to flee his or her birth country but also is unlikely to ever come back to his or her original place. Their displacement is almost always permanent, and their homecoming is out of question (Said 2000). Consequently, people that were exiled experienced not only a detachment from the place where they come from but also from their current surroundings and feel always out of place (Said 2000).

Although the current Administration[28] has impacted severely the American immigration policies, America had had several important moments in its history throughout the last century when its citizens and Government were not welcoming towards immigrants, especially refugees. As seen in a research published in Fact Tank[29] back in 2015, also conducted by Pew Research Org, for example, in 1958 when responding to the question “would you approve or disapprove of a plan to permit 65,000 refugees who escape the Communist regime in Hungary to come to the US?” 55% would disapprove and 13% did not know how to answer the question or did not have an opinion on that matter. The same

negative views appeared on polls about Indochinese refugees back in 1979, when 62% were against their immigration to the US and in 1980 about Cuban refugees with the numbers getting up to 71% against.

To sum up, this anti-immigration sentiment has its roots deep in America's history[30], with one of its peak moments back in the 19th Century with the Chinese Exclusion Act, which after being approved on May 6, 1882, became the first significant piece of legislation restricting immigration in the United States of America and also the first time that the government targeted a specific ethnic group. According to the public initiative Our Document, the act provided "an absolute 10-year moratorium on Chinese labor immigration"[31]. On the American national Archives website, it is possible to look at all the cases linked to the Chinese ban, and for example, when looking for cases filed by the New York District Office specifically, between 1898 and 1943, more than 18,000 cases can be found.

1.1- Go forth as God commanded: The case of the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt

In Genesis 12:1, we read "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get Thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from your father's house unto a land that I will shew thee…"[32] It is extremely important to highlight how Jewish history,[33] even in its sacred religious texts, is linked to the act of leaving one's birthplace in search of a safer, better place. Could Abram be read as a metaphor and could this first displacement movement help us to better understand Jewish diaspora history?

On the Hebrew tradition, God's speech "Get thee out…" is read לְךָ-לְךָ (read as leḵ-ləḵā) and can be literally translated into "Go for yourself!" Abram must leave his father's home in order to fulfill his own destiny as we read in Genesis 12:2 "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:"[34] However, while becoming an immigrant by God's command – it is symbolic that this first departure, as it happens in any modern displacement narrative, Abram was forced to leave, for

he was commanded- so, Abram exposed himself to different cultures, worships and traditions that would clash with his faith, and values. Again, a strong metaphor for immigration narratives.

Abram's name also gives more clues on the importance of this character in Jewish culture and the diasporic studies for its origins come from the Hebew אַבְרָם, read as AY-brəm, meaning high father, and was later changed by the Lord[35] into Abraham from the Hebrew אַבְרָהָם, read as AY-brə-ham, after having his previous name Abram contracted with the word הָמוֹן, or hamon, word that means "many or multitude". Abram leaves his father's house and becomes Abraham, the father of many, or even Abraham, The Hebrew. The religious character is first called Hebrew (עִבְרִי) in Genesis 14:13[36] adding to his name the idea of "the one from beyond", or "the one who has crossed over."

The idea of crossing over, here, is as important, because of the figure who bears it as one of his names, to Jewish diaspora studies, one of the lines of research to which this thesis is linked. Professor Moshe Kaveh, president of Bar-Ilan University, Faculty of Jewish Studies, claims that Abraham did not just cross literally from Ur Kashim to a different place, but also from monotheist thought to a new and different world that worshipped many gods. Thus, he would have not only crossed from one land to another, but from one culture to another as well. Professor Kaveh goes even further in his essay "Lekh-Lekha, 'Go forth from your land": An Educational Message for All Jews and for All Time," stating that Abraham's narrative could be read as a text about assimilation, for during the act of migrating, one does not leave one's culture, language and memory behind, as suggested by Smith and Watson in their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, memory, subjectivity are deeply connected to the materiality of the body (49).

Eventually, the memory and tradition embodied in the immigrant's body may clash with his or her new surroundings and this interaction is never easy, as "this presence [the

immigrant] disturbs the previous order" (Chambers 23). The author continues by saying that "language", for example, "is appropriated, taken apart and then put back with a new inflection.", or to sum up "the general mode for the post-colonial is citation, re-inscription, re-routing the historical" (23). For, as Sara Ahmed suggested in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004): "After all, life experience involves multiple collisions with objects and others. It is through such collisions that I form a sense of myself as (more or less) apart from others, as well as a sense of the surfaces of my body" (26). Not only that, Ahmed also claim that "such a sense of apartness may be crucial for bodily survival (for those who lack the ability to feel pain-like sensations, the world is very dangerous), though it may be felt differently by different bodies"(26).

1.2- On the Egyptian Jewry under the Nasser Regime

There have always been Jews in Egypt; the first Jewish settlements date back from the times of the Babylonian exile,[37] and by the eve of the Egypt-Israel War, it reached an estimated number of 80,000 people, distributed mostly in Cairo and Alexandria in a heterogeneous community, as seen in:

> Indigenous Arabic-speaking Rabbanites and the religiously and culturally distinct Karaites (those who reject the validity of the Talmud as a source of Jewish law) formed the core of the community. Many date the establishment of the Sephardic community to the arrival of Maimonides, an extremely influential Spanish Sephardic philosopher and Torah scholar in 1165, and a new influx began after their expulsion from Spain. Ashkenazi Jews did not arrive until the intensification of anti-Semitic persecution in Europe in the 19th century.[38] ("Judaism in Egypt")

On February 28, 1922, Egypt declared, unilaterally, its independence from Britain, establishing itself as The Kingdom Of Egypt; this revolution and political turmoil led to a series of changes in Egyptian laws, most of them being focused on the definition of Egyptian

citizenship, and who had the right to claim it. Also, there was a strong political movement to make the country a Muslim nation. By then, the first major anti-Semitic protests took place inside Egyptian universities as a response to the Palestinian struggle; these tensions escalated to the maximum with the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and the creation of Israel.

The Egyptian Government declared Martial Law and started arresting Egyptians from a different religious background and others who may oppose the new regime. Around 1,300 people (Laskier 584) were taken by the authorities in a single night, among whom, Jews, Communists and Europeans, or even Muslims who manifested disagreement with the government. All this led to the N26 Proclamation, of May 30, 1948, that allowed the sequestration of properties belonging to any person that may be considered dangerous or a threat to the security of the State.

Between the imposition of a Martial Law and the Proclamation N26 in 1948 up to early 1950, the sequestration of properties and assault on basic individual rights lasted for almost two years; over 20,000 Jewish had been deported by then. Things, however, did not look like they were getting any brighter for the Egyptian Jewish community, for after the country has been swept by violence and anti-British guerrilla war due to the conflicts surrounding the Suez Channel in 1952, Gamal Abdel-Nasser,[39] using a coup d'état, rose to power.

Not much later after his arrival to power, using State security as an excuse,[40] Nasser restarted some of the government's actions against its opposition, especially the Jewish community, whose properties were being again seized in 1956 during the Sinai Campaign years, now being also denaturalized by the government. In his essay "Egyptian Jewry Under the Nasser Regime," Laskier lists some actions against the Jewish community being enforced by Nasser's Administration that led to a mass expulsion of Jews from Egypt. The author highlights that between the end of 1956 and early 1957 over 500 Jewish owned companies

and their bank accounts were seized and frozen, respectively, by the government (578), but one of Nasser's most aggressive strikes was a new amendment to the Egyptian citizenship law. The article 1 that stated that: "Only individuals resident on Egyptian territory before 1 January 1900, who maintained their residence until the date of promulgation of the present decree and who are not under the jurisdiction of a foreign state, are Egyptians (Laskier 579). Notwithstanding this new amendment, the new piece of legislation could be easily manipulated to assure the prosecution of minorities:

> The legally incapacitating intent and effect of this provision was quite manifest in spite of the camouflaging formulation. First of all, the law could easily be interpreted to mean that if an 'undesirable' individual left the country, even for a brief stay abroad, he thereby automatically failed to 'maintain his residence' until the date of the new law. Through this device, Egyptian citizens of the Jewish faith were easily deprived retroactively of their acquired citizenship. Second, an even more dangerous loophole was hidden behind the stipulation of the cut-off date of 1 January 1900.
>
> According to informed sources familiar with conditions in Egypt, there was simply no officially valid documentation in existence there which could attest to the residence of persons in Egypt at that remote point in time. Through this loophole, not only were new certificates of nationality denied to undesired applicants, but it was now possible for the authorities to annul existing certificates retroactively.[41](Laskier 579)

It is estimated that between 1956 and 1960, over 36,000 Jews left Egypt. By then, only 8,000 remained in the country despite Nasser's legal actions against them.

1.2.1- Nasser's government's words and actions regarding Israel and the Egyptian Jewry

Michael Sharnoff claims in his essay entitled "Defining the Enemy as Israel, Zionist, Neo-Nazi or Jewish: The Propaganda War in Nasser's Egypt, 1952-1967," that in order to better understand Nasser's actions against the Jews of Egypt, one must first understand how anti-Semitic rhetoric insidiously entered the government's speeches and proclamations, alongside some Nazi ideas. The author quoting from Said Aburish, one of Nasser's biographers, shows that Nasser's policies come from "deep anti-communists roots, not anti-Semitic ones" (2). Aburish also claims that Israel's creation and actions in the Middle East would have been a turning point for Nasser's foreign and domestic policies, because his early speeches contained "anti-Zionist, and anti-Israel motifs, not anti-Jewish ones" (2).

Nasser faced a problem on his way towards becoming a leader to the Arab-Muslim world due to his attitudes towards Israel, a place that he initially saw only as an "artificial outpost of western Imperialism" (3) and not necessarily a threat. By that time, Egypt had not only signed an armistice with Israel but eventually ended up recognizing UN Resolution 149,[42] which all the six countries from the Arab League[43] had voted against. The document was approved with 35 votes for, out of 58 countries that were part of the UN by then. Against were the six members of the Arab League and the Communist bloc that had "already recognized Israel as a de jure State."[44] Israel was not a part of the UN, although, opposed to a few articles from the resolutions and symbolic enough, the Palestinians were not consulted during the procedures. Thus, to assume his position as a leader of the Arabic-Muslim political group, Nasser would have to act tougher on Egypt-Israel interactions, especially towards the Palestine situation that by then had already caused the exodus of thousands of civilians.

On a report published in *Newsweek* by the journalist Ronen Bergman, during the process the following the tensions after Israeli independence and ensuing strengthening of the Egyptian military to ensure the security of the State, there were German scientists working alongside Nasser's regime who "weren't obscure technicians. They were some of the Nazi

regime's senior engineers."[45] with names such as Eugen Sänger and Wolfgang Pilz as some of the key figures.

Nasser's speech and actions were at times contradictory towards Israel. Even when no military action was taken, it was clear that he used state propaganda to promote an anti-Semitic sentiment in Egypt (Laskier, Shernoff, Barda). Things became tenser, and Nasser's words finally caught up with his actions, when, (here I quote Schernoff), Nasser spoke at the Indian Parliament on March 31, 1960 saying that a military confrontation with Israel seems inevitable because " Israel's leaders 'declared the Holy Land between the Nile and the Euphrates' which included 'a part of Egypt, part of Syria, part of Saudi Arabia, all of Jordan and part of Iraq.'(4)" After five years of polemical declarations and constant growing of tensions between the Egypt and Israel, in 1965 while speaking in a Conference at the Cairo University, Nasser not only made sure to make clear that he hadn't abandoned the Palestine cause, but also expressed rage against the Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba, who had previously recognized Israel as a state and call for peaceful negotiations (Shernoff, 8). Eventually war was declared on 1967, and after Egypt's defeat, not much different from the actions of the government back in 1948, Nasser acted against the Jewish people who still lived in the country. Shernoff writes that "By 1967, around 4,000 Egyptian Jews remained, and they were punished … Eight hundred Egyptian Jews were detained on conspiracy charges and had their property seized. On 11 June, fifty-four Egyptian Jews sought refuge in Naples, Italy" (11-12).

1.3- Alexandria is both there and gone

"To take your lovers on the road with you, for all that you leave them behind you, / To know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls." Echoing Walt Whitman and his poem "Song for the Open Road," many were roads that led André Aciman out of Alexandria, Egypt and eventually brought him to another cosmopolitan city, New York,

where he now lives with his wife and teaches literary theory and the work of Marcel Proust at NYU. As many were the roads, many are the ways in which the wounds of diaspora and exile had always found a way to make themselves visible in the writings of the author: a growing body of work that includes novels, essays, and a memoir. From an essay called "Alexandria: The Capital of Memory," present in his collection of essays called *False Papers: Essays on Exile and Memory*, we can find clues that help us better understand his literary project and interpret it, a motivation that has a central place in this thesis. In the essay, we read the deliberation of the author after finally returning to visit his birthplace:

> This is the Alexandria I live with every day, the one I've taken with me, written about and ultimately superimposed other cities, the way other cities were originally sketched over the Alexandrian landscape when European builders came, in the middle of the nineteenth century, and fashioned a new city modeled after those they already loved. It was this Alexandria I came back for – knowing I'd never find it. (Aciman 5)

Why come back if the city that remained was no longer the city that was left behind, the city of Aciman's childhood years? Or even why keep on writing about it? Lotfi (2014) argues that literature – as mentioned above– can act as therapy for people who have undergone a traumatic event in their lives. For the author "narrative therapy assumes that identities are chiefly constituted by stories of life, whether personal or social" (1912). Alexandria is, then, both there and gone for Aciman. The former cosmopolitan city is now drastically changed by a series of historical events already described in this chapter; yet, there is a counter-Alexandria, one, he takes with him. A version fictionalized in his memory, each time he searches for it in his memory and summons his past back. This alternative Alexandria is one made for writing as a way to mitigate the suffering caused by the loss of the geographical one. When asked about this mitigation process through writing the Aciman stated:

> I called one of my books False Papers, hoping readers might understand that "paper," for all its claims to truth, is still a fiction—a feint. I write to simulate a return to places I remember and that I believe are dear to me. But I know that writing is unable to perform a real return, just an impression of one. So yes, it is a sort of palliative—but no one is fooled. Hence the title of my other book, "Alibis."[46]

Thus, it is crucial to better understand the representation of an everlasting trauma such as the forced displacement of people, to make a detour to Svetlana Boym's diasporic intimacy concept. The author like Aciman himself, has left her homeland, in this case, the former Soviet Union and lived for the rest of her life in the US where she was the Curt Hugo Reisinger Professor of Slavic and Comparative Literatures at Harvard University; moreover, memory, modernity, and homesickness were at the core of her research. On the chapter "Diasporic Intimacy[47]" from her book *The Off-Modern*, the author begin her analysis of the nostalgic feeling present in many diasporic stories of non-returning by stating that these narratives' most intimate moments, they happen against a foreign background (80) or yet that what those narratives have in common is a shared longing, rather than a feeling of belonging. Intimacy, for Boym, does not rely on privacy, rather on contrary, for it is confronting his accent in a foreign tongue the diasporic subject can remake him or herself and deal with the fact that even back home there was already one (79).

In "Shadow Cities", another essay present on the *False Papers* collection, Aciman talks about his personal experience by looking for similarities with others that may have shared a similar detachment from their original place, and we notice that as often happens with diasporic subjects, there is a change from the I to a We (Ahmed 78). This deeply personal experience can be perceived with a broader lens. It is important, then, to notice how in the following excerpt from his essay, Aciman takes the idea of diasporic intimacy further,

not only alternating his speech between an "I" and a "we", but also using the second and third persons, jumping from one to another to describe his experience with displacement:

> I wanted everything to remain the same. Because this, too, is typical of people who lost everything, including their roots or their abilities to grow new ones. They may be mobile, scatted, nomadic, dislodged, but in their jittery state of transience they are thoroughly stationary. It is precisely because you have no roots that you don't bulge, that you fear change, that you'll built on anything, rather than look for a land. An exile is not just someone who has lost his home; he is someone who can't find another, who can't think of another. Some no longer means what home means. They reinvent the concept with what they've got, the way we reinvent love with what it's left of each time. Some people bring exile with them, the way they bring it upon themselves wherever they go. (Aciman 39)

1.3.1 – On being at home

A person living as an exile can receive as many classifications as the reasons behind his or her displacement; one can be called a stateless person, a refugee, an asylum seeker, a migrant. This groups alone can be divided into other several categories according to the reason that led one to migrate; an economic migrant, environment migrant, migrant worker, so on. One can also be an expellee, a humanitarian refugee or even a government-assisted refugee. In all those cases, the subject in question deals with a permanent or temporary incapacity to come back to where he/she come from; thus, diasporic studies deal with another important concept: the very definition of home.

In his essay "The Contrafactual Traveler," present in a second collection of essays called *Alibis: Essays on Elsewhere,* Aciman begins by stating that "Home is what we leave behind"(94) and then continues by saying that a home is "what makes go away safer", for "even an odyssey", says the author, "is just a return trip that's taken too long" (94). In the

same essay, Aciman writes about occasional travelers, like his wife who "was born and raised in the United States, travels with an exile when we go to Europe in the summer" (95). And it is this rooted upbringing that his wife had, unlike his uprooted one, that makes them so different when traveling together "she stares at this or that monument, I have no tolerance for monuments" (95) he writes, then we read "She wants to see things she's never seen before; I can't wait to land on things I've known before." (95) Hence, there is a complication when writing about the place that "home" occupies in diasporic narratives: the need to understand what home is and not where it is. For Said (2000:180-187) "Exiles look at non-exiles with resentment. They belong in their surroundings (…) while an exile is always out of place." Said goes on by highlighting the differences between exiles, refugees and émigrés, for example, because it matters when one is born in a place and knows more or less that this original place will be there.

Aciman, in "The Contrafactual Traveler", traces another important distinction between the exile and another migrant group, the nomads or Gypsies. Despite the similarity of not-having or even remembering where the journey started, nomadic people have their uprootedness as an identity trace, to wander is connected to being who they are as a nomadic people, whereas the exile, for Aciman "is not resigned to homelessness; perpetual transience feels (…) unnatural to him." (94).

Sara Ahmed's *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* traces the importance of the concept of home in those narratives by analyzing it as a fetish presence in these texts. For Ahmed, it is the presence between homes – a departure point, and an imaginary future point of destination, that "allows Home to become a fetish" (78). In a sense that Home, with a capital H, is not a fixed site of construction with roof and walls, but rather a place where one is always getting there, but never actually there. Boym's concept of diasporic intimacy also appears here, for according to the author, "one only thinks of home when away

from it", for "to feel at home is to be comfortably unaware of things, to know that things are in their places and so are you" ("Diasporic Intimacy" 80).

Thus, exiles have home not only as the place from where they originally came from (Ahmed 77), but also as the absence that makes him or her an exile. Home is both a point of origin and a destination where one is always stuck in the middle. Being at home becomes a fantasy of belonging somewhere (Ahmed 89) and consequently, exchanging the in-between for someplace that is here or there.

Aciman ends his text by raising a difficult question of the meaning behind the idea of "being at home". The author asks us "Can one choose one's home any more than one can choose the color of one's skin? Anyone can build a house – but is it ever a home?" (95). The possibilities raised are many, especially because, for Aciman, besides of dealing with all the meanings Ahmed's capital H, Home, can have; one must first confront the fact that "There is no home" (95), for "Home is altogether elsewhere. Or to use slightly different words, home is elsewhere in time – which is why exiles grow to like things that have *erstwhile* and *elsewhere* written all over them" (Italics used by the author. 95). Lotfi (2013) proposes, then, that "home" acts as a metaphor, or a constant theme in non-returning narration because it breaks "the imposed silence, for marginalized minorities" (387), offering a "counter-story for …an oppressed group" (387) on the grounds of belonging.

1.3.2- *Out of Egypt* and into literature

"So, are we or aren't we, *siamo o non siamo*"(Aciman 3), the bilingual question that opens André Aciman's memoir *Out of Egypt,* makes us confront one of the pillar questions for diasporic studies: who are the people we call immigrant, displaced, stateless and so on? The question appears in a dialogue between the young narrator, whose memories will guide us through three generations of his family, from their arrival in Alexandria, to their expulsion by the Nasser Regime, and his great-uncle Vili. The scene goes as it follows:

> ‘Just look at this,’ he pointed to a vast expanse of green. ‘Isn’t it splendid?’ he asked, as if he had invented the very notion of an afternoon stroll in the English countryside. ‘Just before sundown and minutes after tea, it always comes: a sense of plenitude, of bliss almost. You know—everything I wanted, I got. Not bad for a man in his eighties.’ Arrogant self-satisfaction beamed on his features.
>
> I tried to speak to him of Alexandria, of time lost and lost worlds, of the end when the end came, of Monsieur Costa and Montefeltro and Aldo Kohn, of Lotte and Aunt Flora and lives so far away now. He cut me short and made a disparaging motion with his hand, as if to dismiss a bad odor. ‘That was rubbish. I live in the present,’ he said almost vexed by my nostalgia. ‘Siamo o non siamo?’ he asked, standing up to stretch his muscles, then pointing to the first owl of the evening.
>
> It was never exactly clear what one was or wasn’t, but to everyone in the family, including those who don’t speak a word of Italian today, this elliptical phrase still captures the strutting, daredevil, cocksure, soldier-braggart who had pulled himself out of an Italian trench during the Great War and then, hidden between rows of trees with his rifle held tightly in both hands, would have mowed down the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire had he not run out of bullets. (Aciman 3)

Those paragraphs can be read as a meta-textual insight on Aciman’s literary project’s main themes that will be properly addressed with this thesis: identity, memory, and nostalgia; all three deeply connected with diaspora and its representations: “I’ll write about diaspora and dispossession … I use the word exile not because I think it’s the right term but because it approximates something far more intimate, more painful” (“A Literary Pilgrim Progresses to the Past” 89). Chambers while writing about migrancy and its main characteristics, stated that the migrant subject is always confronting the violence of alterity (*Migrancy, Culture, Identity*

4), and uses nostalgia as a defense mechanism, for there is no home to go back to (9). There is only a vivid recollection that will always be taken wherever he or she goes.

These remembrances appear in Aciman's memoir and novels as a way to reclaim what was taken from him; not his family's properties that were seized by the government, but something deeper: what his life would have become had he stayed in Egypt, as read in his essay "Temporizing", in which we read: "The narrator of *Out of Egypt* … is just remembering because remembering ensures that the present won't prevail" (Aciman 89). The memoir is built upon real memories, albeit described in a fictional way by the author; they are imagined and reorganized as an attempt to find some meaning, and perhaps, even some beauty in them. In Aciman, literature becomes, then, a way to analyze his own life's narrative, "perhaps, this is why all memoirists lie" says the author, "we alter the truth … we lie about our past and invent surrogate memories" (91).

Here I would like to propose to read those "surrogate memories" as the author refers to them, not as lies but as *off-narratives*, borrowing the use of the prefix *-off* from Boym's *The Off-Modern*. Boym proposes the concept of an off-modernity rather than a post-one by saying that the moment of history in which we are circumscribed has modernity as its past (1). Moreover, at the same time, modernity is often nostalgically revisited, while speeches of a glorious and almost mythological past gain ground; Donald Trump's "make America great again" logo appears a perfect example. Still on this matter, in The *Off-Modern* chapter "History out-of-synch", Boym justifies her choice on using the prefix *off* instead of *post* to address the cultural and historical moment that we call post-modernity by arguing that "unlike thinkers of the last *fin de siècle,* we neither mourn nor celebrate the end of history or the end of art (3)". The author, then, proposes off, as in "off the path" (3), for off-modern would mean "a detour into the unexplored potentials of the modernity project… it opens into the modernity of 'what if', and not only postindustrial modernization as it was" (3). For Boym, to

understand this alternative road between a progress-centered society and a non-critical nostalgia dive into the past is as important as focusing solely on one of those two perspectives, for we would be at a moment in time where "ruins cohabit with construction sites" (4) more than ever. To sum up, nothing creates more ruins than the obsession for progress to abandon the old and welcome the new.

Two scenes from Aciman's memoir capture the feeling described by Boym, as well as the reason why I believe that we can read Aciman's memory through this lens. The first one occurs when the narrator, living his last days in Egypt enters his late uncle, Nessim's bedroom:

> That evening, I slipped into Uncle Nessim's bedroom. I sat on his bed, looking out the window, catching the flicker of city lights, remembering how he spoke of London and Paris, how he said that all gentlemen, of whom he fancied himself one, would have a glass of scotch whiskey every evening…And now, I too would do the same, think about things, as he put it, think about leaving, and about all the people I would never see again, and about this city, so inseparable from who I was at that very instant, and how it would slip into time and become stranger than dreamland. That too would be like dying. To be dead meant that others could come into your room and sit and think about you. It meant that others could come into your room and never know it had once been yours. Little by little they would remove all traces of you. Even your smell would go. Then they'd even forget you had died." (Aciman 315-6)

The narrator's history in Alexandria is abruptly cut short and his departure – in this scene presented in comparison to his uncle's – will ensure that nothing but memories are left. Memories taken with him, and memories of him that will remain with the ones who stayed. Furthermore, as times passes, like ruins, these memories will change and fragment until nothing much is left. His history in Alexandria is over; he is off this track. Different from his

uncle, however, who is dead, he keeps on living. Superimposing past and present, both narratives, create a new one: the one about his exile.

The second moment which I think illustrates Boym's argument[48] comes from a scene in which father and son are getting things ready to move from their house. "I asked him if he was going to throw away all those books on the floor. No, he replied. We would take them…" (299). Then, noticing how his father seemed more attached to some notebooks scatted on the floor, the narrator asks about them: "These are notebooks I kept when I was a young man." Was he going to throw them away? 'Not all, but there are things here I would rather disappear.' 'Did you write anything against the government back then?' I asked. 'No, nothing political. Other things …Someday you'll understand.'" (300). For Boym, the off-modern approach to History – and here I apply it to literature – is embedded in a nostalgic feeling in search for "unforeseen pasts and future *anteriors*" (*The Off-Modern* 39). It is, then, a way to look at History concerned in giving dignity to the defeated or writing a history "without the capital H" (40). The father/son scene from *Out of Egypt* ends with another reminder that the past in the Faulknerian way is not even past. "He said he could still remember witnessing his parents' emptied home thirty years before on the day they had left Constantinople. … And so, would I, too, one day, though he didn't wish it on me—'But everything repeats itself.' I tried to protest, saying I hated this sort of fatalism, that I was free from Sephardi superstitions. "You think you are," he said" (300). For Aciman, fatherhood:

> […] may represent—and I say this tentatively-as the ultimate absence and yet equally as the ultimate emotional bond to reality: father and son are one, and it is usually via the emotional bond with the father that the son touches the ground under him. Otherwise he is struggling with imaged of desired persons, forgotten loves, and so on. The father is the exemplar; the proof that emotional bonds can and do exist but are near impossible to root.[49]

Therefore, in his novels, such a relationship, between fathers and sons, often acts as a metaphor for the author's inner struggle with his obsession with memory and the need to move on, to focus on the present.

CHAPTER TWO

IMPOSSIBLE FORGETTING

"There may have been nothing there, and I might have invented the whole thing."[50]

"His was a sobering reminder that France, the France I dreamed of…had never existed."[51]

"I knew I'd never forget this…"[52]

"'The Greeks never had a god for regret…the Greeks were brilliant.'"[53]

As it was previously addressed in the first chapter, memory has a crucial place in diaspora studies, for, as Ahmed pointed out, "displacement becomes a question of memory" (*Strange Encounters* 84), because such an event does not only occur in a physical place, but also a temporal one. What fits the definition of Home for an Exile is then always behind and in front of him or her at the same time. This Janus-like migrant subject faces what he remembers his original point of departure to be like and what he thought his destination might be. However, this past and possibility of future remain only as a memory, and even though it may be read as a way in which we access the past, they are already an act of interpretation of this past "in a cultural and historically situated present" (Smith and Watson 2013:31). Therefore, in this chapter, the correlation between memory and identity in exile narratives will be examined through André Aciman's novels and essays.

2.1- The Janus-like act of migrancy

I want to make a digression here to illustrate how one can perceive the in-between-ness of diasporic narratives in general or their feelings of yonder-ness, as described by Siri Hustvedt in her essay "Yonder", "Yonder is elsewhere… yonder is like desire and implies something missing."[54] In the 2004 movie, *Nobody Knows* (誰も知らない), the Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda tells the story of a twelve-years-old boy, named Akira, who after being abandoned by his mother, had to take care of his younger siblings. The film was inspired by a real child abandonment case[55] that shocked Japan in 1988. In the film, this tragic

narrative ends with the three out of five surviving children, after being aided by an older friend of Akira, walking away from the place which they used to call home and where they lived an unimaginable trauma. Nobody Knows' final shot demonstrates how difficult it is for one to move on with such a traumatic experience and how memories are always carried with us, within us, even though we may not access them all the time. In the shot, the director freezes the frame when the kids are walking away from their building and symbolically shows the youngest one looking behind to his past as he walks ahead towards his future (see fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Nobody Knows*' final frame.

This double-focused gaze is how memory appears in diasporic narratives, and for this case, in Aciman's novels, essays and memoir: they are the ruins of a long-gone past upon which the present is shaped and therefore built. Like the kids on Kore-eda's film, there is no moving forward that has completely erased the past, just like there is no modern city that has not been built upon a previous one.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight how plural the concept of diaspora is, for the people who live under its shadow are as different as the reason behind it. On "Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies" (*Theorizing Diaspora: A*

Reader 2005), Braziel and Mannur addressed the importance of dealing with diaspora as a broad concept and always take under consideration the hybridity of the diasporic people (3-5). As the authors explained "recent theorizations of diaspora also seek to represent (and problematize) the lived experiences…of people whose lives are unfolded in myriad diasporic communities across the globe" (5). The emphasis here, however, must be put on the plurality of the people living any diasporic experience, for it is, Hall in Braziel and Mannur explains, "defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives in…difference" (5). This led us to the realization that one cannot talk about diaspora without also talking about history, gender, nationality, sexual orientation and so forth, to properly perceive and understand not only the individual but also his or her relationship with their homeland.

Memory becomes then "a tool through which one can access the past to narrate it" (Smith and Watson 2013:23), moreover, this narration happens through, not despite the lenses previously described, so the memories of the diasporic subject are always marked with "ambivalence and contradiction" (Braziel and Mannur 9). In this sense, questions like why, what and how to remember, seem to be impossible to overcome and be fully answered. Some people want to remember, and some even want to pass their memories to the next generations, others want nothing from their recollections; however, the memories will be always there waiting to be triggered, and the past to be brought to light with them: "the past must be summoned back" (Lowenthal 205)

As mentioned in chapter one, Aciman needs to remember and does that by putting things on paper, and by perceiving his own life as a "post-life, a pluperfect life, a conditional life, a life made … for the mind. Or for the paper", as we read in the "Square Lamartine" present in *False Papers* (66). In another essay called "Underground", also from the *False Papers* collection, , Aciman gives his reader more clues on how his past memories are the

lenses used to see his present, or in a different analogy, how he superimposes past and present to create a new image, a nostalgic one, born out of a nostalgic memory mixed with a nostalgically perceived present."[56]

"Underground" begins with a description of an abandoned subway station of the Broadway Local line on the 91st street, as it is seen by the author every time his train passes by: "The walls are begrimed with thick 1970s-style graffiti, while something resembling a platform, strewn with debris, stands in the ashen dimness of places most cities would rather forget about" (115), or even describing it as "a place only Dante or Kafka might have imagined" (115). The station after being deactivated, like many sites of ruins, ended up becoming a tourist attraction for people whose curiosity is not fulfilled by the ground-level city and want more, including its underground (See fig. 2-4)

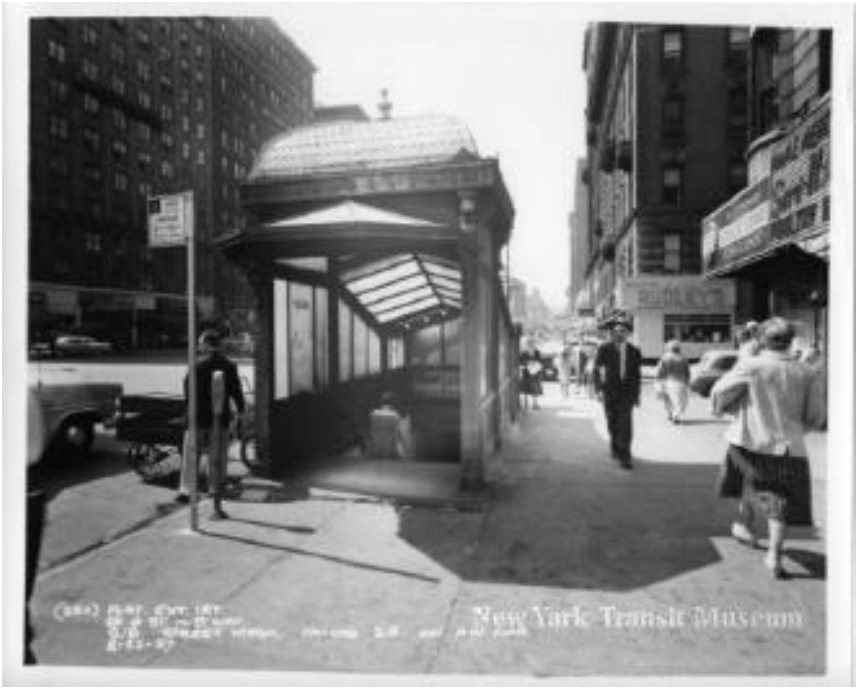

Fig. 2 91st Street station main entrance circa 1957. Photo by the New York Transit Museum. Seen on Ephemeral New York. Web. July 30, 2019.[57]

Fig 3 – 4. 91st Street station circa 1995. Photos by David Pirmann. Seen on New York Subway.Org. Web. July 30, 2019.[58]

Figure 2 and 3 depict a closer look at what Aciman quickly saw when passing by the station. The graffiti and old columns, like a Proustian madeleine, acted as a trigger that brought back to light old questions about what his life might have been had it not gone *off* the main road into an alternative one. As Proust himself put it, "And once again I had recognized the taste of the crumb of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-flowers which my aunt used to give me … immediately the old gray house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like the scenery of a theater" (Vol I: *Swann's Way* 1913). Or in different words, had it been possible to "discover missed opportunities and the road not taken" (Boym 2016:5).

Also, in Chapter 1, I discussed Boym's concept of off-modern and how it may be a useful tool to work with texts that narrate a diasporic experience. For Boym, a nostalgia-charged reading of the past would happen when the subject writes not only about his actual life and journey but also about what it never was, about the road abandoned and the road taken as if they are perpetually affecting and changing each other. Those off-narratives, as I proposed to call them, narratives full of *what if's* and *might have been's* talk about a shadow

life, a shadow city and therefore a shadow self. This concept of the shadow self will be addressed properly in chapter 3.

"What if?" asks Aciman, "What if instead of having the train dawdle awhile between stations, the conductor stopped at Ninety-first Street and on a mad impulse announced the station's name…" ("Underground" 117), and then "opened the doors and began discharging passengers? Some of them would actually walk out, half startled and dazed" (117). The author's rumination goes on and he asks again what if "What if, in spite of its dead silence now, this station were a gateway to an underground that is ultimately less in the city than in ourselves, and that what we see in it is what we dare not see in ourselves?"(118). Finally, it led up to one central point for the author and common to many exile narratives, the feeling of being out of synch with the rest of the world, as read in: "what if this underground cavern were my double, a metaphor for the pulsating, dirty, frightened dungeon within all of us which feels as lonely and abandoned, and as out of place and out of sync with the rest of the world" (118).

2.2- Ruinophilia and memory

In *The Off-Modern*, Boym writes about ruins and its use throughout history and popular culture by claiming that they are both "remainders and reminders…of a past that could've been and the future that never took place" (43). Thus, as one modern city is built upon the remaining of others, our personal narratives are constructed the same way, for "we are at any moment the sum of our moments" (A.A. Mendilow in Lowenthal 185).

Could one, then, approach memory, in exile narratives, as one approaches the idea of ruins? As something that is both decaying and at the same time managing to stay somehow? Boym tries to solve this problem by describing a state of being complementary to nostalgia: the ruinophilia; or a state that differs from its counterpart for being less "afflicted with personal story" and for not being a "a longing for home or for identity but more of a material

and visceral experience of the irreversibility of time that comes together with care for the world." (44-45) For Boym, what ultimately would differ one from another, is that ruinophilia is about "a simultaneous mourning for the world and gratitude for its survival" (45). Ruinophilia and nostalgia act, then, as parallel roads that connect past and future, and offer an alternative way of narrating one's own experience. In Aciman's own words, here writing about why visiting the ruins of an abandoned subway station in the previously mentioned "Underground": "I wanted to see how inanimate objects refuse to forget or suggest that all cities—like people, like palimpsests, like the remains of a Roman temple hidden beneath an ancient church—do not simply have to watch themselves go but strive to remember, because in the wish to remember lies the wish to restore, to stay alive, to continue to be" (119)

Two narratives come to mind when dealing with memory, nostalgia, and ruinophilia: the first one, a passage from Aciman's 2007 novel *Call Me by Your Name*, his acclaimed debut novel; and one from the singer, composer, photographer and writer Patti Smith, from her autobiographical collections of essays called *M-Train* (2015).

In *Call Me by Your Name*, the passage that illustrates better how ruinophilia and nostalgia, at times, complement each other in the narratives by exiled authors takes place in a chapter entitled "The San Clemente Syndrome" in which we read the following:

> 'Like every experience that marks us for a lifetime, I found myself turned inside out, drawn and quartered. This was the sum of everything I'd been in my life … I called it the San Clemente Syndrome. Today's Basilica of San Clemente is built on the site of what once was a refuge for persecuted Christians. The home of the Roman consul Titus Flavius Clemens, it was burnt down during Emperor Nero's reign. Next to its charred remains, in what must have been a large, cavernous vault, the Romans built an underground pagan temple dedicated to Mithras, God of the Morning, Light of the World, over whose temple the early Christians built another church, dedicated—

> coincidentally or not, this is a matter to be further excavated—to another Clement, Pope St. Clement, on top of which came yet another church that burnt down and on the site of which stands today's basilica. And the digging could go on and on. Like the subconscious, like love, like memory, *like time itself,*[59] like every single one of us, the church is built on the ruins of subsequent restorations, there is no rock bottom, there is no first anything, no last anything, just layers and secret passageways and interlocking chambers, like the Christian Catacombs, and right along these, even a Jewish Catacomb. But, as Nietzsche says, my friends, I have given you the moral before the tale.' (Aciman 192)

This passage not only perfectly shows the fascination one may have in digging up one's past's ruins but also it evokes something important about memory, its functions and organization, as Siri Hustvedt pointed out in her essay called "Three Emotional Stories," present in the collection *Living, Thinking, Looking: Essays* (2013). For Freud, "there is no true or original memory." Hustvedt, who began her career as a fictional writer, ended up becoming more and more entangled with psychoanalysis and neurological studies after a series of undiagnosed psychosomatic episodes that led her to write a biography for her other self,[60] the one that had this emotional crisis and the seems to be apart from her, not inside of her. These studies on the mind now have a central position in her work, both essays, and fiction. The author states, then, that there may not be an original memory, as Freud pointed out, but also "memory and imagination partake the same mental process" ("Thinking" 2013); she also wonders "How remembering and imagination are different, then?" For Husvedt, "fiction is both an internal and an external product" and "writing fiction" would be like "remembering what never happened. It mimics memory without being memory" ("Yonder").

The second ruinophilia passage I want to describe happens in a chapter entitled "Café 'Ino" present in Patti Smith's *M-Train*, in which, the author writes about a trip she took with

her husband, also a musician, Fred Sonic Smith, to the North Atlantic coast of South America, or more precisely "I chose Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, a border town in northwest French Guiana" (10). Smith explains her choice by saying that "I had long wished to see the remains of the French penal colony where hard-core criminals were once shipped before being transferred …. In *The Thief's Journal*, Jean Genet had written of Saint-Laurent as hallowed ground and of the inmates incarcerated there with devotional empathy" (10). The visit of the long abandoned prison cells and their ruins was born out of her love for Genet's prose and the will to give him a piece of that land, for Genet was "At seventy, … reportedly in poor health and most likely would never go there himself" (10-11), which not only had been immortalized through his writing but was also a place that he never stood foot in. For Genet, as Ahmed stated, desire is always linked to an absence (*Strange Encounters* 87). Sadly, the French novelist never received the piece of ruin from that fetishized place and Smith, as we read in the chapter "Road to Larache", "April 15 marked the passing day of Jean Genet. It seemed to be the right moment to deliver the stones from Saint-Laurent Prison to his grave in Larache" (217).

2.3- Reading, writing and interpreting memories

Hustvedt describes in her essay "Three Emotional Stories" an episode of her own life in which she was briefly hospitalized due to a constant and severe migraine crisis. About this moment, we first read: "When I remember … that in 1982 I was hospitalized … with an excruciating migraine that had lasted for many months, I do not reexperience either my pain or my emotional distress…" ("Thinking"). However, things got more complicated when the author starts to ponder about the fact that she is writing from a future point of view perspective from those events and this particular essay was written after the hospitalization has been fictionalized twice: one through her debut novel called *The Blindfold*, and the second

time, through a film adaptation of her novel entitled *La Chambre des Magiciennes* directed by Claude Miller. The author continues:

> I no longer remember what happened every day in the hospital, only a few highlights—a nurse who seemed to believe migraineurs were either neurotics or malingerers, the interns who asked me over and over who the president was, and my doctor who seemed exasperated that I didn't get well. I remember lying in the hospital bed, but I no longer see the room clearly. Still, I have a mental image that probably combines several hospital rooms I've visited or seen in the movies. We deposit memorable emotional events into a visual setting that makes sense, but what we see in our minds may bear little resemblance to what actually was. What I've retained is the story and a few serviceable mental pictures, but much is missing from that verbal account. ("Thinking")

Here, the memory of her days in the hospital and the memory of those same days as they happen in her novel, alongside with novels and movies dealing with a similar topic that she had been exposed to by then, begin to mingle with one another and, henceforth, it is not clear or even distinguishable anymore what is really being remembered. Or again using Freud's words, this episode in Hustvedt acts as an example of the impossibility to tracing an original and therefore purer memory: "my own narrative memory of an actual event, my character's story in the novel based on that event, and my character's story in the film … one is constructed as a narrative, which partakes of the imaginary, the fictionalizing processes inherent to memories..."("Thinking") The author finishes her description by saying that "The fact that I used that hospital stay in my first novel, *The Blindfold*, further complicates matters because I turned an episode from my life into fiction, an episode I had already, no doubt, fictionalized in memory" ("Thinking").

2.3.1- Borrowing memories

Memory is not a subject that can be approached as a one-way street, for we can talk about it from a philosophical, literary or even medical point of view - focusing on its neurological and psychological mechanisms. One can devote oneself to the works of philosophers throughout the twentieth century that initially took memory for a process of information storage – which came all the way from Plato to the works of Hume; more recently, memory began to be seen as something far more complex,[61] and the new theories also have recognized that the mental process of remembering and narrating something is affected by internal and external factors, and the information stored by our brains is constantly altered, mixed, edited, censored, shortened, expanded and so forth.[62] These newer methods also sort memory into significant subgroups or systems: semantic and episodic memory. The first one is connected to propositions, whereas the second one is associated with events and information stored. These groups are also divided into other subsystems, among which, I highlight the procedural memory that is used to access our different skills. Furthermore, as Lowenthal argued, other people's memories are necessary to confirm our own (2016:196), and each time we remember something, that memory is altered. This phenomenon happens to a point where the author, quoting Freud, states that what is remembered is more connected to the time it is remembered than to the memory itself. To use Heraclitus'- the object of study of *Call Me by Your Name*'s Oliver - ideas of change and the passage of time, it seems that in memory too, change is the only constant. Now let us investigate two literary examples of memory retrieving or remembering and how others around us as well as our surroundings add, subtract or alter our memories. Going back to Whitman's poetry: "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself; / I am large, I contain multitudes."[63]

2.3.1.1- Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Displaced* and *The Refugees*

The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives is a collection of essays edited by the Pulitzer Prize winner, and a refugee himself, Viet Thanh Nguyen. The author writes in the introduction of the book about his own life and why he and his family had to leave their home back in Vietnam. About this, Nguyen writes: "I was born a citizen and a human being. At four years of age I became something less than human" (10), the author and his family's refugee journey began when they were forced to flee their hometown, a city called Ban Me Thuot, during "the final invasion of the Republic of Vietnam, a country that no longer exists except in the imagination of its global refugee diaspora of several million people, a country that most of the world remembers as South Vietnam" (11) by the North Vietnamese Army.

It is important for this study to focus on how the author proceeds with his narration by beginning almost every following paragraph with one of these two sentences: I remember, or I don't remember. Nguyen's introduction becomes, then, more about the act of remembering than the memory itself, as seen in "For most of my life, I tried not to remember this moment except to note it in a factual way, as something that happened to us but left no damage, but that is not true" (12). Following this statement, the author is forced to recognize that despite being painful memories, they are needed, for memory's importance lies in the fact that, true or false, we know that past by them (Lowenthal 190). In Nguyen's introduction, we read: "As a writer and a father of a son who is four years old, the same age I was when I became a refugee, I have to remember, or sometimes imagine, not just what happened, but what was felt" (12).

The author also shows how he and his brother have different memories of the same events during their family's escape from Vietnam. "My brother remembers…" he writes, "dead paratroopers hanging from the trees on our route, although I do not." (10). We also read "I did remember soldiers on our boat firing onto a smaller boat full of refugees that was trying to approach. But when I mentioned it to my older brother many years later, he said the shooting never happened" (12). Here, it becomes clearer how even the most personal

memories are constructed collectively, as in Nguyen's narrative, in which each member of his family adds something from their journey to America. Boym's diasporic intimacy makes itself noticeable once more when reading these non-return narratives. Lowenthal also wrote about this in his book *Past is a Foreign Country*, by reinforcing the notion that even though the remembered world is innately ours, the remembered past is both collective and individual (194).

More material for this study is given by Nguyen's introduction, in which the author writes about a violent situation that his family went through, already as refugees on American soil. "I remember moving to San Jose, California, in 1978 …I remember the phone call on Christmas Eve that my brother took, informing him that my parents had been shot in an armed robbery" (13); flesh wounds only as he recalls. On a second episode of violence we read: "I remember the gunman who followed us to our home and knocked on our door and pointed a gun in all our faces and how my mother saved us by running past him and out onto the sidewalk" (13). Both episodes of violence appear again in a fictional short story called "War Years," published in the anthology "*The Refugees*". We read this scene now this way: "Her fear of robbery was proved justified last October, when, on an otherwise forgettable Tuesday evening, someone knocked on the door" (Nguyen). The narrator continues: "When I peered through the peephole, I saw a white man who said, 'I got mail for you, sir.' If he had spoken in Vietnamese or Spanish, I never would have unlocked the door, but because he spoke English, I did" (Nguyen). The robber enters the house and in this version of the memory, differently from the essay, the narrative is focused on the people who took part in it, rather than the event that was reported to the police and re-lived through his essay; as if, Nguyen can not only narrate his and his family's exile but also offer an what-if narrative (Boym 2016).

Thus, we read: "My father had appeared, halfway between the kitchen and the front door, and the man fixed his aim on him, saying, "Get down, mister." My father got onto his

knees, raising his hands high. “No shoot,” (Nguyen). His parents’ emotions are brought to light as well “I had never seen my father on his knees outside church, and I had never seen my mother tremble and shake with fear. Pity overwhelmed me; I knew this was neither the first nor the last time someone would humiliate them like this” (Nguyen). The robbery ends and the robber is never caught by the police, although his memory never left the narrator’s house “I thought about him …on Sunday mornings during mass when I rose from kneeling. It was then that I remembered…” (Nguyen).

2.3.1.2- André Aciman’s “The Lotus-Eaters”

The Greeks have told stories about people who would eat the lotus flowers and then, thanks to their narcotics properties, they would become numb, in the most profound apathy. This myth also appears in *The Odyssey*, when in book 9, Homer risks losing his men after anchoring on the lotus-eater’s island and having some of his crew eating the plant. Both in Greek Mythology and in the *Odyssey*, the story acts as a cautionary tale on the alluring promise of peace and everlasting rest that asks its victim to not partake in life and its perils. “The Lotus-Eaters” is also the name of the fifth chapter of *Out of Egypt*, Aciman’s memoir, which sheds a new light on his family’s departure from Egypt and how they dragged that moment up to the very end. They stayed in Egypt (as seen in Chapter 1) when many had already left, still trying to live their daily lives in Alexandria.

In the chapter, we read a story about how the young narrator was failing his Arabic lessons in school and his confrontation with his father is described: “But none of the other European boys studies Arabic” (233), says the narrator, his father’s answer is symbolic enough: “Well, those who are leaving may not have to worry about Arabic. But since we’re not planning to leave,” he continued, “let us at least pretend that Arabic is important to us. Now let me see the latest assignment” (233). The chapter, then, follows with descriptions of

the narrator's days in school, facing a growing anti-Semitism, alongside descriptions of his and his family's daily lives.

At a time, that over 20.000 Jews had already been expelled from the country (Laskier 1995), and it is estimated that around October 1956, 500 Jewish owned companies were seized by the government, the narrator's family relocated itself in a different, and, for them, safer, Alexandrian neighborhood, as seen in "It had taken my parents three years to find their jewel in Cleopatra. Life at Smouha after the 1956 war had become too unsafe…" (217). *Out of Egypt*'s fifth chapter continues to show how Aciman and his family had been eating the lotus that their comfortable financial condition gave them: "My father was delighted with the study, my mother with the balcony" (217). However, the mythological plant's effects did not blind the ones who ate them; they just became lethargic. There was awareness, but no action. One important moment that shows the insidious danger of institutionalized racism and xenophobia by the Egyptian government and its actions occur when after the confrontation with his father over the Arabic lessons, the narrator got a tutor and the poem he was supposed to present in front of his class had anti-Semitic tones, "The poem was accompanied by an illustration of a young Egyptian soldier waving a scimitar at three old men clothed in three tattered flags. … the third, a bald, short man with wiry sideburns, a large hooked nose, and a pointed beard, was shabbily draped in the Star of David" (233).

This lethargy is evoked in the essay "In a Double Exile," in which Aciman writes about a nostalgic feeling the Passover Seder celebration triggers and forces him to think about two different Egypts, one, seen through the lenses of religion and history, an Egypt that even though already linked to the Jewish diaspora, is the Egypt of the Pyramids and Pharaohs; the second is closer to home, an Egypt that he carries with himself despite having left it behind many years ago, "I begin to think of another Egypt, the one I was born in and knew and got to love and would never have left had not a modern pharaoh named Gamal Abdel Nasser forced

me out for being Jewish" (*False Papers* 108). As seen in "The Lotus-Eaters," his family's permanence is again mentioned, but now, without the nostalgic tone of his memoir: "This was an Egypt many of us would have stayed in, even as the last Jews of the land, which we nearly were, even if we had had to beg to stay, which indeed we did" (108).

"In a Double Exile" begins not in Alexandria nor in Europe, Aciman's family's first refuge after their expulsion from Egypt, but in America, many years after everything that appears in his memoir and many of his essays. This particular text is written by a displaced man that calls himself an exile: "I am an exile from Alexandria, Egypt" (*Alibis 94*), and constantly looks back to his own past to make sense of the person he is now, not the one he was back then. Lowenthal pointed out how memories enrich the present more than preserve the past (210), and that we used them to confirm who we are now (197). On the Seder that makes him wonder about his past, Aciman also wrote "I don't know Hebrew. Nor do I know any of the songs or prayers. I can't even tell when the Seder is officially over" (*False Papers* 108), which is supported by his memory about the same event in Egypt, "Often in those years in Alexandria, when I was growing up, Passover coincided with Easter and Ramadan…at Seder everyone more or less giggling, including the one or two Christians visiting that evening…"(*False Papers* 108-109).

The essay ends melancholically with the realization that everything described in his and his family's memoir, especially the reason why they stayed for so long, was nothing but a delusion. "Some of us forgot we were Jews. Alexandria was our mirage—in the desert, we dreamed awhile longer" (110). The past, for Lowenthal, as the image of a desert mirage described by Aciman above, is something that can never be grasped, for it is no place, no thing, but rather a feeling, a sensation (187). External factors may trigger our memories, like a mirage may worsen a lost man's thirst while crossing a desert, but engaging in the recollection, is like pursuing that same desired water when there is nothing but sand around.

This pursuit is an action, and, as such, it is demanding and in cases of trauma, such as the diasporic experience, difficult and exhausting. The past helps us to understand the present and who we are, but the past may also be the lotus plant that leaves us apathetic towards the present. For the author, it all boils down to one truth: "we may not always know what to remember, but we know we must remember" (*False Papers* 110).

Another example from Aciman's texts on how memory acts as an "intersubjective act" (*Reading Autobiography* 26) can be found when we put the final passage from his memoir site to side with an essay called "Rue Delta," from his collection *Alibis*. In *Out of Egypt*, we read:

> I motioned to my mother that I was going out for a walk. She nodded. Without saying anything, my father put his hand in his pocket and slipped me a few bills. Outside, Rue Delta was brimming with people. It was the first night of Ramadan … At the corner of the street, from a sidewalk stall, came the smell of fresh dough and of angel-hair being fried on top of a large copper stand—a common sight throughout the city every Ramadan. People would fold the pancakes and stuff them with almonds, syrup, and raisins. The vendor caught me eyeing the cakes that were neatly spread on a black tray. He smiled and said, "Etfaddal, help yourself. (337-8)

Aciman describes that same scene in "Rue Delta" but this time differently and comments on the reason behind the different versions of the same story. "Every reader of my memoir *Out of Egypt* comes face-to-face with a disturbing paradox when I reveal that my Passover night walk comes not in one, but in two versions—and that both, in fact, have been published" (Aciman 176). Aciman goes on with his explanation and gives the reader more details: "In the book, I stand alone. In the magazine, I am walking not by myself but in the company of my brother … I was a rather shy, …, it was my younger brother, by far the more daring" (176). That last night happened in the author's past so the feeling is translated into words and put

onto those pages, whether from a magazine in the form of a short story or as a full memoir of over three hundred pages.

Symbolically enough, that last night only became known as such after the author left, for neither he, his brother or anyone from his family knew that the time to flee had finally arrived, as none of them "after the movie at midnight would never, ever know, nor ever guess, that this was our last night in Alexandria" (*Out of Egypt* 340) Thus, all those feelings, memories and perspectives mingled together create not a fake memory, but an alternative one, that dares to go off the main road and consolidate itself as a new one, as another possibility: "What I certainly can't remember is the real rue Delta, the rue Delta as I envisioned it before writing *Out of Egypt*. That rue Delta is forever lost" ("Rue Delta" 184). *Out of Egypt* becomes not only the author's memory, but also the memory of a ghost city that is long gone, a city that has become nothing but "an alibi, a mold, a construct," for writing about it as the author says "helps (him) to give a geographical frame to a psychological mess" ("A Literary Pilgrim Progresses to the Past" 89) Just as the city, the people present on its pages, are now ghost people as well and can only exist like that: as shadows from the past in the author's present.

- **2.4. On forgetting**

Lowenthal (2016) posits that to remember, one must first forget. The author argues, here, that memory implies knowledge, for one does not know he has forgotten something because this same information is unavailable to this person (205). Memory needs to be summoned into the present and then the information turned into knowledge. Lowenthal uses Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* as an example for this complex interdependence between remembering and forgetting: for him, Proust uses the significant length of his novels and descriptions of recollections within it as a way to make the reader forget things to recover them involuntarily later as the reading progresses. Information scattered throughout the pages, then, gives the reader a similar effect to Swann's madeleines.

Dealing with diaspora narratives, Braziel and Mannur ask us to consider that no memory and diaspora study is complete without addressing how the same memory that forces someone to "rethink the rubrics of nation and nationalism, while refiguring the relations of citizens and nation-states" (7) is also the cause of unthinkable distress – here, they comment on Haitian and Venezuelan immigrants as an example – and therefore, such a subject may not want or even be able to remember (9). Moreover, for Lotfi (2013), since diasporic narratives are deeply connected to the idea of home, the constant discontinuity of one's interactions with one's surroundings makes remembering more difficult (387). Esposito (2008), via Lotfi in her essay "Scrutinizing the Discursive Nature of Memory", claims that even in the cases of those immigrants who do not want to remember their past, this same refusal may lead to the preservation of the respective memory. For the author, "the one who intends to forget cannot avoid confronting himself and his own procedures of memory construction, while in the case of remembering, one can persist in the illusion of only recording external data…" (143). Creating, then, the eternal circle of needing to forget to remember; and needing to remember to later forget.

"Do you know Lethe and Phlegethon, Officer?", asks the narrator of *Eight White Nights*, before pondering about life and death and how being forgotten is a form of dying: "The worst part of dying is knowing you'll forget you ever lived and ever loved" (96). Lowenthal (2016) claimed that the prime function of memory is not to keep the past alive, but enrich the way we see and understand the present (2010), in a way that one's sense of self depends on the capacity to situate oneself at the present and superimpose this image to how one remembers being in the past. This third image created by a mental process of constant editing and negotiation strengthens a person's perception of his or her identity. Another example comes from *Harvard Square* when, the narrator reads a text by his friend, Kalaj, and

initially perceives it to be a poem. “Here,” he said, producing a tiny pocket notebook… ‘Read,’ he said” (78). The text goes as it follows:

Dresser.

Turntable.

Television.

Striped ironing board.

A standing lamp to the left.

A night table to the right.

A tiny reading light clasped to the headboard.

She sleeps naked at night.

Cat snuggles on her bed.

The stench from the litter box.

Bathroom door never locks.

Toilet flushes twice.

Impossible to repair. Shower drips too.

I see the Charles. And the Longfellow Bridge.

Sometimes nothing because of the fog.

And I hear nothing. Sometimes an airplane.

No one sleeps in the adjacent room;

It used to be her mother’s once,

She died in her sleep.

They never emptied her closet,

The dresser and the turntable were hers too.

No one plays music in the house. (79)

What the narrator missed was the fact that Kalaj's lines were, for him, nothing but a list for eventual immigration questions had his case progressed accordingly. "Have you ever shown it to her?' 'Are you out of your mind…I just wrote this because I didn't want to forget what her apartment looked like'" (80). Aciman, then, goes on and made clear via Kalaj's response, why, at least for him, writing and remembering are intrinsically connected. "Because I didn't want to forget was the heart and soul of poetry. Had any poet been more candid about his craft? I was speechless with admiration…Leave it to a man born in North Africa to capture the hapless, gritty lives of local Cantabrigians" (80).

- **2.4.1. On Language and Silence**

By the end of *Call Me by Your Name*'s first chapter, "If not later, when?", Elio, wondering through his father's library reads a book about a "handsome young knight who is madly in love with a princess" (62), and despite that fact that she is too in love with him, the knight chooses not to say anything, for "despite the friendship that blossoms between them, or perhaps because of that very friendship, he finds himself so humbled and speechless" (62). However, eventually he asks her "Is it better to speak or die?" (62). Elio, unlike the knight from his book, seems to be incapable of declaring his love for Oliver even though for him, the truth couldn't be any clearer:

> But what I'd spoken into his pillow revealed to me that, at least for a moment, I'd rehearsed the truth, gotten it out into the open, that I had in fact enjoyed speaking it, and if he happened to pass by at the very moment I was muttering things I wouldn't have dared speak to my own face in the mirror, I wouldn't have cared, wouldn't have minded—let him know, let him see, let him pass judgment too if he wants—just don't tell the world—even if you're the world for me right now, even if in your eyes stands a horrified, scornful world. That steely look of yours, Oliver, I'd rather die than face it once I've told you. (63)

McClennen argues in her book *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures* (2004) that the interaction between power and language gains more relevance when we are dealing with the forced displacement of people, and the places where they are force to head. More than a matter of gaining citizenship, language is a tool that is used in every human interaction, and as memory is used to make the present time clearer by comparison with the past, as previously addressed on chapter one, language is how this negotiation comes to life. Past and present, self and the Other; language becomes, here, a battlefield and an instrument of identity formation at the same time (Chambers 24-25), in a sense that "[T]he way we talk about ourselves determines to a great extent who we are and various languages, together with cultures in which they are embedded, allow us to construct our identity in different ways" (Jarczok 2015).

Nguyen's *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* deals with language and how it affects the very process of the creation and consolidation of memory, and therefore, alters culture and its representation. The author claims that if memories "are not simply images we experience as individuals, but are mass-produced fantasies we share with one another" ("Just Memory"), it becomes crucial to acknowledge that this exchange does not happen equally, for "just as countries and people are not economically at the same level neither are their memories" ("Just Memory"). Nguyen is, in his book, thinking specifically about the Vietnam War and how it is remembered differently by Americans and Vietnamese: "language itself becomes a circuit through which industrial memories circulate, so that English-language products are more accessible than Vietnamese ones ("Just Memory").[64]

To speak would mean for Elio to open his entire world to another one, to bring some else in, an outsider into his most private residence, his mind, for Oliver is already physically inside his home- symbolically a summer house, not a permanent one. In another moment from *Call Me*, Elio ponders about this: "…would I prefer a lifetime of longing provided we both

kept this little Ping-Pong game going: not knowing, not-not knowing, not-not-not knowing? Just be quiet, say nothing, and if you can't say "yes," don't say "no," say "later" (18).

Evoking Boym again, the diasporic intimacy shows us that everything we consider certain about ourselves and our identities is not as solid and God-given as the nostalgic myths of national identity, for example, make them seem to be. Even in our native tongue, we have an accent, or, we are in a constant process of negotiation and identity formation, as already said, the stranger alerts us that this is constantly happening, and not only within the diasporic space. At another moment, Elio said "Perhaps, in this, as with everything else, because I didn't know how to speak in code, I didn't know how to speak at all. I felt like a deaf and dumb person who can't even use sign language… That was the extent of my code" (17). Here, while speaking about declaring or not his feelings, the character is also coming to terms to the facts that this inability to communicate was always with him, "We had just left the dinner table where my father, as was his habit these days, had been urging me to try to go out with friends more often…" (22).

In *Narratives of Place, Belonging, and Language*, Nic (2012) argues that "Our lives have changed, and we are continually dealing with new circumstances" (4), meaning that the negotiation between interior and exterior, home and abroad, and so forth, never stops. Here Nic uses Hoffman (1995): "Our childhood homes and mental landscapes can never be recovered: 'We feel there is an ideal sense of belonging, of community, of attunement with others and at-homeness with ourselves, that keeps eluding us.' (Hoffman 1999: 39)" (4). Furthermore, being "at home" becomes a problematic phrase for Boym (2017), for the state of being at home would only appear when one is *not* at home: "When we are home, we don't need to talk about it. "To be at home"— byt' doma— is a slightly agrammatical expression in many languages. It's as if it can't be learned; we just know how to say it in our own native tongue" (80).

Thus, it becomes necessary to highlight two things: language, as memories, is embodied in the Exile, for the displaced person always takes the mother tongue along with him or her during the journey. And language is not only used for communication but also to create a sense of belonging. If we think about Italy's late unification, for example, there is a correlation between the late formation of the country and the many linguistic groups present in what eventually became that country's borders. In one's native language, one can be *at home,* even when away from it. However, languages unlike memories, are also "migrant by nature" (Nic 4) as they "borrow from here to everywhere" (4). In *Call Me by Your Name,* it is because of that migrant nature of language that one of the most erotic moments of the novel occurs.

"I shall never forget watching him from my table as he climbed the small ladder wearing his red bathing trunks, taking forever to pick the ripest apricots," (35) Elio wanders, as Oliver brings to the table some fresh-picked apricots. The scene continuous "Touching the apricot was like touching him. He would never know, just as the people we buy the newspaper from and then fantasize about all night have no idea that this particular inflection on their face or that tan along their exposed shoulder will give us no end of pleasure when we're alone." (35). What almost sounds like the confession of a hidden desire, however, becomes in this same chapter an etymology class and the very idea of language and its capacity of change exactly because it migrates:

> In fact, he knew more about apricots than we did—their grafts, etymology, origins, fortunes in and around the Mediterranean. At the breakfast table that morning, my father explained that the name for the fruit came from the Arabic, since the word—in Italian, albicocca, abricot in French, aprikose in German, like the words "algebra," "alchemy," and "alcohol"—was derived from an Arabic noun combined with the Arabic article al- before it. The origin of albicocca was al-birquq. My father, who

> couldn't resist not leaving well enough alone and needed to top his entire performance with a little fillip of more recent vintage, added that what was truly amazing was that, in Israel and in many Arab countries nowadays, the fruit is referred to by a totally different name: mishmish… 'It's a long story, so bear with me, Pro.' Suddenly Oliver had become serious. 'Many Latin words are derived from the Greek. In the case of 'apricot,' however, it's the other way around; the Greek takes over from Latin. The Latin word was praecoquum, from pre-coquere, pre-cook, to ripen early, as in 'precocious,' meaning premature. The Byzantines borrowed praecox, and it became prekokkia or berikokki, which is finally how the Arabs must have inherited it as al-birquq.' All I kept thinking of was apricock precock, precock apricock. (36-37)

Another example on how Aciman goes even further in Chambers' argument of language as a sense of belonging (1994:22-24) appears in *Harvard Square*. As mentioned in the previous topic of this chapter, Café Algiers became a contrafact home for those who did not have one; it was because the place was always full of immigrants speaking in their respective native tongues that the feeling of being a foreigner ceased to exist. At Café Algiers, *Harvard Square'*s main characters spoke French and by speaking French they shared something although immaterial, that was essential for men: being a part of something, (be)longing somewhere: "what finally cemented our friendship from the very start was our love of France and of the French language, or, better yet, of the idea of France—because real France we no longer had much use for, nor it for us" (56). Going back to Ahmed's *Strange Encounters*, the feeling of displacement, and their narratives, becomes a question of memory (84), for the past becomes the firmest thing the exile has to build his narrative and identity upon. "Perhaps it wasn't even France, or the romance of France we loved" continues the narrator of *Harvard Square* "perhaps France was the nickname we gave our desperate reach for something firm in

our lives—and for both of us the past was the firmest thing we had to hold on to, and the past in both cases was written in French" (Aciman 56).

Zur (2004) via Lotfi (2014), concludes her thoughts on the interaction between silence and forgetting, as well as their importance to the act of remembering by claiming that "[silence and forgetting] are present absences or negatives spaces which shape what is remembered. This has a communal aspect, in that there is a tacit agreement about what is remembered or forgotten and the "forgotten" is …shared as what is remembered" (144). With all this given, for both authors, "this makes recalling a healing method, not only for psychiatrists, but for writers and their fictional characters too" (144).

CHAPTER THREE

THE EXILE'S SHADOW SELF AND THE INTERMEDIATE SPACE

"Did I wanted to be like him? Did I want to be him?"[65]

"He was my screen, my mentor, my voice. Perhaps…the life I was desperate to try out."[66]

"I like being unlike me, hoped that this unlike me was not an ephemeral visit…"[67]

"… he and I could be equals."[68]

Throughout the chapters of this research, one topic reappears constantly: diasporic narratives, perhaps for being deeply connected to an individual's personal experiences, refer both to present and past at the same time. This, also as already mentioned in chapters one and two, is only possible because we read our own past experiences in the present time, with our present minds; therefore, we are beings inscribed in a specific social and historical context (Smith and Watson 2010; Lowenthal 2016). So, to write, read and analyze life writings is only possible using a dual approach to time: the constant negotiation between memories and their interpretation of identity, as differentiation and likeness; of space, as here and there; as foreign, and citizen and so forth. Smith and Watson (2010) use James Olney's readings of Augustine's memories and his dual approach to the text, processual (time), and archeological (place), as an example of this complexity.

Hustvedt (2017), when writing about the complex interaction between the self and others, comments that for Hegel "the road to self-consciousness, the ability to know what we know, turns on a combative relation with another person" ("Becoming Others" 370). As she goes on to argue about the importance of understanding the place where this interaction between self and the other takes place and how this phenomenon works, Hustvedt claims that the only permanent thing is a constant state of negotiation for "there is no subjective meaning … achieved alone" (373). She, then, traces this interaction back to the Lacanian mirror stage theory and Winnicott theories on infant development, using the interaction between a patient

and his or her analyst as a metaphor to how literature can help us deal with the alterity of our surroundings.

In this chapter, the works of André Aciman will be read through this dual-lens approach: how the self, whether it is in his memoir, essays or fictional works, is constantly negotiating his identity with the others and with his surroundings, and how being an exile influences and changes this negotiation.

3.1- The intermediate space

One line of thought is common to all the theoretical works read so far in this thesis, the fact that any subjective-ness is only possible through the recognition of one's own body and its location in space and time (Hustvedt 2017, Smith and Wilson 2010). In this sense, the diasporic subject becomes a perfect example of this battlefield in which identity is formed and constantly challenged[69].

Hustvedt (2017), as mentioned before, traces this interaction all the way to Lacan's mirror stage theory and his dialogue with Hagel's philosophy on alterity. Lacan is writing about the process of the identification of a child with his or her own reflection in the mirror, or the ideal-I / ideal-ego. Hustvedt's reading of Lacan suggests that the mirror stage had simply turned Hagel's theories of self-consciousness into an "intrapsychic drama", for "Hegel's others became Lacan's child's self-image in the mirror" (373). Hustvedt is speaking from a writer turned into psychiatric and psychological researcher's point of view, this is relevant because what leads her to Lacan's and Hegel's works is a need to better understand how her own fictional writing process happens and the interaction between memory and fiction. In the same essay, Hustvedt also brings the intermediate space concept into light by using it as a metaphor for the fiction-writing process.

Winnicott also used this child development stage to write about a "blurred zone" or "in-between-ness" (Hustvedt 374), where the interaction between the child and the mother

would take place. Freud, on the other hand, spoke about a place between the self and the other where every interaction would happen, and called it the intermediate area. For Hustvedt this space would be where the work of the artist would take place: "The making of arts takes place in a borderland between the self and the other[70]" (374). It is, then, one of this thesis concerns, to understand how this phenomenon could be applied to a migrant subject and how the idea of an intermediate space and its borders could be applied when reading non-returning narratives.

What Hustvedt argued in "Becoming Others" can also be perceived in Gloria Anzaldua's borderline and mestiza's theories, even though the author, one of the key names in the Chicano movement, as well as queer studies in America Latina, spoke from a very different place from Hustvedt's. Anzaldua's boundaries were both geographical, the Rio Grande area, and psychological, and it was from this context that she wrote about the double-consciousness of mestizos, and about a transitional space where the migrant self would clash with the dominant culture. For Anzaldua "the US-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the third world grates against the first and bleeds… to form a third country – a border culture" (*Borderlands/Frontera: The New Mestiza* 3). The border becomes metaphorically a place for "los atravesados" as Alzandua writes: "the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the normal" (3). Alzandua's borderland appears, then, like a reading of Brah Avta's diasporic spaces, but focused on the violence, physical and psychological, that comes with the exchange of people, information, culture, and capital that Avta wrote about.

Rosi Braidotti goes even further and writes in her book *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* about the multiplicity of those diasporic spaces and how the late stage of capitalism is creating a much more complex diasporic scenario. For Braidotti we are living in "the historical era of generalized nomadism" (59) as less stable economic models, the rising of

new fascist and populist regimes, alongside severe climate changes come to play as new and major factors behind the reasons for people to leave their homeland. The complexity that cannot be neglected, however, is that the same reason forcing people to leave their homes is the same one linked to a new wake of nostalgic-patriotism and questioning of the place of the foreigner within culture and society. This late capitalism contradiction is discussed by Cohen (1997) and read by Braidotti (2017), for globalization is a state deeply connected with "the deterritorialization of social identity that challenges the hegemony of nation-states" (Braidotti 2017: 60).

Using Cohen (1997) and Avta (1996) as points of departure, Braidotti, then, argues that this position of the diasporic experiences within society and its never stopping changes and globalization makes this in-between-ness place a fertile ground for the bodies of marginalized people to be inscribed in a regime of violence (60). As shown in Chapter One of this thesis, one cannot talk about diaspora without understanding the different kinds of rootlessness and how this same difference will affect directly how people will be treated. Braidotti comments on what she calls "disposable bodies": "The 'disposable' bodies of women, youths and others who are racialized or marked off by age and marginality come to be inscribed with particularly ruthless violence in this regime of power" (60). The intermediate space, the in-between, the borderland, *frontera* or diasporic space, whatever we call it, is situated between two or more cultures, between a self and an Other, however, it is inscribed within society; therefore, its mechanisms of exploration, negotiation, evaluation of lives and social movements will also be transferred to this space. Echoing Foucault's idea that there is no place outside power; not in language, not in society, not in literature or any artistic form.

Two episodes narrated in Anzaldua's *Borderlands/Frontera: The New Mestiza* act as a perfect example of the violence mentioned previously; the first one is about a deportation case of a Latino American boy that was without his papers when he was approached by the

immigration officers: “He tried to smile when he looked back at us, to raise his fist. But I saw the shame pushing his head down, I saw the terrible weight of shame hunch his shoulders” (4). The author continues: “They deported him to Guadalajara by plane. The furthest he'd ever been to Mexico was Reynosa, a small border town opposite Hidalgo, Texas … Pedro walked all the way to the Valley” (4).

The violence in this interaction is not connected to the common talking point of illegally crossing a frontier and then becoming not only an alien[71] but also a criminal in the destined place. The interaction between Pedro, the boy from the story above, and his fellow citizens in America never took under consideration that he was born there because he was not white and didn’t speak English properly.[72] We go back then, to Chamber’s violence of alterity (*Migrancy, Culture and Identity* 4) and identity intersectionality, (Braidotti 2012; Smith and Watson 2010), because different identity concepts do not add, but rather intersect, in a sense that to speak as a lesbian Latina, for example, is not the same as to speak as a lesbian and then as a Latina, but as both intersecting each other at the same time.

The second example comes when Anzaldua writes about a long process of the occupation of the Mexican territory from the Mexican American war up to Texan militia creation and their use of violence to dispossess the Mexican that stayed by then on the American side of the new frontier between the two countries.[73] Here, the author mentioned how some families could not even pay respect to their departed ones, for several cemeteries were between the taken areas: “there was a fence around the cemetery, chained and padlocked by the ranch owners of the surrounding land. We couldn't even get in to visit the graves, much less bury her there… The sign reads: "Keep out. Trespassers will be shot" (8).

3.1.1- Aciman’s diasporic spaces

Though each diasporic narrative is unique in its own way, by approaching this subject, the presence of an intermediate area, or a borderland between the self and the Other, a place

where their interaction and exchange take place, we realize that there is something bigger and common to those narratives and what, for instance, makes it possible to see mirror images in the works of two completely different bodies of works such as Aciman's and Anzaldua's. This similarity can be explained by a Edmond Jabès' *A foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Book,*[74] quote made by Chambers (1994) when addressing this alterity: "the foreigner allows you to be yourself by making a foreigner of you" (1).

Jabès' sentence seems to sum up perfectly Aciman's novels and I want to begin this analysis with his 2013 book *Harvard Square*, a novel about the friendship of a young Jewish émigré who is an Ivy-league student and an Algerian taxi driver who works in the Harvard campus' area. Kalaj, the taxi driver, and the narrator, the unnamed Jewish student, meet in a place called Café Algiers and their first interaction not only takes place in a place that despite being located in the United States couldn't be any less American, but also in a foreign language, as their first exchanged words are in French as seen in: 'How come you speak French if you're not French?' … 'For the same reason *you* speak French' (Italics by the author. 30) later the same paragraph shows us: "Anyone born in the colonies would have known right away the answer to that. He was definitely playing" (30).

In this scene, Café Algiers is the intermediate area, where Kalaj and the narrator using French as the intermediate code, negotiating how they present themselves to one another, as well as their understanding of each other; the Café Algiers assume, therefore the position of what Hustvedt called we-between-ness (374). Identities, cultures, and habits come together and clash with one another in this space. Hence, the two men's use of French shows not only a shared colonial past, but its appropriation and ensuing use proves how in language "there is also a sense of belonging (Chambers 24): "He'd been here for six months only… he threw out a word in Arabic at me. I threw back another...feeling the ground for how to improvise a tentative pontoon bridge" (31); the scene and the process of identification of an original point

of departure – one of the diasporic narratives' fetishes- continues: "'Perfect accent… even if it's Egyptian Arabic… Jewish?' 'Moslem' I replied" (31). Language and its provided sense of belonging are a key topic in Aciman's body of work, as it was properly addressed in the chapter two.

Café Algiers is described at two different times in the novel; the first one, in the narrator's present, when he takes his son[75] to visit Harvard in hopes that he would eventually choose the school that he had attended many years ago, and in his memories later in the novel. In the prologue, we read the following description: "…Café Algiers had moved from downstairs to upstairs, though it's green logo hadn't changed" (9), and it is while looking at the Algiers' logo that, in a Proustian fashion, the memory of that "summer of 1977" when the narrator used to spend his days "in this small coffee shop" that unlike Harvard, "reminded [him]…of the Middle East"; a place that the narrator "though to be put behind" (11).

These exchanging spaces appear throughout Aciman's body of work, and another example I want to dissect in this chapter takes place in an unnamed city[76] in Italy where two men, Elio and Oliver, fall in love with each other, in his novel *Call Me by Your Name*. The novel is narrated through Elio's point of view as he remembers his and Oliver's love story,[77] and it is through his narration that we begin to see that summer in that house as a space where they will negotiate not only intimacy but also identity, for it is only after meeting Oliver that Elio begins to really see and understand how he deals with his own Judaism.

About this topic, we read: "with the exception of my family, he was probably the only Jew who had ever set foot in B (19). Elio, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, goes on and states that "we" (he and his family) "wore our Judaism as people almost everywhere in the world: under the shirt, not hidden, but tucked away" (19). Oliver, on the other hand, could not be more carefree about his Jewish heritage: "But it was the gold necklace and the Star of David with a golden mezuzah on his neck that told me here was something more compelling

than anything I wanted from him, for it bound us … transcended all differences" (19). This likeness trumps everything else that makes them different from each other. All the things that happen in the novel: their romance, their coming out and coming of age, only happen because Elio identified Oliver's Jewishness first. "I saw his star almost immediately during his first day with us" (19); then, Elio continues, "what baffled me was that he didn't seem to care or notice that I wore one too. Just as he probably didn't care or notice each time my eyes wandered along his bathing suit and tried to make out the contour of what made us brothers in the desert" (19).

Thus, identity negotiations do not simply happen as a give and take exchange, but rather as something far more complex that often generates a third thing, or a "third country" as Anzaldua suggested in her book *Borderlands/Frontera*. On Oliver's background, we read that "He had lived long enough in small towns in New England to know what it felt like to be the odd Jew out" (20); complementary about their process of falling in love, Aciman uses another space metaphor as seen in: "this is like coming home, like coming home after many years away among Trojans and Lestrygonians" (15), the metaphor continues: "like coming home to a place where everyone is like you… coming home as when everything falls into place and you realize that for seventeen years all you'd been doing was fiddling with the wrong combination" (15); or in the words of Jabès' *A Foreigner Carrying* : "Only what fits, like a key in a lock, is like itself. Reciprocal affinity molds us" (1).

Eight White Nights gives us another example of such intermediate space and the struggle one may face in hopes that he is allowed to enter another's space. Here, the narrator had just left a party where he met Clara, the woman he is bound to fall in love within the next few days. "I left – I don't know why I'd left. There are so many reasons. There are no reasons" (85), says the narrator echoing a recurrent topic in Aciman's novels: desiring as something more important than actually having. "To leave something for later" (85), he justifies his

departure. However, "[he] want[s] to be with you [Clara]. And with your friends. In your world. Your house …be like you, of you, with you" (85). Symbolically enough, they have met in a third space. Yet, he is more of a stranger to that place than she will ever be, for despite the Christmas party in which they met had taken place in a common friend's apartment, she lives in the same building. He, on the other hand, had to cross the city during a snowstorm to get there. He, then, comes to a melancholically conclusion about that night: "she was the face I put on my life and how I live it. Tonight, she was my eyes to the world looking back at me" (90).

3.2- "Is there identity in dispersal"[78]: the shadow-self

In Aciman's "Parallax", we read, "for me to write, I need to work my way out of one home, consider another, and find the no-man's-land in between" (198). Home, as Ahmed (2000) argued, becomes a fetish for the exile exactly because home is not simply a construction site one departs from, or even one is trying to get to; as Aciman, reading Cavafy, suggests: Alexandria is where "I'll always end up, even if I never come back" ("Alexandria: The Capital of Memory" 21). As I stated when writing about diasporic spaces, the home one writes about gives the writer a sense of being the real one, but, it is nothing but a shadow image of a home.

Home, then, is deeply connected with the exile's identity, for identity and its representation via writing, circles an absence. To have no home is a home (Ahmed 78), or as Aciman puts it in "Parallax", "the exile no longer knows what he's exiled from" (190). Then, if home becomes a counterfactual home, how would this apply to the exile's self? How do we perceive this counterfactual life and identity? What is this life for the paper as Aciman wrote in "Square Lamartine"?

Thus far, I have argued that memory is a key element of the identity formation and consolidation (Ahmed 2000; Chambers 1994; Hustvedt 2017; Lowenthal 2016), especially

when reading a migrant narrative. Hustvedt takes this even further by arguing that memories and fiction are not opposite to each other, for fiction would be linked to our brain's ability to project ourselves in the past (2017:387). Can this projection, then, be seen as a shadow through which in the most Platonic way, we see shape ourselves in the present?

Still in "Parallax", we read: "I need to go to one André, unwrite that André, then go looking for the middle André, whose voice … approximate the voice of an André able to camouflage all telltales signs that English is not his mother tongue" (198). Evoking a passage from Hustvedt's essay "Why One Story and Not Another?" characters can be understood as the author's selves (389); for the author "to write or to read a novel means becoming others, while knowing I am still myself. Where do I end and where do the characters begin? is not a simple question" ("Becoming Others" 377). Still on this matter, Hustvedt uses one episode from her novel *What I Loved* (2013) as an anecdote: "In the following conversation from my third novel … Violet Blom has just told the narrator, Leo Hertzberg, an erotic story about herself and two men and proposes a way to think about the self in relation to others" ("Becoming Others" 369). Violet says: "Descartes was wrong. It isn't: I think therefore I am. It's: I am because you are" ("Becoming Others" 369). Drawing on this episode, Hustvedt asks: "Where do fictional characters come from, after all? I am not Violet or Leo, and yet they emerged from me, or rather, from an internal geography made from my experience with others, both conscious and unconscious. They are nor remembered persons but figments, which I believe are born of a self-other relation" ("Becoming Others" 370).

The idea of a shadow self or mirror image and projection through which one could face the many identities' intersections within oneself cannot be addressed without a psychological reading of these themes. Here, I would like to focus on Jung's archetypal shadow-self and its main difference from Freud's and Lacan's take on the same subject. Initially, Lacan's mirror stage dealt with an early child development stage when it becomes

able to recognize the reflection in the mirror as belonging to him or her. Although this process happens through identification, Lacan also argued that this process is connected to a wrong or false recognition, for one is not what is actually seen as a reflection, in a sense that we become bound to the image we see and spend our lives attempting to correspond to; hence, the first other we must face is the other reflected in the mirror.

Jung, on the other hand, posited what has been called the double, alter ego, or doppelganger, and focused on a shadow that we all project. For Jung, one of the main causes of distress is the constant struggle between who we perform as being ourselves to the others, how we project ourselves to others and what we try to hide; metaphorically, we get an image of a shadow that appears because there is light, not despite it. Here, the shadow-self does not have a negative connotation as in Freud's psychology, for the suffering comes from the negotiation between light and shadow (returning to the metaphor), not from the shadow itself – I believe to be impossible to read these theories and not to see the similarities with the third spaces or diasporic spaces theories that have already been addressed in this chapter. As Jung argued in his "Good and Evil in Analytical Psychology": "To confront a person with his shadow is to show him his own light" an from this confrontation, the self can understand itself, "Once one has experienced a few times what it is like to stand judgingly between the opposites, one begins to understand what is meant by the self" (*Civilization in Transition* 872).

The following passage from Aciman's *Eight White Nights*, in which the narrator, following one of Aciman's most recurring literary devices, wonders in a freezing park bench about a conversation he did not have, and never will, with Clara, the woman he is in love with, acts as a sort of entrance door to how this other self, this shadow version that we all take with us throughout our lives, appears in his writings: "And it hit me that more was being said in this short conversation between our shadow selves in this lonely park than anything we'd

spoken all night. A lovers' colloquy, as in Verlaine's poem, where both our shadows touch, the rest just waits…this wasn't new. I'd been doing this for years (92-93).

Smith and Watson, via Susan Stanford Friedman's *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* and Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", show that identity needs to have some shared background and that it is a two-way street between creation and performance, being result and cause at the same time. This performance also always involves a social exchange. An example of this shared construction appears in Aciman's *Harvard Square* when the narrator realizes that every certitude about himself is being questioned by the simple presence of a different person, who despite this difference, shares a similar background as someone from a colonial country. The already porous borderland between the self and his surroundings (Hustvedt 2017) becomes even thinner as they get close to each other. "He was an Arab, I was a Jew. Otherwise we could have swapped roles in a second" (51-52). However, after listing their differences, our narrator recognizes that "I envied him. I wanted to become him. I wanted to learn from him. He was a man. I wasn't sure what I was" (52). All this led us up to the following confession that echoes Boym's off-modern and ruinophilia theories: "He was the voice, the missing link to my past, the person I might have grown up to be had life taken a different turn" (52).

This makes us confront the fact that, as Hustvedt argued in "Why One Story and Not Another?," through fiction one could consolidate a memory, which is closely related to Rancière's thoughts on how, for example, the pyramids became the memory and not a memory of something, the monuments not only resist time but also tell a story about the past. Using this same line of thought, can the author through its characters firm up his own identity? Still in *Harvard Square*, we read:

> As I watched my own reflection on the glass panels of the Green Line car heading out to Newton that evening, I kept asking myself: Was this really me, and were these

> really my features standing out on this totally alien Boston scenery? Who was I? How many masks could I be wearing at the same time? Who was I when I wasn't looking? Was I simply a being without shape, ready to be molded into what everyone wanted me to be? Or by acquiescing so easily was I simply making up in advance for the treachery I invariably brought to those who trusted the face? I looked at my face against this strange Boston background and saw a lawyer who over tips the waiter at lunch because he knows he'll be vicious in court that afternoon. I saw a husband who buys his wife expensive jewelry—not after cheating on her, but before finding the person who'll help destroy his marriage. I saw a priest who absolves everyone because he has lost his faith and no longer trusts in his vocation. (244-45)

Identity can be approached by likeness and differentiation. During the early stages of development, we learn the extension of our own body and the limits of this embodiment by differentiating ourselves from others, but, throughout our lives, it is the likeness and shared experiences that help to consolidate our beliefs about ourselves (Baumeister 1999). It is by seeing his reflection, metaphorically in Kalaj, and literally in the glass panel of a car, as described above, that shows to the novel's narrator how the negotiation between him and Harvard, between him and America, between Judaism and Christianity, was really taking place in his life. "Like an actor who wants to sit alone in his booth after all the lights are out and everyone's gone home, I wanted to take my time removing the makeup, the wig, the false teeth, the skin glow, the eyelashes, take time to recover myself and see the face, not the mask, not the mask again…"(247-48). This moment of self-realization continues: "I wanted to talk to myself in French, in my own French accent, speak as those who brought me into this world had taught me to speak. I was tired of English" (248).

Symbolically enough, even in this extreme personal moment from the narrative, all these realizations are also mirrored by Kalaj, who is also negotiating, between Islam and

Christianity, between himself and the America that is trying to expel him because he does not have a proper visa, but still, an America he desperately want to be a part of, so much that he spends his days trying to hate it, as seen in: “The munificent dinner sold him on the wonders of America. He never ate pork, but the sight of the juicy roasted ham … [was] simply too much for him to resist” (252-53); or in “As soon as he was hooked…” by the American lifestyle “he became weak. Until then, he had flaunted his hatred of America because it dignified his pariah status. He could survey the New World from a quarantined balcony, but he couldn’t get near, much less touch it, so he shouted curses at it” (253)

CONCLUSION

"I do not ask: 'Who are you?' but 'What do you bring me?'"

"I bring you nothing but what I am." was the answer."[79]

Time passes and the changes caused by it are the only real constant in life, or evoking Heraclitus, the constancy of things lie in the fact that they are continuously changing; always in transit, neither stuck where they once were, or how they once were, nor where they intend to go, or hope to become. Janus, the double-faced Roman god appears, then, as a metaphor for this condition, which has remained at the center of this research: the in-between-ness that despite being common to all of us, is a stronger feeling for some people. Here, I borrow Boym's argument that while longing is universal, nostalgia, on the other hand, is not. Moreover, nostalgia demands an archeology of place and time, a dual approach to reveal its fragments. Thus, like Janus looking both at the past and present at the same time, I intend to divide this conclusion into two segments, or fragments; the first one being on André Aciman's body of work, this thesis' case of study and the second one, on how and why to represent a trauma as exile in literature, or art in general, matters.

- **First fragment**

In "Pensione Eolo," Aciman attempts to understand how his own exile is manifested in his narratives, and while doing that, all his literary devices are brought to light; so, by reading this essay, one can sum up his main literary concerns. The author begins his essay like this: "In 1984 I thought I'd be living in Europe. After more than fifteen years in the United States, the time had finally come for me to return to a continent I had long consider my home" (134). Boym, as discussed in this study's chapter "Impossible Homecoming," asks us: how can anyone be homesick about a place that one has never had (*The Future of Nostalgia*)? This idea echoes in Ahmed's *Strange Encounters* and her thoughts on how home became a fetish on exile narratives, for the displaced is always between here and there (78-9), always in a

state of yonder-ness, as seen in Siri Hustvedt's essay "Yonder," published on her collection *Yonder: Essays*.

As discussed in this thesis, Aciman is no strange to any of these theories, and as a matter of fact, seems to partake in them as his literary project: "I eventually managed to remind myself that, once in Europe, I'd be missing Christmas in New York that year" ("Pensione Eolo" 134). Europe was desired because Europe was an absence, it was what was missing while living in America; in a similar way what made Alexandria a constant in his works was being forced to flee the city. Alexandria became a muse only when unreachable. Aciman continues his deliberation and claims that he now sees his home as a "purely intellectual realization that he has no home" (141). As also seen in Chapters One and Two, home is not a real construction site in those narratives, but rather a "fantasy of belonging" (Ahmed 89).

In this attempt to create a counter-narrative of his memory (Foucault 2012), Aciman dives into nostalgic waters, and, as Boym (2017) pointed out in her book *The Off-Modern*, ruins and their representation and interpretation become a constant for the displaced and nostalgic writers, because they both mourns and celebrate the past and its memories at the same time: In "Pensione Eolo," ruins appear as little souvenirs being prepared to be taken with Aciman on an eventual trip, " Before I knew what I was doing, I had begun to jot down my own "Metropolitan Diary," little entries that tried to capture life and love on the Upper West Side. These were my Zettelschriften, snatches and snapshots of what was to be my own portable New York" (136). It is from these nostalgic recollections that a counter-memory, a memory of a past that never actually was, but a memory of what things might have been like, an off-narrative – as I proposed to call them – is born:

> The mail here is unspeakably slow, and my lifeline to New York dries up every so many weeks. There is no local library. I must subscribe to *The New Yorker*, *The New*

> *York Review of Books*, and *New York* magazine. My mind turns back to the late sixties, when, as a student newly arrived in the United States, I continued to purchase French and Italian magazines so as not to let go of Europe, knowing all along, however, that I'd unavoidably lose touch and that despite my promises to hold on to the old, the new invariably had ways of demoting old things. I had already seen it happen once before, when, almost against my will, as an adolescent new to Italy, I had gradually begun to let go of Alexandria in favor of Rome. ("Pensione Eolo 135)

As Seen in chapter two, Aciman's narratives always have their main characters calling up the past in order to make sense of their present life and selves, an experience shared between those characters and their creator, an exile himself. We see this right in his novels' first lines: in *Call Me by Your Name*, we read: "Later!' The word, the voice, the attitude…It is the first thing I remember about him, and I can hear still today. *Later*!" (3). In *Eight White Nights*, "Halfway through dinner, I knew I'd replay the whole evening in reverse…" (3). *Harvard Square*, as mentioned before, evokes the importance of post-memory narratives by beginning and ending with a father trying to tell his son about his days as a young émigré in Harvard, "Can we just leave?' I'd never heard my son saying anything like this…" (1). Finally, in *Enigma Variations*, we read: "I've come back for him. These are the words I wrote down in my notebook when I finally spotted San Giustiniano from the deck of my ferryboat" (3).

As Chambers (1994), while writing about migrancy and its effects on identity, claimed that identity is formed on the move, for the migrant has one of his or her feet in one place, here, and the other, there: this image also appears in "Pensione Eolo" as seen in:

> I am not caught between two points. I am two points caught in the same spot. Correction: I am two points caught in different spots. This may explain why I am always fond of using the image, the figure, of two foci in an ellipse, or of the two banks of a river, or of the many strands in a cat's cradle that always manage to

> reproduce generations of patterns with baffling regularity. The figure in all this is always the same: me tussling between two shadow centers. (138)

Finally, the shadow projection that happens, through and because of the unhealable rift (Said 2000) caused by the exile experience, is explicitly used throughout Aciman's entire body of work, which portrays his characters trying to grasp their full essence, their full self by mirroring themselves on each other; on a surface level, echoing Plato's soul mate and the search for completeness theories. Aciman seems to be also aware of what Chambers and Lowenthal theorized about: just like memories, are in a constant process of being read, interpreted, reviewed or even altered, in a sense that they tell more about the moment when they are summoned back than about the past itself: our *selves* are not only in a perpetual circle of change, but also constantly negotiating with others and our surroundings. As Lowenthal argued, in his *The Past is a Foreign Country*, we need other's memories to confirm our own, for memory is both individual and collective; so, wouldn't we need also other's identities or selves to confirm our own?

On this topic, in 'Pensione Eolo," we read: "Everything becomes a mirror image of itself and of something else. I am, insofar as I can speak of an I, a tiny thinking image caught in a hall of mirrors, thinking, among other things, about halls of mirrors. I am, for all I know, a hall of mirrors" (138). The description goes on: "My home is a counterhome, and my instincts are counterinstincts…I project these reversals on everything, because it is in finding reversals that I am able to find myself" (140).

To sum up, by being here and there at the same time, Aciman's characters are not really anywhere but stuck in an everlasting odyssey without a promise of home, with only occasional harbors in islands found along the way, but never something definitive: " as I wandered from room to room, thinking that perhaps I should have arrived much earlier tonight, or a bit later, or that I shouldn't have come at all" (3) proclaims *Eight White Night*'s

narrator. Home is an absence, and its counterpart is made on transit, by wandering as Ahmed pointed out. Identity, as mentioned before, also comes from a dual approach, between the self and his surroundings. Aciman writes in “Pensione Eolo”:

> A palintropic reading of the world assumes that one is not quite like others and that to understand others, to be with others, to love others and be loved by them, one must think other thoughts than those that come naturally to one. To be with others I must be the opposite of who I am; to understand others, I must read the opposite of what I see, say the opposite of what I mean, think the opposite of what I feel, ask for what I do not want. I might as well be someone else. (140)

By differentiation, Aciman’s characters search for clues on who they really are, but this is never a definite answer for the exile writer and his narratives. Here, I would like to evoke Barthes and his writing on how the other remains unknowable, in a sense that, just like the Lacanian real is what always escapes being represented; the other is never at arms-length, as we read in *A Lover’s Discourse*:

> I am often struck by the obvious fact that the other is impenetrable, intractable, not to be found; I cannot open up the other, trace back the other's origins, solve the riddle. Where does the other come from? Who is the other? I wear myself out, I shall never know… "I can't get to know you" means "I shall never know what you really think of me." I cannot decipher you because I do not know how you decipher me. (134)

- **Second fragment**

Then, Janus asks us also to look ahead and by doing that, this thesis has made me question myself while writing it, the place for this study in the present society, which reminded me of an essay by the writer and professor Kristen Case I had read last year. In her essay “How Thoreau and My father Taught Me That Literature is a Public Good” Case writes: “One of my fondest memories of my father, an economics professor, is the mischievous way he would ask

me, an English professor, exactly what literature was good for."[80] The text is both a love letter to her dead father and a rumination on the place of literature in a more neoliberal society through a thoughtful analysis of Thoreau's *Walden*. So, what is literature good for and should we take everything by its monetary value?

Case goes on and writes that those conversations on literature and research in humanities went on until her father's death, and while writing an introduction on a 200th anniversary edition of *Walden*, by revisiting those memories, she got more than an answer: a way to reach her father's memory and deal with her grief. "Perhaps not surprisingly, this time around the book seemed to be almost entirely about two things: grief and economics. I had known, of course, that Thoreau played with economic concepts throughout the opening chapter of *Walden* (titled, in fact, "Economy")" (Case). And then, we read: "with the help of the textbook my father co-authored, *Principles of Economics*… it occurred to me that "Economy" was less a spoof of than a deep engagement with the central questions of the dismal science" (Case).

Case writes not only about the importance of *Walden* to literature in general, but the recently discovered importance to her. Eventually, she concludes that memory could be what literature is for and time, as Thoreau stated on his chapter called "Economy", is valuable, maybe the most valuable thing of them all. We give our time to work, to family, to relationships, to college; thus, memory is a way to claim some of it back, and by doing that, understanding better the present.

However, Case did not only write because of *Walden* or her father. Her question, as she made clear in the text also came after Donald J. Trump, the 45th president of the United States attempted to eliminate both NEA and NEH.[81] Finishing her text in a fashion that no paraphrase could do justice, she states:

> The justification for the elimination of humanities departments from public colleges across the country echoes this logic, reiterating the old lie that literature is a fundamentally elitist endeavor. Re-reading *Walden* taught me in the starkest way imaginable that, on the contrary, books fill a basic human need: they store the words of the dead so that we can find them when we most need them. This function is as vital as air, as vital as water. It's what literature is good for, exactly. (Case)

As a final argument, I would like to confirm Case's point by going back one of Adorno's most famous quotes: "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (Adorno 1983:34). The sentence that was born out of a criticism by the author on the Jewish poet Paul Celan and his claim that there would not be a thing that poetry would give up representing, and that language would be strong enough to do so. For Adorno, language would fail, therefore, poetry would too. Thus, one would be writing poetry *in spite of* the Holocaust, in Adorno's and Celan's case, not because of it. One tries to put some experiences on paper, knowing that the real will always escape, but also knowing the importance of doing so in spite of things.

NOTES

[1]. Apenas as obras *Call Me by Your Name* e *Enigma Variations* foram publicadas no Brasil, por isso apenas seus respectivos títulos aparecem aqui na versão traduzida.

[2]. Boym, Svetlana. *The Off-Modern*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Inc., 2017. Print. P. 3.

[3]. Solomon, Andrew. *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity*. Scribner, New York. 2012. P. 677

[4]. Source: Walt Whitman Archive. https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/poems/27 .

[5]. Krasznahorkai, László. *Satantango*. Milano: Bompiani, 2016. Print. P. 133

[6]. Joseph Brodsky, a Russian poet exiled from the Soviet Union.

[7]. Professor of the department of English translation from the Islamic Azad University from Tehran.

[8]. See Hustvedt (2017) for more on how the loss of memories in subjects with a degenerative neurological disorder or brain trauma implicates a loss of identity as well.

[9]. The full quotation is: “There is no home. Home is altogether elsewhere. Or to use slightly different words, home is elsewhere in time – which is why exiles grow to like things that have erstwhile and elsewhere written all over them.” Aciman, André. “The Contrafactual Traveler”. *Alibis: Essays on Elsewhere*. New York: Picador, 2012.p.95

[10]. The Cambridge dictionary defines the parallax phenomenon as: “the effect whereby the position or direction of an object appears to differ when viewed from different positions, e.g. through the viewfinder and the lens of a camera.” On his essay, Aciman associates this occurrence with the experience of an exile person. On this topic, he states that: “Parallax is not just a disturbance in vision. It’s a derealizing and paralyzing disturbance in the soul – cognitive, metaphysical, intellectual, and ultimately aesthetic. It is not just about displacement or of feeling adrift *both* in time and space, it is a fundamental misalignment between who you are, might have been, could still be, can’t accept we’ve become, or may never be.” In: Aciman, André. “Parallax”. *Alibis: Essays on Elsewhere*. New York: Picador, 2012.p.189

[11]. On the novel’s first chapter, entitled “First Love”, the narrative takes place in Italy. Paul, the main character and narrator while reminiscing about his youth in Italy, recalls that by then he was still Paolo.

[12]. It was an invasion of Egypt in late 1956 by Israel, followed by the United Kingdom and France to regain Western control of the Suez Canal and to remove Egyptian President Nasser, who had just nationalized the canal. See chapter one.

[13]. For this thesis the novels *Call Me by Your Name* (2007), *Eight White Nights* (2011), *Harvard Square* (2014) and *Enigma Variations* (2017) as well as his memoir *Out of Egypt* (1994) were chosen. But his books of essays on exile and memory *False Papers* (2000), and *Alibis: Essays on Elsewhere* (2011), will eventually be used as a support material for the research.

[14]. Aciman, André. *Call Me by Your Name*. S.l.: PICADOR, 2017. Print. P. 133

[15]. ---. *Harvard Square: A Novel*, 2014. Print. P. 69

[16]. ---. *Eight White Nights*. London: Atlantic, 2011. Print. P. 90

[17]. ---. *Enigma Variations*. 2018. Print. P. 3

[18]. Displacement conversations have now added a new layer to this already enormous problem: climate change. In a report published by *Business Insider*, scientists believe that by the year 2100, ten major cities around the world will become uninhabitable and their respective populations will be forced to migrate. According to this report, Miami and New Orleans are among the most vulnerable cities in the US when it comes to climate disasters. It is believed that they are bound to face huge floods by the end of this century and regarding New Orleans alone, "If sea levels were to rise by just 3 feet, more than 100,000 New Orleans residents — about a third of the city's population — could be inundated.". The other cities mentioned in the article are Chicago, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Shanghai, Beijing, New Delhi, Bangladeshi, and Lagos in Nigeria. Source: https://www.businessinsider.com/cities-that-could-become-unlivable-by-2100-climate-change-2019-2 . For more information on ecocriticism and how literature has been dealing with climate change and its fallout, read Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Fromm and Glotfelty's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (2009), and Moore's *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (2015).

[19]. Source: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states

[20]. The MPI defines as "foreign-born," "people residing in the United States at the time of the population survey who were not US citizens at birth." Therefore, it includes "naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent immigrants, refugees, and asylees". People living in the country with temporary visas or illegal aliens appear here as well. By opposition, "Us-born" refers to people born in one of the 50 States or DC, insular areas, and people born abroad who have at least one parent being an American citizen. The numbers given in this chapter are focused on the racial aspect of US immigration, which is why groups that in the majorly are formed by citizens such as American Indian and Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders appear

here. According to the US National Library of Medicine, race adds a complex layer to census surveys because of the principle of self-identification. Among people belonging to American Indian or Alaska Native, for example, we can find different tribes and ethnic groups who have been naturalized through changes in America's immigration and citizenship laws, and people, unable to provide a sufficient family tree to be fully associated to any of those groups and, subsequently, be granted its citizenship benefits. Even though the numbers are not expressive, someone can identify as belonging to one of the many indigenous groups in North America regarding race, ancestry, ethnicity, and tribal affiliation, and still be considered a foreign-born.
Sources: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/US and https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5967841/ .

[21]. The same data also shows two different aspects of US immigration: the date of entry into the country, and naturalization numbers. On the period of entry, it is estimated that before 1990, 30.7% of the foreign-born population entered the US. 22.3% between 1990-1999, another 25.7% from 2000-2009. And finally, since 2010, 21.3%. According to the naturalization status, by 2017, 49.3% were naturalized, against 50.7% of noncitizens.

[22]. The Pulitzer Prize winner, Viet Thanh Nguyen, wrote in the introduction to a collection of essays that he contributed and edited called *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*, about his and his family's flee from Vietnam to America, and how it is important to clarify that he was a victim of forced displacement and grew up as a refugee and not simply as an immigrant. On this subject we read: "I was once a refugee, although no one would mistake me for being a refugee now. Because of this, I insist on being called a refugee, since the temptation to pretend that I am not a refugee is strong. It would be so much easier to call myself an immigrant, to pass myself off as belonging to a category of migratory humanity that is less controversial, less demanding, and less threatening than a refugee."

[23]. Survey conducted with US adults between April and May of 2018. More data and numbers are available on their website: www.pewsearch.com

[24]. Scott Rempell, "Defining Persecution", available on: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1941006

[25]. According to same Agency, there were almost 26 million of refugees, over 40 million of internally displaced people and 3.5 million asylum-seekers in the world by the last year.

[26]. Ferrando, Francesca. *Narrating Posthumanism*. Utrecht: Frame, 2012. Kindle ed.

[27]. It also states that two thirds of the refugees around the world right now, regardless the reason behind their displacement come from Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia. The organization also highlights the importance to not only set the group named as refugees apart from other immigrant and

expatriated groups, but also divide them between refugee, internally displaced person, stateless person and asylum seeker. This research adopted the terminology used by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees that uses three main classifications for displaced people: internally displaced person, refugee and migrant. The main difference between these groups lies in two aspects: whether or not the person crossed an international border and if this departure was voluntary or forced.

[28]. According to a piece published by the Migration Policy Institute since its Inauguration, Trump's administration has reshaped American immigration policies. Among the changes, it is relevant to highlight that he:

- Banned any citizen from eight Muslim majority countries from entering the US. This topic appears at the center of constant legal battles regarding the constitutionality of Trump's executive order;
- Cancelled the DACA (Deferred action for Childhood Arrival) program.

The full piece of news is available on https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-under-trump-review-policy-shifts

[29]. Available on: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/19/u-s-public-seldom-has-welcomed-refugees-into-country/

[30]. Another example is the populist right-wing party in the US called The Know-Nothings, that acted between 1849 and 1860 that opposed immigrants and Catholics as well as promoted white supremacist values.

[31]. Available on: https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=47 .

[32]. Genesis 12:1. King James Version.

[33]. Carpi and Stierstorfer (2017), while addressing the religious roots of the word diaspora, highlight another episode also from the book of Genesis: The Babel tower, and how by mixing people's languages, God forced them to scatter around the world.

[34]. Genesis 12:2 King James Version.

[35]. Genesis 17:5 "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee." KJV.

[36]. Genesis 14:13 "And there came one that had escaped and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram." KJV.

[37]. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, the Jews that lived in Jerusalem by 597BC were deported after the Chaldeans, or the New-Babylonians conquered the place. It is believed that around 10,000 people were deported and found themselves without a country.

Available on https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-babylonian-exile .

[38]. Available on: https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/faq/judaism-egypt .

[39]. Gamal Abdel-Nasser Hussein was the second president of Egypt, staying in power from the early 50s up to 1970 when he died due to a heart attack.

[40]. State security and love for the motherland appear as a recurrent excuse for authoritarian regimes because it evokes two crucial concepts: a sense of belonging to a community and a greater cause, as Boym suggested in her essay "Nostalgia and Its Discontents", "The danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one. In extreme cases, it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill. Unreflective nostalgia can breed monsters" (10); and it is based on feelings rather than facts. Sara Ahmed also argued on this matter in her essay "The Bond of Belief: From Nervous to Happy Nations" in which we read: "The language of fascism is written in the language of love. Love is made into the primary quality of attachment, what motivates individuals into fascism: 'we hate foreigners because we love our country.'…Love has an enormous political utility: transforming fascist subjects not only into heroic subjects, but also into potential or actual victims of crime as well as those who 'alone' are willing to fight crime. Fascist subjects become freedom fighters, willing to stand against the 'swamp' or 'tide' of the incoming others, who themselves are narrated as hateful: as being not only worthy of our hate, but as full of hate for what we are and have".

[41]. Laskier, Michael M. "Egyptian Jewry under the Nasser Regime, 1956-70." Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 31, no. 3, 1995, pp. 573–619. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4283743.

[42]. The Resolution 149 from December 1948 had at its core the situation of Palestine and its refugees and it called for immediate actions towards mediation to facilitate peace between Israel and the Arab States. The accord proposed actions such as:

- Article 3: Decides that a Committee of the Assembly, consisting of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, shall present, before the end of the first part of the present session of the General Assembly, for the approval of the Assembly, a proposal concerning the names of the three States which will constitute the Conciliation Commission;
- Article 5: Calls upon the Governments and authorities concerned to extend the scope of the negotiations provided for in the Security Council's resolution of 16 November 1948 1/ and to seek agreement by negotiations conducted either with the Conciliation Commission or directly, with a view to the final settlement of all questions outstanding between them;

- Article 11: Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible;

[43]. Formally known as the League of Arab States. It was formed in Cairo on March 1945 by the governments of Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Later the group was joined by Yemen.

[44]. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_General_Assembly_Resolution_194 . For more information on the voting procedures see Resolution 194 (III) at unispal; 11 December 1948 (doc.nr. A/RES/194 (III)).; Votes: United Nations Dag Hammarskjold Library. Available on https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/634ea0efe460133c852570c0006d53f2/f471df8e3f0efb94852574c600524e41?OpenDocument .

[45]. "The Secret History of Israel's War Against Hitler's Scientists". Available on: https://www.newsweek.com/2018/04/20/israel-secret-war-mossad-hitler-scientists-world-war-ii-egypt-nasser-883630.html .

[46]. Personal Interview.

[47]. It is possible to think of Boym's diasporic intimacy as a specific application of the Lacanian concept of *extimacy* which is as neologism coined by Lacan from a wordplay with *exterieur* – exterior, and Freud's *intimité* – intimacy. The concept is a way to better see how psychoanalysis works, for the real, in Lacan, is as much inside as it is outside.
Source: https://nosubject.com/Extimacy.

[48]. Boym also traces in this same chapter a few key topics of the off-modern project: "1. An alternative genealogy and understanding of the modern project, including art, theory, and history. 2. Eccentric geographies, alternative solidarities, and reemergence of cross- cultural public space. 3. Politics and arts of dissent based on pluralities within cultures and identities, and not only external pluralism or multiculturalism. 4. Prospective nostalgia and critical urbanism that engages architectural and social concerns. A new scenography of "modernization through preservation" where ruins cohabit with construction sites. 5. Alternative new media shaped by estranging artistic techniques and not only by new gadgets. Organization of humanistic platforms for knowledge and experience. Neither "hyper-" nor "cyber-" but another prefix that hasn't been invented yet." (*The Off-Modern* 6-7)

[49]. Personal Interview.

[50]. Aciman, Andre. *Call Me by Your Name*, 2019. Print. Pg. 23.

[51]. ---. *Harvard Square: A Novel*, 2014. Print. P. 21

[52]. ---. *Eight White Nights*. London: Atlantic, 2011. Print. P. 123

[53]. ---. *Enigma Variations*. 2018. Print. P. 199

[54]. Hustvedt, Siri. *Yonder: Essays*. New York: Picador, 2013. Internet resource.

[55]. The case is nowadays known as Sugamo Child Abandonment Case. Five children known only as A, B, C, D, and E were left completely by themselves by their mother and were discovered by the police malnourished and traumatized. According to the Wikipedia page of this case, which uses a statement from the Chicago Japanese Consulate as its main source, "Child A, a boy, was born in 1973; Child B in 1981. Child C died soon after birth in 1984. Children D and E were born in 1985 and 1986 respectively. All the children had different fathers. Although it is unclear, it appears that besides Child A, several (perhaps all) of the other children were unregistered. None of the children attended school. In Autumn 1987, having met a new boyfriend, the mother placed Child A in charge of the others, leaving him with ¥50,000 (around US$350 at the time) for their living expenses in their Tokyo apartment." About the state in which the children were found we read: "In April 1988, the youngest, Child E, was assaulted by friends of Child A (known only as Friend A and Friend B) and died as a result. On July 17 of the same year, acting on a tip from the landlord, Sugamo officials entered the apartment and discovered the severely malnourished Child A (then 14), Child B (seven), and Child D (three). They also found the body of Child C, but not Child E. The information given by the children was vague. It was determined that the malnourishment was caused in part by the children's diet, which consisted largely of food bought at convenience stores."
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sugamo_child_abandonment_case Accessed on July/30/2019.

[56]. In another essay called "Arbitrage", Aciman writes about "firming up the present by experiencing it as a memory, by experiencing it from the future as a moment in the past" (*False Papers* 151).

[57]. Accessed on: https://ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com/2017/06/12/hunting-ghosts-of-the-west-91st-street-subway/

[58]. Accessed on:
https://www.nycsubway.org/perl/showpix?bnN0YSBpbiAoNDQyKXwwfDV8NTB8U2hvd2luZ3wvd2lraS9JUlRfV2VzdF9TaWRlX0xpbmV8bnllYXIgZGVzYyxubW9uIGRlc2MsbmRheSBkZXNj

[59]. Emphasis added.

[60]. The book is called *The Shaking Woman, or A Story of My Nerves* and was published on 2009.

[61]. For more information, see IEP's (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy) page on memory. https://www.iep.utm.edu/epis-mem/

[62]. The psychologist Daniel L. Shacter works on memory and amnesia were extremely helpful to understand this change on how one writes about memory. His body of work focuses mainly on remembering and amnesia. It is crucial to his research to understand how memories are altered by external and internal factors, such as the concept of the transience of memory, and how it gets affected by the passing of time. Such topics are extremely helpful to diasporic narrative studies, for they deal with trauma and the passing of a memory through time. For more information on this subject, I recommend two of his works: *Neuropsychology of Memory* (2002) and *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (2001).

[63]. Source: Walt Whitman Archive. https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1891/poems/27 .

[64]. Nguyen also highlights the fact that the war is worldwide known as Vietnam War, but, back in his homeland, it is called the American War.

[65]. Aciman, André. *Call Me by Your Name*. S.l.: PICADOR, 2017. Print. P. 67

[66]. ---. *Harvard Square: A Novel*, 2014. Print. P. 69

[67]. ---. *Eight White Nights*. London: Atlantic, 2011. Print. P. 124

[68]. ---. *Enigma Variations*. 2018. Print. P. 18

[69]. This becomes more complicated in online scenarios – social media and virtual realities games and other online interaction platforms - for in those environments there is a more fluid performance of one's identity as well as a freer and broader idea of body, thanks to avatars, for example.

[70]. Lacan, borrowing much from Hegel's writing on alterity, wrote about two other's, one with capital O, and the other, not. The little other, in a general sense, is not a different one per se, but a projection of our own ego, a shadow-version of oneself. The Big Other, on the other hand, is a violent alterity, it belongs to the order of symbolic.

[71]. It is important to emphasize once again how language is a crucial weapon in the everlasting posthuman debate on who is the "man" from all men were created equal. According to the American Immigration Law, alien is the formal designation for any person not authorized to enter and stay inside the American borders. The law also defines that "a national of the United States as one who, while not a citizen, owes permanent allegiance to the United States. One owes personal allegiance to the United States if that person has taken an oath of naturalization."

Source: Cordell Law School – Legal Information Institute. Available on: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/alien. Accessed on August/ 09/ 2019

[72]. According to a report published on the Center for Immigration Studies website, by 2017 one out of five Americans speak a language other than English. Still using the same census data, if we look at the languages one speaks at home, almost half, 48.2%, of the United States' five largest city speaks another one with their families. For more information, the full census analysis is available on: https://cis.org/Report/Almost-Half-Speak-Foreign-Language-Americas-Largest-Cities

[73]. On this subject we read: "After Mexican American resisters robbed a train in Brownsville, Texas on October 18, 1915, Anglo vigilante groups began lynching Chicanos. Texas Rangers would take them into the brush and shoot them. One hundred Chicanos were killed in a matter of months, whole families lynched. Seven thousand fled to Mexico, leaving their small ranches and farms. The Anglos, afraid that the mexicanos would seek independence from the US brought in 20,000 army troops to put an end to the …protest movement in South Texas. Race hatred had finally fomented into an all-out war" (7)

[74]. For this thesis is used the Rosemarie Waldrop's translation from French to English, published on 1993.

[75]. It is worthwhile to mention that *Harvard Square'*s prologue and prelude act as an metaphor for post-memory narratives, for the father seems to have a constant need to share his histories and moments in that campus with his son who, on the other side, does not seem as keen on it as his father. In a more literal sense, diasporic narratives act, not only, to deal with the past but also pass it forward and consequently, preserving it. It is also relevant to notice that as any other human interaction, post memory narratives deal with a complex system of identity, sense of belonging, negotiation and so forth. For more theory on post-memory theory see Hirsch (2010,2012 e 2013) e Frosh (2019).

[76]. To be more accurate, in *Call Me*, Aciman names a few places by the first latter of their names, as seen in "in the hinterland toward the abandoned train tracks that used to connect B. to M" (6). When speaking about the movie adaptation of his novel, the author confessed that *Call Me* is set in Bordighera.
Source: "'Call Me by Your Name's Author Opens Up About the Film Adaptation". Graduate Center. City University of New York. November 10, 2017. https://gc.cuny.edu/News/All-News/Detail?id=42472

[77]. In Aciman's novels, always narrated in the first person, one is always scrutinizing the past to better understand the present.

[78]. Aciman, André. "Parallax". *Alibis: Essays on Elsewhere*. New York: Picador, 2012. Print. P. 194

[79]. Jabès, Edmond. *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Book*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press published by University Press of New England, 1993. Print. P. 5.

[80]. Available on: https://lithub.com/how-thoreau-and-my-father-taught-me-that-literature-is-a-public-good/

[81]. National Education Association and National Endowment for the Humanities.

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