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THE VOICES OF THE VOICELESS DISPLACED

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the on the rhetoric of diaspora in recent novels. Diaspora refers to the dispersion of a specific population away from their homeland (Safran83). Hence, the study aims to show how different authors from different backgrounds have brought the issue of displacement in their novels. This paper tackles authors who have expressed their grief because of diaspora. These include:HalaAlyan's *Salt House* (2017), Dina Nayeri's *Refuge* (2017), and YusraMardini 's*Butterfly* (2018).

Keywords: Diaspora, Plight, Home, Alienate, War

Introduction

Diasporic literature has a great significance as it presents an avenue to perceive, represent, and catechize different ethnic refugees' diasporic experiences. The theme of diaspora has always been of great concern and captivation to many authors in the course of literary history. *Salt House*, *Butterfly*, and *Refuge* have depicted the pain and sufferings of those in diaspora skillfully. For example, *Salt House*, written by the Palestinian-American HalaAlyan, portrays the turmoil and crisis faced by the Palestinian Yacoub family in diaspora. *Refuge* by Dina Nayeri effectively portrays the plight of an Iranian child who is forced to abandon her country leaving her father behind. Moreover, YusraMardini 's*Butterfly* portrays the suffering of the Syrians in diaspora and their feeling of unsettledness. Nostalgia, displacement, discrimination, and identity conflict are the main themes of the diasporic literature, and the novels tackled in this paper demonstrate all these themes. The abovementioned diasporic novels deal with the exilic experience and its impact on different ethnic refugees. Although they have different nationalities, they have the same heartache.

Main Text

Salt House, written by the Palestinian-American writer HalaAlyan, portrays the turmoil of the disported Palestinian Yacoub family. The story revolves around the suffering of different generations of the same family over a period of 60 years (ShuklaandBanerji4). The Yacoub family has witnessed multiple wars and turmoil. They have suffered the aftereffects of wars and have to be displaced from their native place for several times as implied by the lines: "What is a life? A series of yeses and noes, photographs you shove in a drawer somewhere, loves you think will save you but that cannot. Continuing to move, enduring, not stopping even when there is pain. That's all life is, he wants to tell her. It's continuing" (Alyan273).Moreover, it can be understood that as a result of several displacements of the family, they have lost the sense of belonging to a single home. The author has effectively used the title in order to symbolize the fragility of homes in diaspora.

Similar to the structures of salt that can easily be erased by a small tide, the home of Yacoub also gets shattered for several times (Fotouhi5).

The narrative of the novel is interwoven and keeps on jumping from a timeline to another: "The sea was like another member of the household, a recalcitrant child at times, a soothing aunt at others. She crooned them awake; she crooned them to sleep. Everywhere, there was the smell of salt" (Alyan273). The story unfolds itself in the year of 1963, narrating the wedding day of Alia, the daughter of the Yacoub family, who is getting married to her beloved Atef. As a customary ritual of their culture, Alia's mother was using the dregs from a coffee cup in order to predict the future of her beloved daughter. What she sees next was very upsetting for her. She eventually predicts a life for her daughter that will be full of instability, suffering, and loss. However, she keeps the prediction to herself and does not speak about it to anyone (Delisle1). As the novel progresses, the reader gets to know that the predictions done by Alia's mother have eventually become reality as the Yacoub family witnesses the effects of wars and suffers through a life of successive diasporas. Alia and her husband are forced to move to Kuwait as a result of the war in Palestine. They eventually have three children. However, life decides to be cruel to them, and they are again uprooted from Kuwait as a result of Saddam Hussain's invasion. Once again, they become uprooted from their home and are forced to move to foreign countries (Delisle4). Eventually, the family gets exiled to Boston, Paris, and Beirut. The Palestinian diaspora, born in 1948, is different from any other diaspora in the recent history of mankind since it has been passing from one generation to another. Edward Said is a famous Palestinian critic, whose *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* tackles his own exile and the Palestinians' diaspora in general. According to Martha C. Nussbaum, "Exile is Edward W. Said's political condition" (2).

Alia's children grow up and eventually get married. However, life decides to continue to be problematic for them as they face difficulties in assimilating (Delisle8). The difficulty of getting assimilated into a new culture is one of the main facets of diasporic literature. Displaced ethnic groups demonstrate tremendous resilience in their ability to adjust to their new environments (Cohen56). Although life eventually has come up with few better opportunities for them, they are never able to overcome the sense of alienation and loneliness (Fotouhi4). Hence, it can be easily understood that identity crisis is one of the major issues that is dealt in the novel. As the novel reaches towards the end, the reader eventually gets to know that in spite of their western upbringing, the children of Yacoub family have to deal with unpleasant experiences as their peers accuse Palestinians to be violent in nature (Robinson1). Racism is another facet of diasporic literature. The interplay between diaspora and racism has always been evident throughout history.

Refuge by Dina Nayeri effectively portrays the plight of an Iranian child who is forced to leave her country (Schatzman and Pamuk2). The theme of diaspora has been a very significant topic in this novel. In her novel, Nayeri explores and scrutinizes the impact of diaspora upon the protagonist. As the story unfolds, the readers are being slowly acquainted with the protagonist of the novel, Niloo. At a very young age, she is forced to leave her native country, Iran. As she leaves her home with her mother and sister, her father stays behind. Over the course of time, Niloo meets her father for few times; however, their relation does not bloom properly (Suleiman4). Nayeri has portrayed the character of Niloo as a trapped soul who claims, "Between East and West I lost myself" (8). At the very beginning of the novel, the reader gets to see Dr. BahmanHamidi, the old dentist and father of Niloo. He is on the verge of getting divorced for the third time in his life. At this juncture, he is having reverie about his past life (Campochiaro2). Dr. Hamidi now is pondering over the decision that he has taken several years ago: "Had he, with his fatherly hopes for [his daughter] and he brother, sent them off to a foreign land to struggle and to pray to deaf gods? Did she belong to a place, to a people?" (Nayeri50).

From the novel, the reader can monitor that Niloo is ambitious and workaholic. She does not entertain the idea of spending time without working. Her behavior with her husband is also very businesslike as she communicates with him through emails (Campochiaro4). Apart from these abnormalities in her behavior, Niloo never stops daydreaming of her father. The relation of this father and daughter is used as a symbol of estrangement that exists between the refugees and their native land. Throughout the novel, the plight of Niloo has been portrayed efficiently. In spite of her highly satisfying educational degrees and employment, she feels alienated from her surroundings. According to Baxter, "... six categories of alienation: powerlessness,

normlessness, isolation, cultural estrangement, social isolation, self-estrangement, and feelings of personal worthlessness" (112).

YusraMadini's *Butterfly* enlightens the readers how the refugees can start over again despite all the hardships. The title of the novel indicates a story of breaking the barrier of chrysalis and coming out as a butterfly. The novel narrates Yusra 's escape from Syria to Turkey , Greece, and eventually Germany . When the boat's engine breaks down, the boat begins to be covered with water. Being very good swimmers, Yusra, her sister and two others pull the boat for three and a half hours until they reach Lesbos, rescuing the lives of those on the boat. At the end of the novel, she participates in the Rio Olympic and gets the medal (The Guardians.com).

In this novel, the protagonist's diasporic predicament speaks to the sufferings and disarray of all Syrians in diaspora. One of the hardships faced by the protagonist is the negative image of Arab refugees that the media promotes. Yusra gives the example that the Germans are surprised when they see that a Syrian refugee can use a phone, Facebook, or any technological device. She also describes how she is maltreated, imprisoned, treated like a terrorist in Hungary: "But they might be terrorists" (Madini67). She describes how they suffer from humiliation, alienation, and ostracism. She illuminates how the refugees should pay double price for a hotel room because of their inferior position. In addition, she describes how the refugee women take off their veils in order not to be jailed. In *Covering Islam*, Said believes that the " sensationalism, crude xenophobia, and insensitive belligerence are the order of the day, with results on both sides of the imaginary line between 'us' and 'them' that are extremely unedifying" (2).

Conclusion

Because diaspora is a part of the human experience, the authors of diasporic communities portray their immeasurable suffering through writing. This paper has focused on three novels recently written. Each novel demonstrates the agony faced by a displaced community represented by each novel's protagonist. The novels are:Hala Alyan's *Salt House*, Dina Nayeri's *Refuge* and Yusra Mardini's *Butterfly*. *Salt House* reveals the agony of the Palestinian diaspora. The theme of diaspora suffered by an Iranian has been a very significant topic in *Refuge*. *Butterfly* reveals the predicament of all Syrians in diaspora. Diaspora inspires a vast and heterogeneous body of literature that has common features including: unhomeliness, nostalgia, alienation, identity conflict, and discrimination. In the three novels, the authors unleash their emotions of nostalgia. They express their longing for their homelands. In addition, they demonstrate the alienation they feel in the new cultures. The three novels depict all the discrimination that the refugees face in the new cultures. Diaspora is charted heavily in the refugees' imagination and thus found its way into literature.

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