

Alienation in Susan Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly* (2007): A Social Study

Alyaa Saad*

m_aliaa@art.nvu.edu.eg

Abstract

This article aims to investigate how two dimensions of Melvin Seeman's taxonomy of alienation are portrayed in Susan Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile*. Seeman's study "On the Meaning of Alienation" discusses the concept of alienation from a social perspective, and postulates six basic patterns of alienation. Upon studying and analyzing Darraj's diasporic text, it becomes clear that two of Seeman's aspects, namely cultural estrangement and social isolation, appear in Darraj's text through narrating the lives of four Palestinian immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters. The study follows the analytical method through the area of diasporic fiction. It presents the theoretical framework, and then applies the two mentioned dimensions of alienation to Darraj's text from the perspective of feeling alienated from the homeland (Palestine) and the host land (Philadelphia) regarding mothers and their daughters. Thus, the study proves that Darraj has succeeded in portraying and revealing the manifestations, causes and consequences of the alienation of Arabs who live and grow up in a host country such as the United States of America.

Keywords: Darraj; Seeman; alienation; cultural estrangement; social isolation

* English Department, Faculty of Arts, New Vally University.

1. Introduction

One of the remarkable features of our time is the feeling of alienation. Arabs usually have one culture and one home, but Arab communities in America have at least two. In his article “On the Meaning of Alienation” (1959), the American social psychologist Melvin Seeman classifies six aspects of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation and self-estrangement. The objective of this study is to apply two dimensions of this theory of alienation, their manifestations, reasons and profound consequences to Darraj’s diasporic text. It shows the continuous clash and difference between the two different generations of immigrant Palestinian mothers and their American-born daughters in terms of their feeling of alienation and; consequently, their feeling of social isolation and cultural estrangement towards the homeland, Palestine, and the host land, America.

The method employed in the study is analytical, and the area is diasporic fiction. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part lays out the theoretical framework of the research and sheds light on the meaning of alienation, particularly emphasizing cultural estrangement and social isolation. The second part applies these two specific dimensions of alienation to the narrative text under consideration regarding the feelings of mothers and their daughters.

2. Review of Literature

Wael Salam and Abualadas Othman's article "Cultural Authenticity Versus Hyphenated Identities: Transnational Modes of Belonging and Citizenship in *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly*" (2020) manifests cultural estrangement, generational gap and Hybrid Identities. It exposes the consequences of these aspects on Arab American immigrant mothers in the first generation and on their second-generation daughters. It explores the transitional modes of citizenship and belonging. The essay, also, exposes how identity and subjectivity are formulated and developed.

In "Identity Negotiation through Positioning in Two Selected Short Stories from Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile*" (2020), Dalia Hamid argues the two clashing bicultural identities of immigrant mothers and daughters. The two generations are displaced between Palestine and Philadelphia; the American identity and the Arab one. She reveals that the maternal generation carries their Arab heritage but must deal with the American traditions. However, their daughters are different from their original homeland and its culture. Hamid proves that inner conflict passes across generations. The article finally proposes that discourse about biculturalism and negotiated various identities necessitate more scholarly attention from researchers.

"Displacement, Belonging and Identity in Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile*" (2015) by Yousef Awad, shows how Darraj depicts home as a concept and a physical

space. It manifests the connection between the concept of alienation and its link with belonging to a home. Throughout analyzing the experiences of four Arab-American mothers and their American-born daughters, the article manifests some of the difficulties immigrants and their descendants confront. It also analyzes the concept of home physically and metaphorically as a reservoir of memories that wait to be disclosed.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Alienation

Alienation, which results from rootlessness, forms the subject of many literary studies. The Arab-American critic Edward Said defines the modern age as “spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement” (173). Similarly, the American philosopher Richard Schacht claims that “there is almost no aspect of contemporary life which has not been discussed in terms of alienation” (3). Alienation exemplifies “an individual’s estrangement from the traditional community and others in general” (Davachi 11). Alienation is defined in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* as “the state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody; it is a condition of the mind.”

Furthermore, the word “alienation” has been inquired linguistically, psychologically and sociologically to deeply affect modern world literature. Linguistically, the term “alienation” is borrowed from the Latin word *alienationem*, which means

separation or surrender. Psychologically, it means to estrange or turn away the emotions or feelings of anyone; to turn into a stranger or alien; and to create a state of unwelcoming or hostility (Starzyk 420). It also means the exclusions of the emotions of hope and trust (Gass 107). In modern sociology, alienation means “the distancing of people from experiencing a crystallized totality both in the social world and in the self” (Kalekin 6). Sociologists claim that alienation is a phenomenon in which an individual marks himself as unable to control socio-political events happening around him. The alienated person is unclear about his beliefs and the world around him. S/he cannot make decisions and cannot expect the consequences of one’s behavior. S/he, too, faces separation between one’s own goals and socially approved means to achieve those goals. Thus, the alienated individual becomes isolated from others and society and as a result, estranged from himself.

It was Georg Hegel, a German philosopher, who coined the concept of alienation into modern philosophy. In addition, the German philosopher Karl Marx discusses alienation concerning human existence through a socio-economic perspective. Marx believes that social alienation happens when the state does not care about the individual’s existence and when there is no intercourse between the individual and people in a society. He claims that the individual “in his relation to such a state does not experience a feeling of solidarity, he is only able to relate himself

to it as an isolated monad, an individual. Man's inner life is divided in the world split up in such a way" (8). Considerably, one of the most significant articles on alienation is Seeman's "On the Meaning of Alienation" in which he claims that alienation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. He presents six major dimensions, and this study discusses two of them: social isolation, and cultural estrangement.

3.2 Social Isolation

First, Seeman defines social isolation as "the individual's low expectancy for social inclusion and social acceptance, expressed typically in feelings of loneliness or feelings of rejection." This pattern of isolation is widespread among "minority members" and "strangers" and leads to a sense of loneliness ("Alienation and Engagement" 492). In other words, alienation is the sense of being separated from one's community which is "one of the foundational social imaginaries of human society. It is the figure, the image, the form from which we construct our yearning for a meaningful, humane, and just social existence" (Farrar 7). In that regard, the foundation and concept of the self, the emotional, physical, and mental features of an individual, thinking patterns and language are all formed through interaction with the community. It is from 'community' that meaning is fabricated. Thus, social isolation germinates from normlessness and by a cycle process results in normlessness again.

When a man fails to share the normative system for fulfilling his goals because of its ineffectiveness, he may formulate his own norms to direct his behavior. Having his normative system, the individual notices himself as different from others and becomes isolated from society and its normative system. Based on social-influence theory, “every individual fulfills his needs to belong, to love, and to be loved by others by adhering to the group norms as a member of that group” (Jones 65). Hence, if the group norms do not fit the individual’s personal goals which are identified by belonging needs, the group loses its normative effect on the individual; thus, the individual turns out to be socially isolated. Social isolation occurs at a moment when an individual fails to be part of society and no longer belongs to the group or is accepted by other people in the group. Socially isolated individuals, as Seeman believes, are those who “assign a low reward value to goals and beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society” (“On the Meaning” 788-9).

3.3 Cultural Estrangement

Seeman’s second dimension of alienation in this study is cultural estrangement. Culture is a complex concept that entails various aspects of human life. It signifies the shared beliefs, morals, values, habits, norms, and practices of a specific group of people. Culture is strongly related to each community, and it differs from one country to another, from one place to another, and from village to city relying on the ideologies and customs of

people. It is spread socially from generation to generation, not by genetic inheritance but by the evolution of human behavior. “Culture is what shapes us; it shapes our identity, our beliefs and our behaviors” (Hassiba 56). Many sociologists explain culture as a “way of being” which indicates how people communicate with each other and how their beliefs and values shape their behaviors (Kittler 6).

Consequently, the existence of two contradictory cultures in one community frequently causes estrangement. Cultural estrangement arises when there is a lack of interest in the culture to which one belongs and because of an extreme desire to be a part of the superior culture. Immigration is also a cause for this aspect of alienation. The memory of the native place’s culture evokes an ethnic identity and, thus, a sense of estrangement from the culture of the host country. Cultural estrangement is claimed to be an individual’s complete rejection of, or feeling of isolation from, social and cultural values widespread within a society (Ahmed 106). Cultural estrangement is not a physical separation, however, it is “an emotional experience where one can feel isolated in the middle of a crowd if they do not authentically share the group’s cultural values, beliefs, and/or norms” (Brooks 48). Russel Middleton, a Professor of Sociology, argues that some “beliefs define what is right, moral, and common within a society. When refusing them, one becomes alienated from the society and culture in which one lives” (974). Therefore, this form of

alienation reveals the feeling of estrangement from goals and beliefs that are highly valued in a specific society.

Cultural estrangement declares a feeling of isolation or separation from society and its prevalent shared cultural and social values and activities. Seeman views cultural estrangement as “the individual’s rejection of, or sense of removal from dominant social values and popular cultural standards” (“Alienation and Anomie” 351). The culturally estranged person feels his ideas and opinions about prominent and everyday issues differ from other people in the group (Sarfraz 55). Therefore, the individual grows estranged from society and the culture it carries when he observes that his ideas are contradictory with those of the masses. Likewise, the American social psychologist Kenneth Keniston assures that cultural estrangement is “an explicit rejection, freely chosen by the individual, of what he perceives as the dominant values or norms of his society” (455).

Like the other kinds of alienation, cultural estrangement is not a physical separation but, as the American sociologist Jeffrey S. Brooks manifests, an emotional affair “where one can feel isolated in the middle of a crowd if they do not authentically share the group’s cultural values, beliefs, and/or norms” (48). Cultural estrangement seems to be a psychological state that emanates from clashes between personal and social values. Social and cultural values may be interpreted as those commonly held by members of a given society.

4. Cultural Estrangement and Social Isolation Reflection in *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly*

Since alienation has been developed to be one of the most common phenomena in the modern age, alienation has become a repeated theme in fiction during the twentieth century. Authors began to publish literary works that handled the Arab sense of alienation and explored what had been lost during the generations of assimilation. Hence, social alienation represented in cultural estrangement and social isolation is what Darraj tried to portray in her literary work *The Inheritance of Exile*.

Suzan Muaddi Darraj (1975-) is one of the most remarkable contemporary Arab American women authors. She was born and raised in South Philadelphia to Palestinian immigrants who moved to the US in 1967. As a daughter of Arab immigrants, she experiences the predicaments that complicate her life as a second-generation immigrant who lives in American society. She suffers alienation as she always confronts discrimination because of her Arab identity. Darraj states, in an interview, that during the first Gulf War, her classmates whom she had known her whole life suddenly rounded on her. There is this outsider status that she has as an Arab in America that informs who she is. There is no way to escape her identity because she looks Arab and has an Arab name. When she was young, Darraj visited Palestine many times. Thus, her experience of alienation living in two different countries enables her to depict cultural estrangement and social isolation

that result from living between two homes, two cultures and two identities.

The Inheritance of Exile narrates many intricate stories by four immigrant Palestinian mothers and their American-born daughters. The plot is set in the working-class neighborhood of South Philadelphia, where Darraj too was born and grew up. Each one of the protagonists conflicts against a terrible sense of alienation because of living torn between a host land and a homeland. Darraj portrays the disturbed relationship between the first and second generations of immigrants. On one hand, these four Arab-American daughters adopt and adapt to American society and culture, while their mothers are still haunted by the memories of their homeland which makes it hard to assimilate into the American culture of the host land. So, this conflict and opposite feelings of alienation affect the relationship between mothers and their daughters because their ways of thinking and living are different.

The text narrates the stories of Nadia, Aliyah, Hanan and Reema, the daughters of immigrant mothers, Layla, Siham, Lamis and Huda, who are overwhelmed between the past and the present, through a complex and tangled plot. The four daughters try to negotiate between their lives in America and their mothers' strong feelings of cultural estrangement and social isolation in the host land. In other words, while the stories of the four daughters are set in the present and depict their daily practices in America,

those of their mothers are set in the past and portray their memories of their lives in Palestine and their immigration and settlement experiences in a host land.

Darraaj manifests cultural estrangement and social isolation as the main forms of alienation arising from immigration and biculturalism. As strangers to American society, the protagonists represent the other and the other is a potential enemy. “The enemy is the other, the stranger...existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible” (Schmidt 51). Hostility toward them, as strangers, is an innate human trait. Robert Morris Sapolsky, an American neuroendocrinology researcher, claims that “the tendency to form in-groups and out-groups of Us and Them, and to direct hostility at the latter, is inherent in humans” (34). Social isolation is regularly connected to hostility and subjectivity. In turn, those socially isolated protagonists, are more likely prone to the group’s hostility and humiliation.

On one hand, the mothers adopt their Arab culture while they must adapt to the American culture. However, the stress upon immigrant mothers resulting from their mixed Arab and American cultures is magnified because of the contradiction between Arab traditions and ethics and the freedom that America offers. Any attempt to adapt to the American culture disunites them from their Arab culture. Their sense of alienation widens the gap between the two cultures and therefore between the two generations.

Mothers struggle to keep their Arab identity without being marginalized by the American one which often alienates them because of ethnic differences leading them to cultural estrangement and social isolation.

On the other hand, daughters are deeply influenced by and devoted to the American culture. Therefore, they reject the Arab culture and values that their mothers want them to inherit. Mothers try hard to keep their original cultural heritage, but the imposition of it by their daughters creates extreme tension among them. Darraj portrays the second generation's inability to accommodate American culture and the Arab one. They want to be Americans and assimilate into the American community without the ethnic differences that isolate them and make them bicultural Americans. The daughters preserve one culture inside their houses and another outside. Hence, their failure to assimilate the two cultures causes cultural estrangement.

Immigrant mothers suffer in the host land which has a completely different culture from their own, including language, marriage, food, traditions, values, rituals and even names are completely different. On the contrary, their daughters, who were born and raised in the US, conflict with their mothers and with the Arab culture, trying not to be isolated in American society. Language, for instance, acts as a "resisting tool against the politics of essentialist nationalism" (Salam 57). It isolates mothers from their Americanized daughters. Having an odd and different accent

can lead to social isolation and cultural estrangement as the difficulty of repressing that accent opposes pure assimilation. The immigrant mothers are distinguished by their accent which becomes a reflection of their identity and a hard trial to still stick to their home culture. Thus, Siham tries hard to learn English to get used to living in Philadelphia. Her husband buys her an Arab-English dictionary to study the verbs for an hour per day. “She practiced her English like a religion” to improve her accent (17). Nevertheless, her accent remains heavy even after many years in the US. When her daughter, Nadia, meets her fiancé for the first time, she observes that “his voice had a gentle accent, unmistakably Arabic but not as heavy or as pronounced as that of my mother” (42).

Layla, too, tries to instruct her daughter, Hanan, maxims such as “blood runs deep” and “oil and water don’t mix” to indicate the relationship between American culture and Arab culture, but Hanan gets upset that her mother has a “clipped accent” (79). This exemplifies another difference between them. Hanan expresses this clear difference between her and her mother in language; she confesses that she does not “speak Arabic all that well and that my mother’s English was still burdened after twenty-six years in America” (80). Accordingly, her mother’s ‘clipped’ accent is considered a burden because it is a clear manifestation of her Arab identity that resists pure assimilation. The cultural contradiction between both of them appears early through Hanan’s first years at

school. When she is eight, Hanan asks her mother not to attend Parent's Day because Layla will "talk differently from the other parents" (98). Hanan is embarrassed about her mother's accent; thus, Layla feels that her daughter wishes to have an American mother and cast aside her Arabness. Layla is afraid that Hanan will grimace when she speaks to her in Arabic because Hanan will "answer, pointedly, in English" (103). Later, the conflict over the use of language is affirmed in Hanan's argument with her mother about living in an apartment with her friend Aliyah. Hanan insists on talking to her mum in English, while Layla persists "in Arabic, her lips hissing around every letter" (Darraj 121).

This clash between the mother and her daughter reveals the tension created by language as a basic marker of group culture. The mother's insistence on using Arabic manifests her attitude in maintaining her home culture as an Arab. Darraj portrays Layla as "hissing around every letter" to reveal her Palestinian roots. Hence, the mother's "clipped accent" is considered a marker of her home culture. Otherwise, Hanan's insistence on answering in English reflects her ultimate rejection of her mother's culture declaring that she is an American. The Ukrainian-American linguist Aneta Pavlenko, and the sociolinguist Adrian Blackledge emphasize that "languages may not only be 'markers of identity' but also sites of resistance, empowerment, solidarity and discrimination" (4). The daughters consider English as their key tool to assimilate and to be regarded as a part of the American

community. Mothers consider the Arabic language to be the essence of their families' culture, pride, solidarity, and origin. They feel ashamed to be unable to use their native language. Mothers' host culture is their daughters' home culture.

Darraj indicates, too, how names are employed as cultural markers. She presents Arabic names to confirm the two generations' relation to culture and traditions and to unveil the conflict between them. For instance, Hanan's father, as an Arab American, wants his children to know their culture and not have to search for it like him. So, he gives his firstborn child an Arabic name. Later, Hanan confesses that she hates her name. She wonders, "Why couldn't I be Laura? Or Miranda?" and states that "all the kids laugh at my name and the teachers never say it right" (102). Her name makes her socially isolated from her peers and culturally estranged. Her Arabic name represents an obstacle in Hanan's way. Her cross-cultural marriage increases her feeling of estrangement. Her mother-in-law used to call her "Hunan." She pronounces Hanan's name as if it is "a region of China, but 'I had given up trying to correct her'" (123). Therefore, she calls her first child Michael, an Americanized version of her father's name, "Michel" (143). However, the cultural difference is the main factor in the failure of Hanan and John's marriage.

In contrast, Siham, one of the mothers, feels proud of her culture and her name. She proudly explains the meaning of her name: "Siham meant 'arrows' in Arabic. Straight to the target. No

deviations” (22). Hence, her name mirrors her behavior and power as she inspects her husband’s previous marriage and follows his ex-wife to her house. Like arrows, she tries to defend her house against strangers. So, she feels that her name is part of her personality and culture.

Furthermore, Darraj presents a popular cultural practice among Arabs, which is calling the parent by the name of the eldest child preceded by “Abu” meaning father, or “Umm” meaning mother. Reema, one of the daughters, claims that “most Arab men name their first sons after their fathers...That’s why my brother is named Ahmad” (Darraj 143). Unlike their daughters, immigrant mothers are proud of their cultural authenticity and Arab identity, whereas, the daughters view their names as a tool for their feelings of alienation and of always being an outcast and socially isolated.

Ralph Waldo Ellison, an American critic, regards “name” as “an identifier which a man has to become accustomed to or feel less comfortable with”. Names are, in fact, cultural constructs that are more linked to parents and their hopes and dreams, rather than to the individual who bears the name (191). He, too, assumes that “it is through our names that we first place ourselves in the world. Our names, being the gift of others, must be made our own.” Accordingly, he declares the confusion that triggers when the name that one is given contradicts a consistent sense of self because it offers two conflicting cultural identities. Ellison argues

that there will be a point when one feels compelled to explore his name to feel that his name is associated with his sense of self rather than accepting it as a pre-given fact (192).

Food is another cultural marker that restricts the level of assimilation and hence increases the sense of cultural estrangement and social isolation. For mothers, food refers to celebrating ethnicity and strengthening cultural connections to their homeland; it is a means of defining their Arab identity and culture in the American host land (Hamad 57). Daughters refuse to have contact with their mothers' cultural roots. They try to imitate American culture although they are not fully accepted by American society as Americans because of their biculturalism. Therefore, food is a "fictive motif" incorporated "into a wider setting around generational and cultural conflicts under which the narrative conventions are subsumed" (Salaita 77).

Nadia feels cheerful about walking down with her mother to Pat's and eating cheesesteaks. She states that it is something she loves to do unlike her mum (39). Her mother avoids American fast food which reflects non-assimilation. She tries to stick to traditional culinary practices. Nadia narrates how her mother Siham feels happy when she cooks "mansaff" for her friends, and they all "ooh-ed and aah-ed appreciatively as she'd laid the flat dish on the table" (11). Immigrant mothers always feel nostalgic for their traditional food, which reminds them of their native home and their family gatherings. Therefore, food enables those

mothers to remember their memories of Palestine. It associates them with their homeland and reduces the feelings of alienation in their host land. Food is also associated with happy or sad occasions; “Malfoof” had been the favorite meal of Siham’s husband, and it had been the last meal she had cooked for him before his death; “it was so long ago, but she still marked the anniversary of his death by making that meal” (Darraj 38).

Middleton believes that “apart from the refusal of social and cultural values, cultural estrangement may also be perceived as a refusal of activities that result from the shared values, and that are considered as standard patterns of behavior within a culture” (974). Accordingly, the clash between the American culture and the Arab culture appears when Layla visits her daughter, Hanan, and her friend, Aliyah, in their apartment. Layla sticks to cultural authenticity and refuses to drink American coffee, calling it “dirty water” (120). Then, she gives them a bag of Arabic ground coffee accusing the girls of forgetting everything “when you live away from your families” (121). Layla’s dislike for drinking American coffee shows the importance of food as a marker of Arab culture. She refuses American coffee which represents the host culture and encourages them to drink qahwa (coffee in Arabic) and to adhere to its rituals. She prepares it using a small pot that has a long handle and tells her daughter how to serve coffee to guests, “when you serve coffee to guests, you start first with the oldest person” (80). The rituals of making coffee and serving it reflect Layla’s

Arabic roots and heritage. Food represents a landmark in the cultural knowledge of her grandmother as it depicts tradition, memory and home. It is one of the few features of Arab culture that controls Arab Americans. Thus, Darraj sheds light on Arab cultural practices and their relations with the homeland when Nadia associates the cultural practice of stuffing and rolling grape leaves with the figure of her grandmother: “Siti’s hands smelled salty like the brine of the grape leaves she was eternally stuffing and rolling at the kitchen table” (4).

Being a symbol of one’s culture, food is also a means used to bridge the gap between diverse cultures. Darraj depicts the gap between the American culture and the Arab culture as a dominant one that is caused by impure assimilation. She portrays Huda as often mocked by her classmates when she was young because she was different, and found a Korean girl with whom she joined (196). Similarly, when Seham is in the Italian Market with her husband Nader Aljundi, Mrs. Donato, the Italian widow who has a flower shop on the first floor, welcomes Siham with “a coconut custard pie” (Darraj 15). Thus, through food, “Arab-Americans unite with other ethnic groups and minorities to create a community based on multiplicity rather than separation and binary opposition” (Conrey 198).

In *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (1998), Donna Gabaccia, an American historian, interprets the relationship between culture and food. She claims

that many psychologists confirm that language and food are the first cultural aspects that human beings learn and the ones that they reluctantly convert; humans hardly adapt to new accents when they learn a second language after the age of twelve. Likewise, they forever feel comfortable and familiar with the food they ate as children (7). Hence mothers stick to their familiar food because it indicates the survival of their Arab culture. While, throughout the food, daughters try to integrate into the host home.

On another level, marriage is a well-defined turning point in Arab culture. Relations outside the bounds of marriage represent a curious social problem and undermine the stability of cultural identity. Premarital sex is prohibited and shameful in most Arab American families. Girls are supposed to be virgins when they marry. Arab Americans believe that “compulsory virginity before marriage is traditionally understood as ideal for good Arab girl, and consequently, a good Arab family” (Abboud 722). So, non-virgin girls cause shame and harm to themselves and their families. Sexual abstention before marriage and the girl’s dignity usually reflect the honor of family in Arab culture (Hammad 21).

The American sociologist Robert K. Merton states that “culturally isolated individuals...do not absorb the norms, values, and sanctions of the dominant segment of the society and, consequently, they do not gain acceptance among the general people” (135). Thereby Darraj narrates how the daughters resist the Arab culture and their immigrant mothers. Mothers consider

traditional marriage a cultural practice that represents their efforts to save what they believe is authentically Arab. Such restrictions and eternal reminders of traditional cultural values, yet, stimulate the daughters to prove their Americanness and break out of the traditional Arab culture of their mothers. Daughters oppose these cultural practices related to marriage to liberate themselves from this outdated cultural burden as they believe. Thus, mothers' persistent objection to showing any respect for daughters' American beliefs plays a role in their cultural estrangement.

Nadia, for example, resists her mother, Siham, about going on a trip to the Poconos Mountains with her fiancé, George, and their friends Hanan and John. Mum attacks Nadia, warning her of its profound consequences. However, Nadia admits that they will be a group of friends so she does not have to worry about "*a-naas*." Nadia does not believe in "“What will *a-naas* say?” ‘What will *a-naas* think?’” She criticizes Siham who “always worked herself into a frenzy about the gossip circles created and perpetuated by *a-naas*.” Nadia views gossipers as having an “uncanny ability to transmit a single, juicy nugget of information about someone’s reputation across the Atlantic Ocean and then the Mediterranean Sea to the corresponding family back in the Middle East” (11). However, Siham agrees “as long as you and Hanan sleep in one room, and you let George and the American boy stay in another room” (Darraj 12). Worrying about “*a-naas*,” gossipers, is a “patriarchal tradition” that detains Arab-American women

because of their reputation (Hamid 37). Nadia hates her family's inheritance of Arab customs despite living in the US. Nadia's family expects Nadia to behave according to her Arab culture and care for 'a-naas.' However, Nadia behaves like a victim belonging to a chattering community and Arab culture that is fond of gossip and rumors. On the contrary, Siham feels grateful for Arab customs. She is always suspicious of Americans because of their modern lifestyle. "Unlike Jerusalem, where gossip lines kept everyone updated on their neighbors, someone could hide an entire life, conceal so many secrets behind America's veil" (27). Thus, Darraj claims that Arabs spread every piece of information, while Americans do not interfere in others' lives.

Like Nadia, but more aggressively, Hanan struggles with her mum to have a relationship with her American boyfriend John (later her husband) and get pregnant beyond the bounds of marriage. Layla tries hard to prevent her daughter from having any illicit relationships, so she has been keeping an eye on her every night. Even when Hanan moves temporarily to Aliyah's apartment, Layla keeps visiting her at seven in the morning. So, Layla is angry when Hanan marries John with whom she has a premarital relationship. She curses her daughter and tells Hanan that she will never give her blessing (115). Layla never accepts this cross-cultural marriage because she believes that "if that Amerkani wanted to marry my daughter, he should enter my house from the front door and not the back door!" (46) Dating is

inappropriate and disgraceful in Arab culture. Unlike her mum, Hanan is careless of what people say about her.

Similar to Nadia and Hanan, Reema's parents oppress her when she informs them that she will move to an apartment on her own. They notify her that "they would be compelled to disown her if it turned out that she was 'with a man' or causing people to label her '*bint al-haram*.'" However, Reema believes that leaving is imperative to "prevent the competition of cultures from fogging the path of her future" (Darraj 176). She is torn between Arab and American cultures.

Yen Le Espiritu, an Asian-American sociologist, assures that remembering a homeland in a host land is essential as it shapes "a lifeline to the home country and a basis for group identity in a new and often alien and oppressive context;" it is a way of announcing their "sociocultural claims in their adoptive country" (14). Therefore, Siham, Lamis, Layla, and Huda meet every Sunday to drink coffee and chat. This social circle of cultural practice helps them remember their homeland, Palestine, and unveil their feelings of alienation. It acts as a comforting zone in which they state solidarity as Arabs who confront the stress of the assimilation of the host land. One of these cultural practices is reading coffee cups to speculate about the future. Though Lamis is a semi-believer in reading coffee cups, she and other women in her circle stick to some cultural practices they were immersed in when they were in Palestine. She semi-believes in these

superstitious rituals because she “was raised breathing it, accepting it like air in my lungs” (60). These cultural practices associate them with their home culture, traditions and memories. Like reading coffee cups, blue stones appear in Darraj’s text as a cultural practice for protection from envy and the evil eye. As a newly arrived immigrant, Siham feels insecure and hangs blue stones in her home as her husband thinks of “voodoo,” to repel evil (Darraj 20). In addition, when the previous wife to her husband appears, Siham hangs many of these stones to keep this woman away from her family. Although these cultural practices may not be acceptable to others, they enable these women to stick to their Arab culture.

Whereas Darraj portrays immigrant mothers’ adherence and authenticity to their Arab culture, she, on the other hand, portrays how the daughters struggle against the cultural authenticity of their mothers because it restricts their freedom and makes them estranged between the two cultures. Growing up in South Philadelphia, the Arab American daughters absorbed its culture which motivated the reconstruction of their culture. The Palestinian-American Lisa Suhair Majaj confirms that “The implications of a Western identity in an Arab context can be so problematic that claustrophobic familial restrictions are often the result” (72). Thus, Lamis rejects her daughter’s behavior when she rolls her eyes because Lamis warns her not to wear a second earring. Reema reacts similarly when Lamis prevents her from

ripping her jeans at the thigh (58). Immigrant mothers use their matriarchal control to protect their daughters from foreign values and beliefs; they do not want them to assimilate into American society. Therefore, the result is their feeling of cultural estrangement.

Likewise, Hanan protests her mother's patrolling behavior. Layla wants Hanan to behave like an Arab. Layla hates Hanan's going out to parties and clubs, or just out with her friends. She always tells Hanan that they "are Arabs...not American! This is not what we do!" Hanan still cannot realize the dividing line between Arabs and Americans "who faced off against each other in her mother's mind like boxing opponents" (Darraj 87). The "boxing" metaphor reveals the cultural gap between immigrant mothers and their daughters. Daughters cannot completely desert their Arab heritage, however, being born and growing up in South Philadelphia and their feeling of their Americanness stimulate them to violate their ancestral traditions. These cultural violations of the second-generation daughters show their feeling of cultural estrangement.

In addition, Darraj depicts and manifests social isolation by annotating characters' failure to assimilate into the host country because of feelings of rejection by others. The French existentialist and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre claims that the seed of alienation is veiled in the experience of shame itself. In shame, a man faces a different self. This self he is ashamed of

does not exist before he confronts the other. The gaze of others forms this new self (352). In general, shame is defined as the feelings of sadness, embarrassment, and guilt that you feel when you know that something you have done is wrong, while Sartre illustrates shame as follows:

By the mere appearance of the other, I am put in the position of passing judgment...for it is as an object that I appear to the other...I could feel irritation, and anger before it as a bad trait of myself which gives my expression an ugliness or baseness that I do not have. Shame is by nature recognition. I recognize that I am as the others see me. There is, however, no question of a comparison between what I am for myself and what I am for the other. (222)

Shame is a form of consciousness of the individual. To feel shame is to be aware of others who can look at an individual as an object and judge and criticize him. "Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being an object" (288). It is recognizing the self through the other's eyes. Being judged and portrayed by others is what alienates an individual. Sartre believes that "the alienation of myself is the fact of being looked at" (263). Unfortunately, others form an opinion about an individual based on what they see. However, what is seen is not strictly what an individual is because what is seen is only a small part of the self-possibilities. The feeling of shame leads to

isolation and alienation from others, as what others see is just a part of the possibilities of the self.

Hanan believes that she is an American to the core, admitting that she is “not an Arab” (139) because she was born, raised, and lived her whole life in Philadelphia. She conflicts with her mother to prove this, while her husband’s family and the American community consider her an Arab. Once, at Thanksgiving, Hanan felt shameful when her husband’s family members “took the chicken from the opposite side of the plate, leaving a small pile of chicken wings and legs near what I’d touched, like a contaminated leper colony” because she picks a chicken leg with her hands and not with the tongs that are on the plate as this is what they used to do at home. At another dinner, Hanan makes a terrible mistake and uses her bread to sop up what was left of the Caesar salad dressing on her plate (129). Although her husband’s family has always been friendly with her, she is ashamed not to fit in with John’s family. She feels socially isolated because she is steeped in a traditional practice that is unacceptable to her husband’s family. While this cultural practice places her within her ancestral roots and traditions it deviates her from the dominant culture of the host land, thus, leading to her social isolation.

Darraj applies diction well throughout her text. Because of her name, when she goes to the Department of Sociology where her husband works, Hanan is classified as an “ethnic” by two of the senior professors. When one professor asks her “From which

region do you hail?” (140), Hanan clarifies that she was born and raised in Philadelphia and that she has never been to the Middle East. However, still, another professor asks her, ““Where in the Middle East do you come from?”... ‘Lebanon, Egypt?’” (141) as if they do not believe Hanan. Moreover, one of the professors who is writing a book on how Muslim women in the Middle East enter politics, asks her to scan her book for ““authenticity”” as she wants an Arab woman’s overview of ““how real”” her writing is (138). Thus, Hanan tries to assert her Americanness: “I’m not an Arab...I’ve never been to the Middle East in my entire life” (Darraj 139). Hanan refuses to be “pigeonholed into a narrow ethnic posture” (Salaita 75). However, Hanan’s definitive opinion does not save her from the complications of the American ethnicity. Her American parents-in-law will always see her as “Hunan” who eats chicken with her fingers and wipes her plate clean with bread (129). Her husband sees her as “ethnic”, and his colleagues in the Sociology department are convinced that she is genuinely Arab and is qualified to criticize the “authenticity” of the department chair’s thesis. The fact of calling Hanan an “ethnic” is a way of isolating her and treating her as a stranger and outcast.

Like Hanan, Aliyah’s sense of alienation is intensified by her journey back home. Aliyah’s visit to Jerusalem reflects her sense of social isolation as a Palestinian who is alienated in both her host land, America, and her homeland, Palestine. In the US, she is

isolated because of her ethnicity, and in Ramallah, she feels alienated because of her Americanness. During her journey, Aliyah meets a local man called Kareem whom she is engaged to. Then she justifies their engagement failure claiming that she: “was an Arab American. There was a hyphen there, connecting the things that created me: the one that drew me to him and the other that kept me at a distance” (69). This hyphen acts as a bridge that associates Aliyah with and isolates her from two distinct cultures. Hence, Aliyah announces that she “couldn’t gain access to Kareem’s world, partly because of my Americanness, my accent, and partly because they didn’t see me as part of their lives” (70). Ironically, outside the United States, she feels alienated due to her American identity which became more noticeable in Palestine. Now, she faces alienation, estrangement and isolation in both cultures and homes.

5- Conclusion

The paper ends up articulating that the two dimensions of cultural estrangement and social isolation of Seeman's theory of alienation are perfectly reflected in Darraj's text. These two aspects of alienation are experienced by four immigrant Palestinian mothers and their American-born daughters who feel disconnected from the surrounding society. The text's analysis proves that Arab Americans suffer social isolation and cultural estrangement in a host land. Immigrant mothers feel alienated because of living in the in-between space between the culture of the new homeland and the traditions and conditions of the old homeland. Mothers stick themselves to the Palestinian social and cultural beliefs, heritage and activities and give precedence to their values and beliefs exacerbating and complicating their alienation. Their unfamiliarity with the prevalent social values and beliefs is a result of perceiving their goals and beliefs as more important. Consequently, immigrant mothers give priority to the preservation of Arab culture and its conservative nature over those held by American society. They have always been subject to a permanent sense of alienation. In contrast, the daughters are trapped in alienation as their mothers' culture oppresses them. Despite being more able to adapt to the American culture, daughters are still socially isolated and culturally estranged because of the interplay between Arab Americans' perceptions of themselves and how others see them. They are always treated as

others. Daughters try to stick to the host land but also feel alienated as strangers, outcasts and outsiders. They suffer severe social isolation and cultural estrangement. Therefore, the existence of both mothers and their daughters in the host land, as strangers, renders them social outcasts.

Works Cited

- Abboud, Sarah, Loretta S. Jemmott, and Marilyn S. Sommers. "We are Arabs: The Embodiment of Virginity through Arab and Arab American Women's Lived Experiences." *Sexuality & Culture* 19, 2015.
- Ahmed, Mervat. "Alienation in Bahaa Taher's Sunset Oasis." *Egyptian Journals* 10.35, 2020.
- Brooks, Jeffrey, et al. "Fear and Trembling in the American High School: Educational Reform and Teacher Alienation." *Educational Policy* 22.1, 2008. Accessed 3 Aug. 2023.
- Conrey, Carol F. *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Darraj, Susan M. *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2007.
- Davachi, Azadeh. "Existential Absurdity and Alienation in Kafka's The Metamorphosis and Hedayat's The Blind Owl." MS thesis. University of Putra Malaysia, 2010.
- Ellison, Ralph W. "Hidden Name and Complex Fate: A Writer's Experience in the United States." *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. Ed. John F Callahan. Modern Library, 2003.
- Farrar, Max. "Re-thinking 'Community' as a Utopian Social Imaginary." *Class, Space and Community – A Workshop Conference*. Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Durham, 2001.
- Gabaccia, Donna R. *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Gass, William H. "Exile." *Salmagundi* 88.89, 1990.

- Hamad, Shireen Sh. "Food as a Means of Defining One's Identity and Culture in Selected Works of Arab-American Women Writers." *Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences* 219.1, 2016.
- Hamid, Dalia. "Identity Negotiation through Positioning in Two Selected Short Stories from Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile*." *Cairo Studies in English* 2020.2, 2021.
- Hammad, Adnan, et al. "Guide to Arab Culture: Health Care Delivery to the Arab American." *Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services*, 1999.
- Hassiba, Nouaouria. "Arab American Identity in Exile: Case Study of Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent*." MS thesis. University of Guelma, 2017.
- Jones, Edward, and Harold Gerard. *Foundations of Social Psychology*. New York: Wiley, 1967.
- Kalekin-Fishman, Devorah. *Designs for Alienation: Exploring Diverse Realities*. Finland: University of Jyväskylä, 1998.
- Keniston, Kenneth. *The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965.
- Kittler, Pamela G., Kathryn P. Sucher, and Marcia Nelms. *Food and Culture*. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016.
- Le Espiritu, Yen. *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*. California: California University Press, 2003.
- Majaj, Lisa S. "Boundaries: Arab/American." *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab American and Arab Canadian Feminists*. Boston: South End Press, 1994.
- Marx, Karl. *Selected Writings in Sociology & Social Philosophy*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.
- Merton, Robert K. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957.

- Middleton, R. "Alienation, Race and Education." *American Sociological Review* 28, 1963.
- Pavlenko, Aneta, and Adrian Blackledge. "Introduction: New Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Negotiation of Identities." *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts* 45.3, 2004.
- Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*. London: Granta Publications, 2001.
- Salaita, Steven. *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011.
- Salam, Wael, and Othman Abualadas. "Cultural Authenticity Versus Hyphenated Identities: Transnational Modes of Belonging and Citizenship in The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly." *College English Association Critic* 82.1, 2020.
- Sapolsky, Robert. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017.
- Sarfraz, Hamid. "Alienation: A Theoretical Overview." *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research* 12.1-2, 1997.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. H. E. Barnes trans. New York: Washington Square Press, (1943)1992.
- Schacht, Richard. "Alienation Redux: From Here to Postmodernity." *Contributions in Sociology* 11.6, 1996.
- Schmidt, Kenneth. "Alienational Powerlessness and Meaninglessness: A Neo-thomistic Approach." *The Journal for Sociological Integration and Religion and Society* 1.2, 2011. Accessed 10 Dec. 2023.
- Seeman, Melvin. "Alienation and Anomie." *Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Attitudes* 1, 1991.

---. "Alienation and Engagement." *The Human Meaning of Social Change*. Eds. Angus Cambell, and Philip E. Converse. New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1972.

---. "On the Meaning of Alienation." *American Sociological Review* 24.6, 1959. Accessed 5 Dec. 2023.

Starzyk, Lawrence J. "The Coming Universal Wish Not to Live in Hardy's 'Modern' Novels." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 6.4, 1972.

الاغتراب في "ميراث المنفى: قصص من جنوب فيلي" (2007) لسوزان

دراج: دراسة اجتماعية

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة و تحليل مشكلة الاغتراب كما تناولتها الكاتبة الفلسطينية الأمريكية سوزان دراج في نصها الروائي "ميراث المنفى: قصص من جنوب فيلي"، و ذلك طبقاً للدراسة التي قام بها عالم النفس الاجتماعي الأمريكي ملفين سيمان "حول معنى الاغتراب" و التي تُناقش مفهوم الاغتراب من منظور اجتماعي يهدف إلى القول بأن الحالة النفسية للاغتراب تشمل على ستة أبعاد أساسية هي العجز و فقدان المعنى و العزلة الاجتماعية و عدم المعيارية و الغربة عن الذات و التباعد الثقافي. و عند دراسة النص الروائي و تحليله تبين أن نمطين من بين هذه الأنماط الست و هما التباعد الثقافي و العزلة الاجتماعية يظهران بوضوح في النص من خلال سرد حياة أربع أمهات فلسطينيات مهاجرات و بناتهن اللاتي وُلدن و نشأن في الولايات المتحدة. و في ضوء ذلك يتبع البحث المنهج التحليلي لدراسة و نقد رواية من أدب الشتات. حيث يعرض البحث الإطار النظري، ثم يقوم بتطبيق النمطين المذكورين للاغتراب على الرواية من منظور أثر الشعور بالاغتراب تجاه الموطن الأصلي (فلسطين) و البلد المضيف (فيلادلفيا) على كل من الأمهات و بناتهن. و بذلك تُثبت الدراسة أن سوزان دراج قد نجحت في تصوير و كشف مظاهر و أسباب و توابع اغتراب العرب الذين يعيشون و يترعرعون في بلد مُضيف مثل الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دراج؛ سيمان؛ الاغتراب؛ التباعد الثقافي؛ العزلة الاجتماعية