

Unhomeliness of Palestinian Immigrants in *Salt Houses* Novel

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Abstract: This research explored the notion of unhomeliness experienced by Palestinian immigrants as depicted in Hala Alyan's novel "Salt Houses" against the backdrop of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This research conducted using the method of qualitative research with the theory of Unhomeliness by Homi K. Bhabha (2004), the result showed how the characters Souad and Alia as Palestinians always believe they are not and perhaps can never be fully accepted by their host societies and they are always considered as outsiders, enemies within country, others and strangers embody the phenomenon of unhomeliness and reflecting their identity as a Palestinian immigrants. The study explores the way cultural identity conflict emerges with unhomeliness that concluded of how the characters issue of how they living for a long time in another country, but they still maintain their identity from their homeland.

Keywords: *Cultural Identity, Displacement, Palestinian Immigrants, Unhomeliness*

INTRODUCTION

Living in the host countries is not always welcomed but also confronts the alienation or aggression from the majority population and finds themselves isolated from the rest of the society, it gives Palestinians the unhomy feelings; not only in other states but also in their own motherland. The term *diaspora* means 'scatter' in Greek and it is associated with the banishment of Jews from Israel by the Babylonians. But now this word is used more generally to state any large migration of refugees, language, or culture.

Hammer (2009) argued that living in different countries, cultures, and settings has been influencing the identity of each Palestinian (p. 3). As well, they were always reminded of their impermanent stay in the host countries. The Palestinians have not been keeping a particular identity and international relationships. Since 1993, almost a hundred thousand Palestinians have returned through a peace process that has distressed the Palestinians with the perspective of their developments and purposes (Schulz, 2005. p. 3). Zaidan (2012) believes that there are six major events which strengthened Palestinian identity crisis; the 1936-1939 Arab revolt, 1948 Arab Israel-War, the economic situation from 1950s to 1960s was intensely uncertain, Six-Day War of 1967, the first Intifada 1987 and second Intifada 2000 and the Gulf War of 1991 (pp. 11-12).

Until the war of 1948-9, Jaffa was known as the largest economically Arab town occurred, but after the war, the British evacuated Palestine, Zionists proclaimed the state of Israel, and over 700,000 Palestinian Arabs become refugees. The land eventually was divided into three parts: the Gaza Strips for Palestinians, the West Bank, and the Israel State for Jewish. Followed by the Six-day war in 1967 as the establishment of the dominant regional military power of Israel. As a result of the 1948 war, there are 3 million Palestinian living as an

immigrant, which are 1.3 million Palestinian immigrant communities in Jordan, some live in Lebanon Syria refugee camps, and some work in Saudi Arabia and other Arab gulf countries. (Beinin & Hajar, 2014).

Because of the Arab and Israel conflict, there are many indigenous people displaced from their homeland and becoming immigrant, especially Palestine. Eisenstadt (1955) defines immigrant as the physical transition of an individual, or a group from one society to another. This transition usually involves abandoning one social setting and entering a different one. This is where people feel they don't have a home or a place they are belong because moving to another countries, eventhough they have lived for many years, the feeling always rise. This is where Bhabha's term unhomeliness emerges.

The interaction between Palestinian and American also emerges unhomeliness into cultural identity conflict that has direct impact upon Palestinian people, culture and their identities. It offered the explanation on the issue of tension between Palestinian and American culture. Some characters has been described as a metaphor for Palestinian culture that stands for the Palestinians' determination to stick with culture, historical and ideological past. This attitude is responsible for the present love-hate relationship between the American and Palestinian culture. It will also shows that the root cause behind the cultural conflict is severe and negative American policies against Palestinians in Palestine since 1948. The issue revealed home as a symbol of culture and identity, when home changes its location; it causes cultural conflict (Iram Rubab, 2019).

The issue of unhomeliness of immigrants in Literature can be found in the *Salt Houses* novel by Hala Alyan. It provides an idea of Palestinians' loss of true identity with the establishment of Israel state in Palestine which brought catastrophe, uprooted and dispersion of Palestinian people and emergence of immigrant problems. The *Salt Houses* novel is about a Palestinian family who was forcibly displaced to many different places as the cause of wars and invasions from the first war held in Palestine in 1948 until the last war in Lebanon in 2006. This novel focused on the life of the Yacoub family consisting of four generations who struggle their experienced from the war, and the struggle living in the host country with different cultures, societies, and languages. The Yacoub family survived in the host country and adjusted to the new culture as a way of controlling their grief of being displaced and lost. The Yacoub family depicted migrated from Jaffa to Nablus, Kuwait City, Amman, America, France, Boston, and Beirut until they eventually lived together in Amman (Jordan). The story also portrayed of how characters like Alia and Souad have a lot of character shifting because of the identity they hold into.

The researcher argues that analyzing the unhomeliness issues in Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses* is important to be discussed and investigated further, since the novel portrays the migration experienced by the Palestinian during the war and displacement to another country while keeping their cultural identity. Moreover, losing their homeland, displacement, and inheriting grief from the survivor generation lead to how characters like Alia and Souad do suffer the unhomeliness in this novel and how do clash of culture shape and reshape the identity of characters in the novel.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is focused on analysis of unhomeliness through character's quotation using Homi Bhabha's unhomeliness theory and the connection with cultural identity by Stuart Hall. This research also describes the way characters dealing with unhomeliness, especially to the immigrant characters who are in one family tree and the next generation. Several immigrant characters such as Alia and Souad was analyzed to take evidence of unhomeliness in *Salt Houses* novel. Based on the explanation and problems that have been explain in the background of the study, the researcher concludes that there are several questions:

1. How does cultural identity conflict of Alia and Souad as Palestinian immigrants emerges in *Salt Houses* novel?
2. How does the cultural identity conflict reflect the feeling of unhomely of Alia and Souad?

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Alia and Souad's Cultural Identity Explanation in "Salt Houses"

The In this novel, the characters of Alia and Souad undergo a profound exploration of cultural identity, influenced by Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity. Hall posits that cultural identity is not a fixed, predetermined entity but rather a fluid, dynamic construct shaped by a complex interplay of social, historical, and personal factors (Hall, 1990). The identity within diaspora communities is a complex experience. Diaspora refers to the dispersion or scattering of a group of people from their original homeland to various locations around the world. As individuals and communities navigate life in new and often diverse environments, their sense of belonging evolves and it has been described in the literature as the extent to which an individual feels included, respected, accepted, and supported by others in different social contexts (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Hagerty et al., 1992).

The characters Alia and Souad in Hala Alyan's "Salt Houses" each symbolize distinct aspects of cultural identity as they struggle with the issues of legacy, displacement, and belongings. As the family's matriarch, Alia represents the battle to maintain cultural identity in the face of relocation. She was raised in Palestine and is quite familiar with the customs and values of her native country. Nonetheless, she is forced to adjust to new surroundings while clinging to her Palestinian identity due to the ongoing instability brought on by wars and displacement. Her story demonstrates the tenacity of those who have experienced displacement and their unwavering ties to their native country in spite of geographical separation.

Conversely, Souad stands for the younger generation that is struggling with identity in a world that is changing quickly. She navigates the challenges of identification in the nations where she lives, growing up in the diaspora and feeling cut off from her Palestinian roots. Throughout her travels, Souad has sought a sense of acceptance and a reconciliation between her Palestinian background and the traditions of the nations she calls home. Her experience demonstrates how comprehending and navigating cultural identity in a globalized environment varies throughout generations. It delves into the complex issues of cultural identity, the effects of displacement on people and families, and the never-ending search for a sense of belonging

in a world that is constantly changing, all via the perspectives of Alia and Souad. One of the quotation below tells the story of how Souad searching her identity by drinking whiskey:

“Whiskey,” Séraphine says now. “For this shitty night.” She sets down one for Souad and one for herself, and Souad lifts hers. They clink glasses. Souad swallows, welcoming the fire in her throat. (p. 171)

From the quotation above, the writer conclude that Souad is doing the celebration, representation of the European who mostly celebrate anything with the whiskey and vodka, etc. This thing are rarely found in the country where Souad belongs, Palestine. But, this is one of the way Souad finding her identity in the place she lives eventhough it doesn't fit into her life. This story happened after Souad refuse to go to Amman to see her mother because she is still having a educational program in Paris. It can also be concluded that Souad is trying something of what the colonizer of her country did. In some cases, the adoption of the colonizer's practices may be a strategy for survival or assimilation into mainstream society. Colonized people may face discrimination or marginalization if they adhere too closely to their own cultural traditions, leading them to adopt aspects of the dominant culture to gain acceptance or access to resources. It is relatable to what Bhabha (1994) in his book argues that colonized subjects may mimic the cultural practices of the colonizer as a form of strategic mimicry, seeking to gain power or agency within colonial society while also retaining a sense of cultural identity:

Relation Between Unhomeliness and Cultural Identity in “Salt Houses”

The connection between the concept of unhomeliness as proposed by Homi K. Bhabha and cultural identity as theorized by Stuart Hall lies in their shared focus on the complexities of identity formation within postcolonial and diasporic contexts (Smith, 2018). While their approaches are distinct, they both illuminate how individuals negotiate their sense of belonging and cultural identity in environments marked by displacement, hybridity, and cultural difference.

Cultural identity can be significantly impacted by loneliness. People may feel as though their identity has been lost or fragmented when they feel cut off from their cultural background or roots. This can show up in a number of ways, like having trouble balancing divergent cultural influences or feeling alienated in one's own community, it can be seen from the quotation below:

She had missed the muezzin, the food, even her own tongue faltering in Arabic. In Beirut, she has gone back to being Palestinian. To everyone from the cabdrivers to the bank tellers, her accent exposes her. It reminds her of Kuwait. As a girl, this cataloging of origins never struck her as strange; Kuwait was a place of expatriation and everyone seemed to come from somewhere else. (p. 137)

The quote shows that Souad feels that she is a real Palestinian. In fact, from all the events that happened in Beirut and the atmosphere in Kuwait, it made her know and be herself. Souad being completely Palestinian and the eastern culture is the only one really suits her. While living in Paris or Boston, he felt that he had left his real home. On the other hand, by offering a sense of continuity and belonging, a strong sense of cultural identification helps lessen emotions of being alone. Engaging with cultural communities, speaking one's original tongue, and taking part in customs are examples of culturally affirming events that can help people feel anchored and at home even in strange places.

Homi K. Bhabha's theory of unhomeliness, rooted in his work "The Location of Culture," explores the psychological and existential dimensions of colonial and postcolonial experiences (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha argues that colonialism disrupts not only physical spaces but also psychological and cultural territories, leading to a state of "unhomeliness" or "in-betweenness" for colonized subjects. This concept highlights the ambivalence and ambiguity inherent in the colonial encounter, where individuals inhabit liminal spaces characterized by a constant negotiation of identity

The Unhomeliness Depiction of Alia and Souad

Every chapter is narrated by a different character and functions as a transition, the impact of relocation on individuals, or citizens can be diversified. The impact of relocation varies from person to person and depends on factors such as individual circumstances, reasons for relocation, and the support systems available. Successful adaptation often involves a combination of resilience, openness, and a proactive approach to addressing challenges. For example, in the novel, relocation brought so many effects for each family members, such as the unhomeliness and the identity they have hold which categorized as a bad impact for their future and will. As a diasporic, Alia, and Souad has a different point of view and problems according to the relocation effect. They are the second and third generation of Salma's family who really suffered from the war and had to move to another city that they doesn't want to lived in. Their relocation to another country makes the different result impacted in each family member. The constant relocation will also lead to the family member's different reaction and habit.

3.1.1.1 Alia

Alia is the first daughter in Salma's family, she is the one that Salma very love to share her story with. Alia, being the daughter that represents a link between the older and younger generations of the family. Her experiences and challenges serve as a lens through which the novel explores the broader themes of identity, belonging, and the effects of geopolitical events on individual lives. Alia's importance in the narrative may also stem from her personal journey and how it reflects the larger narrative arc of the family and the Palestinian diaspora. In the very beginning, Alia's life has already been read by her mother from her cup reading. Cup reading is the tradition of reading one's destiny from the rest of the coffee grounds in the teacup. Cup reading is done before the wedding to read the destiny of the couple and their life after the wedding. Here is the quotation related to the cup reading as foreshadowing.

The porcelain surface of the teacup is white as salt; the landscape of dregs, violent. Lines curve wildly, clusters streaking the sides. Two arches, a wedding, and a journey. The hilt of a knife crossed, ominously, with another. Arguments coming. On one side of the teacup, the white porcelain peeks through the dregs, forming a rectangular structure with a roof, drooping, and edifice mid-crumble. Houses that will be lost. And in the center, a smudged crown on its head, a zebra. Blurry but unmistakable, a zebra form, stripes across the flank. Salma wills her face expressionless, though fear rises in her, hot and barbed. A zebra is an exterior life, an unsettled life (p. 14).

From the cup reading, the novel is giving a hint about the struggle faced by Alia after the wedding which also reflects her life as an immigrant. Alia's future is shown as unfavorable, save for the positive news of her husband's faithfulness. She must undergo the tumultuous voyage of life, filled with conflicts, aggression, and the inevitable loss of her home. Salma explicitly cautions in the story that Alia will encounter several challenges during her wedding

and subsequent voyage, which unfold after the wedding. In the story, the protagonist relocates from Nablus to Kuwait City four years after her wedding in 1963, due to the six-day war in 1967. This is the point at which Alia encounters significant difficulties. At this point, she experiences the loss of her brother, departs from her residence, and adapts to a novel existence as an immigrant in a foreign nation. In addition, the novel employed the persona of Zebra to portray a life that exists outside of the norm and a life that is filled with uncertainty (Alyan, p. 14).

The unsettled existence signifies the arduous and distressing experiences endured by individuals affected by conflict and immigration. The story depicts Alia's firsthand experiences of the six-day war, her relocation to Kuwait City, and her subsequent isolation during the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the Lebanon war in 2006. Indeed, the cup reading's prediction has confirmed the depiction of Alia's life as a product of conflict, since it anticipated her chaotic and outwardly unstable existence. By focusing on her character, the novel highlights the complexities and nuances of the family's history, providing more intimate understanding of the broader context in which the characters live. There is also another moment of what Alia's feel when it comes to the place she doesn't belong.

“Instead of staying in Kuwait’s wasteland, the endless afternoons of television and heat, let them go to Amman, the coffee shops and vendors hawking fruit, neighborhoods filled with old friends. Yes, everyone was distraught, mourning the houses and cities they’d left behind, the men beneath the soil. Shouldn’t they mourn together? Palestine has vanished for them—this knowledge crept up on Alia slowly, a new death every morning: Mustafa gone, Nablus gone—but they can find the ashes in Amman, collect them to build another life” (p. 89)

The quotation above depict how the relocation bring the impact for Alia, Salma's Daughter. In her mind, she almost lost her birthplace, Palestine. As she lived in Kuwait, the “Wasteland” now, She feels really weird and doesn't know what to do. This also the effect after war that make her sad after the passing of her brother, Mustafa. There is also a scene that depicts how miserable Alia's life is by losing her family, her home, and her hope in the war. It can be seen in the novel through the quotation.

The same memory assaulted her while she watched the news reports: the bird, Mustafa, bombs, Atef, Nablus (p. 61)

Alia narrated this story as she saw the Israeli army and tank drive into Nablus and the planes with the chalky six-tipped star flag watching the Mediterranean. Israel was defeating them and Palestine was vanished. The aforementioned sentence makes clear that, despite the fighting, Alia is reminded of Mustafa, Atef, and Nablus—her hometown, her family, and her home. Everything disappeared because of the bomb, a reference to Israel. In addition, the bird is used in the book to represent hope, which was also destroyed by the conflict. When Alia discovered a young chick in the midst of a downpour in Nablus, the bird is first addressed in the flashback. When Alia discovered an immature chick in the midst of a downpour in Nablus, the bird is first addressed in the flashback. Alia held the bird carefully since it was trembling and appeared frail, with moist feathers and little feet. Carefully and gently, Alia and Mustafa made the decision to take care of the bird.

The bird shivered violently, his heart palpitating beneath Alia's fingers. Tiny bead eyes, translucent beak. Pale yellow stood out in tufts, the downy feathers frizzing as they dried. (Alyan, p. 61, 2017).

In general terms, a newborn bird or chick represents life, hope, and fresh possibilities. The chick represented hope to Mustafa and Alia when they were young. Although it is little and feeble, this hope does exist. Alia is inspired to believe that hope is possible and that all pain will eventually pass by her belief that the little bird would eventually grow larger and stronger. As a Palestinian immigrant, Alia's three main goals are to live with all families, have a better life, and protect Palestine from Israel. Sage & Cirlot (2006, p. 27) also describes the bird as a representation of the soul. The bird refers to Alia's soul that belongs to Nablus and Palestine, which indicates she lost her soul as the bird lost in the war. Indeed, the news of the war spoils the memories of Mustafa, Bird, Nablus, Atef, and Bombs which pointed out that all of it was lost in the war. The hope she has from childhood has vanished, her soul leaving Palestine is lost, and all she has is the miserable fact that Palestine is gone, her home is gone, and Mustafa is gone. Beside the unhomeliness felt by Alia, she also fiercely outspoken throughout her life, speaks with curled lip and palpable disdain because of the lost that she had going through.

'Scattered men. What kind of leader promises victory with scattered men? An Arab republic. Ha! Look at this – some American money and here's Israel's shiny new toys. What do we have? Flags, songs, dreams. They're going to obliterate us.' (p.51)

The quotation tells the story of how she sees the family, Palestinian at their roots yet almost always living elsewhere – Kuwait, Lebanon, America – is constantly working to define itself, to find its place in the world and in the geopolitical struggle for belonging. She feels that Palestinian didn't have anything but flags, songs, and dreams. It means that the Palestinian didn't know exactly where are their 'home'. Homi Bhabha describes 'the unhomely moment' in which personal and psychic histories intersect with the violent dislocations of colonialism. Bhabha's analysis of the unhomely moment in literature draws on Freud's essay "The 'Uncanny'", which argues that "the *Unheimlich* (translated as 'uncanny') is what was home-like, familiar; the pre-fix 'un' is the token of repression" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 450).

3.1.1.2 Souad

Souad is the third generation that become one of the central characters. She is the daughter of Alia and become an art professor in Paris and Boston and one of the most often characters that being relocated in another country and city. Souad even sometimes confuse about where she actually belong and this make her and unhomely person, as researchers found in quotation below:

People's eyes glazed over when she tried to explain that, yes, she'd lived in Kuwait, but no, she wasn't Kuwaiti, and no, she had never been to Palestine, but yes, she was Palestinian. That kind of circuitous logic had no place over there. (p. 209)

From the quotation, researchers conclude that eventhough she comes from an affluent family and is also an art professor, but deep inside, she has never felt the sense of home. Souad live not just in one country, she goes to Kuwait to encourage her child to experience the pure Arab identity. However, after being there she feels a significant difference in her emotions that she herself doesn't understand. On one hand, she wants to fully embrace her Arab identity, but

she still wants to be someone who lives in the West. This is identic of what Tyson (2006) says, “To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee.” Another story of unhomeliness happened with her when she already lived in Paris for a long time, she fought with her friend, Elie, and blaming the situation that she has felt in the quotation below:

She prepared dinner in tears, cursing him as she stirred spaghetti in a secondhand copper pot. The cream sauce clotted into lumps. A realization: she hated Paris. (p. 139)

Souad shows her disappointment and unhomeliness feeling in this quotation, the effect after she fights with Elie makes her feel wrong to live in Paris. She stayed for a few years in Paris but she hated Paris, this shows that she can't love the place she already stays in. It makes her think that living in Boston, the place she has graduated is better than anything for a while. Souad describes her quest to find her true home, to understand the roots of her separation, and to find her position in the world where she resides. This also caused her to leave her birthplace and travel to other countries, where she encountered numerous obstacles that impacted the formation of her personality, beginning with one bearing and progressing to the next. Many of the problems in the story help to shape her personality and place in the world; for example, her mother's differing opinions and a tense relationship with her husband made her question where she truly belongs a thousand times. The whole series of events that Souad went through to find her real home can attract readers. It can be concluded that diaspora concept unhomeliness by Homi K. Bhaba here occurs because everything that happened to Souad formed a personality that made her feel that her homeland was her true home. Should you have tables, please refer to this format of the table, no vertical line used:

CONCLUSION

In the novel "Salt Houses," the sense of displacement felt by Palestinian immigrants, particularly Alia and Souad, is vividly portrayed. This feeling of being unhomed stems primarily from the devastating war and the 1948 Battle of Jaffa, leaving a lasting impact on future generations. Alia and Souad grapple with their cultural identities as Palestinians living in diaspora, navigating the complexities of identity formation in postcolonial contexts where concepts of home, belonging, and heritage are constantly challenged. Through their stories, the novel delves into the profound connection between feeling unhomed and one's cultural identity, underscoring how displacement, conflict, and longing shape individuals' understanding of themselves and their sense of belonging. The writer can conclude, even though the characters living for a long time in another country, they still maintain their identity from their homeland, even though Alia and Souad tried to resist or dealing with the unhomeliness, they still can't dismiss their identity as a Palestinians how hard they have tried.

Furthermore, the book explores how this sense of displacement intertwines with the characters' cultural identities. Drawing on the ideas of Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness and Hall's understanding of cultural identity, the narrative delves into the intricate and fluid nature of identity formation, especially within diasporic and postcolonial settings. Both Bhabha and Hall recognize the profound impact of colonialism, migration, and globalization on individuals' experiences of belonging and cultural affiliation. They also emphasize the role of representation, discourse, and power in shaping collective and individual identities.

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