

## **Flailing Identities**

Alia Culbertson

*“A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents’ culture. The third culture kid builds relationships to all the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the third culture kids life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of the*

express. After teaching for years, something I saw to be so powerful that I followed suit, she has gone back to school yet again, this time for an MFA. She's been able to share her story in multiple literary journals, giving hope to those who've been in a similar position as her.

*That I can tell firecrackers from gunfire. That I can only distinguish bombs from thunder when a whistle precedes the thunder. But that I think every thunder is a bomb falling and That I drop and look for shelter. That I am embarrassed that I jump at a loud noise. That I know I will not die as long as I can relive memories where I lived through death. That I know to open windows to avoid glass shrapneling the house. That the building in Lebanon did not have a basement. That I know how to fill sandbab vemM*



home smells and the cigarette smells are that the latter does not incite me to dial 911 and the

My home is deeply connected with my culture and my ethnicity. Despite having not traveled to Lebanon or Ghana, it does not make my *home* any less intertwined with them. They were my mother's, cousins, aunties uncles' home. They've made what I know home to be, what it is. With them, they brought their cultures of Ghana and Lebanon with them, they integrated it into my life without me even noticing. In a way, I've never been without them and truly never will.

Growing up I was plagued with thoughts and voices, both external and internal, which were compounded by my dad's constant criticism and excessive punishments. In turn, I became filled with questions and doubts, rage and sadness. I was convinced that self destruction was the only way to cope. I couldn't talk to my mother during this point in my life because I had developed a complex that my mother was the anti-christ and because during every negative situation, my father would say I was "just like her," I resented the idea of ever being anything like her. Nothing brings me more shame than to admit that during my most impressionable age, I took this anger, this feeling of helplessness and anger towards my mother and put it into action. I scrubbed the sink drain with her toothbrush and then cleaned any visibly remaining *treats*

“Maybe it’s like family” my aunt tells me, “you love it, but you hate it.” Perhaps it’s the same way we feel about our hometown. We hate it growing up, then when you get older, probably in your last semester of highschool, you love it and begin to miss it. Or perhaps, it’s the way you feel towards your own mother whilst growing up, saying horrible things you only wish you could take back, until you realize she’s the only person who has always seen you as a whole person. Similarly, when you’re a child or teenager sometimes you are ashamed of your culture, you want to blend in, you want to be friends with the girls who organize their friend groups together for Halloween costume plannings. Until you realize, trying to scrub away your identity, lighten your skin, bleaching your hair, in order to please others never works. (I never did any of those things, thank God my mother never allowed me to). At the end of the day, those girls still won’t like you and you’ll end up not liking yourself either. As you become older, the world becomes smaller and your differences become an exciting way to instill a sense of pride in yourself, regardless of having to answer questions like, “where are *really* from?”

So when you finally find it again; that nostalgia of comfort, contentedness, satisfying your longing to be home - whether you find it in a person, in a food, in a face, in a smell - when you find it again, everything clicks, and you feel as if you’ve traveled home again.