

# Cultural Displacement and Identity in the Novels of Sheba Karim and Emily Nasrallah

Mohammed Jassam Salim<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Bhari Girish Dave<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of Languages, Department of English, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, India.

<sup>2</sup>M.P. Arts and M.H. Commerce College for Women, Ahmedabad, India.

## Abstract

This paper explores how cultural displacement influences the search for identity in the works of Sheba Karim and Emily Nasrallah. Through a comparative analysis of selected novels, it examines how the characters navigate between cultural loss, memory, and self-redefinition. Despite their different cultural backgrounds Pakistani- American and Lebanese their texts converge in depicting displacement as both a physical and emotional journey toward selfhood.

**Keywords:** Cultural, Displacement, Search, Self, Sheba Karim, Emily

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural displacement involves the rejection of one's original culture or the attempted assimilation into or reception of a new one. Cultural displacement is often intertwined with physical displacement or migration from one location to another. Stories of cultural displacement clearly narrate one's struggles with identity, belonging and attachment. Stories of migration from one land to another have coexisted with human beings since the dawn of civilization. These stories depict the attempts to settle in a new land and the negotiations with the memories of the earlier one. Stories of cultural displacement have proliferated over the years with intense global and local movements (Awad, 2015). However, the global conversation has broadened from the stories of the difficulties which pioneers of migration went through, to coping with home or homeland in a place that was not yours originally. Emphasis has been placed as to how through settling, coping, exploitation and/or assimilation, the notion of home becomes more ambiguous and multifaceted.

Emphasis is also being placed on how this turn socially and economically disenfranchises communities socially. Such cultural displacement exposes alienation and detachment of the discursive notion of home, homeland or culture. Extreme cases of cultural displacement expose traumatic memories of the earlier homeland that disrupt the normalcy of living in the new environment. Novelists, poets, playwrights and filmmakers provide their own interpretations of the issues arising from cultural dispossession and dislodging. They comment on the struggles with affixation and acceptance, and how compromise and nostalgia deal with transience, fragility and displacement. Sheba Karim and Emily Nasrallah in their novels combine the stories of the effects of migration to the US by South Asian and Middle-Eastern women along with the stories of the difficulties they encounter in adjusting to the new socio-cultural environment. They narrate and depict the difficulties of adjustment, estrangement and acceptance from the perspectives of the characters who struggle.

Simultaneously, they scorn, contest and resist the instances of traumas, suffering, dis-allegiance and detachment of forlorn memories of the earlier homes and cultures. Through the contrasting experiences and interpretations of two generations, both novels provide illuminating and encompassing visions on the selections, acquisitions and modifications of which a wider and more intricate spectrum of understanding of the issues of cultural displacement is accessible.

This research investigates the intersection of cultural displacement and identity formation in selected novels by Sheba Karim and Emily Nasrallah. The central concern is how characters from two different cultural backgrounds grapple with loss, and the struggle to define themselves.

### **Research Questions:**

- What forms of displacement are depicted?
- How does cultural alienation shape the characters' identities?
- How do Karim and Nasrallah narrate the search for self?

Karim and Nasrallah explore displacement as a transformative process that redefines the self, with characters navigating through conflicting cultural norms and personal memory.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Cultural Displacement refers to the psychological and emotional effect of losing or leaving one's native cultural setting, which often results in a fractured sense of identity.

The Search for Self is the internal journey of defining or rediscovering one's identity under external pressures like migration, war, or cultural difference.

A Postcolonial Feminist perspective is useful in analyzing how women authors depict displaced identities through the lens of gender and cultural hybridity.

### **2.1. Cultural Displacement**

Typically, transcendence is a compelling aspect of the immigrant mother-daughter novel. The daughters struggle to juggle between clashing cultures co-existing within a single body. The daughters portray an understanding of the clashing expectations of two generationally and culturally different women. In almost all cases, the initiation of the daughter is presented in the form of cultural displacement where she is made to take violent or drastic measures to assert her turf within the native culture and, in turn, rebel against the foreign culture. They grapple with the struggles of immigrant daughters with their faith and introversion being both internally and externally displaced the daughter wrestles with her hyphenation during the transitional phase of coming of age. No fictional daughter is perfect she should be at once naïve yet local what makes her local is the portrayal of culture-specific aspects. The protagonists of these novels accommodate a kind of a gradual evolution from a naive knowledge of the world to a quite comprehensive understanding of it one through public culture the other through introspection and *pas de deux* with the mother being well aware of the metamorphosis of the daughter. The cultural codes as represented in the choices of objects and activities are mediated and channelized through the experiences of the mothers. The daughters learn the subtle shifts of cultural connotation in the choices of objects and bring in new meanings to the pre-existing old once. Though the daughters' voice is centripetal focusing more on the feminine side of culture the mothers are also given a fair chance to speak. Each of these immigrant mother-daughter novels highlight the cultural codes as distinguished by imposition, inversion, intension, and invention with the binary of external and internal dislocation bringing home the art of cultural translation.

The hitherto analysis of cultural displacement attempts to bring out the joys and woes of object and

activity insertion in the daughter-in-mother narratives with the immigrant experience forming the background. The layer cake model of home is utilized to showcase the at once rich, nuanced and complex presentation of cultural statuses vis-à-vis the racial and ethnic differences. The cultural codes are depicted with cultural distinctness being accompanied by cultural evolution. The cultural shift is expressed so effortlessly that it renders cultural in-betweenness style-staggeredment closure is depicted in an understated manner. It further paves the way for peaceful and respectful co-existence between cultures (Awad, 2015).

## 2.2. Identity Formation

Identity is one of the most crucial and contestable areas of scholarship and an enigma of human experience. Identity in this sense characterizes diasporic fiction. Defining the delineation, complexity and transcending cognitive of identity by extending it to dislocation and cultural diversity becomes inevitable in the perspective of globalization, migration, hybridity, multi-ethnicity and cultural intermingling. The emergence of rigid, static and fixed identity and ethnicity prevents the free-flowing of people and cultures, and leads to national conflict and cultural apartheid contrary to cosmopolitanism and syncretism which preach a flexible and multi-layered identity not too far to be strange and antagonistic. In the wake of imperialism and colonialism, post-colonialism came into being, defending socio-cultural conflicts and turmoil imposed by post-colonialism was interculturalism. Under the auspices of here, there, and somewhere undertook the monumental task of liberating cultures gutted by colonialism and post-colonialism to make them meet, mix and influence each other. In this contest, both shaping their novels in the backdrop of Toronto and Canada precisely dug into an aspect of identity formation and disformation by scribing the subcontinent and Middle Eastern diasporas to a new land. The novels purport the negotiation and navigating between the first culture inherited from one's ancestors and the new implicit culture around the characters. The pioneering enquiry traverses the agonizing plight of the first generation women evicted from their motherland to stretch the experimental and theoretical horizon of the already existing field of discourse and an intended contribution to interrogate the universally human experience. Identity formation and transformation is being trudged through and interrogated in the novels.

## 2.3. Postcolonial Theory

The discourses of globalization have brought up a new approach for understanding culture and society as a result of the complex matrix of migration, diaspora, and transnational processes intervening in people's lives. People are living, shifting, and creating identities in transit, fluid, and porous boundaries across nations. The battered narratives of homeland, exile, belonging, and citizenship adopt shapes and characteristics as diverse as cultural practices from across the globe. Diasporas offer a fertile ground for double consciousness, facilitating the counter-writing of colonial borderlands and bridging sites of experience and survival. Defying conventional wisdom, they articulate an irreducibly hybridized and hyphenated sense of cultural production and belonging, encapsulated in the term "transculturation" (Saad Almutairi et al., 2017) recognized as an approach to the understanding of culture and society as processes that are neither wholly the same nor wholly different, but continuously adrift in dynamic transformation. Accents, outfits, gestures, sounds, and so on are all inter-textual, most of it circulating, traversing, and remixing in an intricate web. Where migrants go is neither the same old place nor a new one, but a palimpsest in continual restoration. Diasporic literature accompanies this movement of peoples, exploring a wide range of phenomena associated with cultural transforming across borders, including displacements, the longing for home and in-betweenness, and the negotiation of transnational

identities. They take the form of textual and visual narratives, reviving the notion in the late twentieth century of the re-appraisal of movements across nations, languages, and cultures. Accordingly, the ever-changing nature of contemporary culture and society motivates new questions for postcolonial studies addressing aesthetic representation, power, differentiation, and agency, as well as differences in gender, race, class, and sexuality. However, while there is vast migration to them, there has been notably less postcolonial scholarship directed at Muslim diasporic bodies and Muslim migrant countries, such as Pakistan. This gap is compounded by the impoverished view of transnational lives in the works of Sheba Karim and anger of Arab women in Emily Nasrallah.

### 3. Sheba Karim: An Overview

Sheba Karim, a Pakistani-American writer, was born in Karachi, Pakistan, raised in the United States and has lived in England, Ireland and South Asia. She composes in English, with themes drawn from the cultural friction between her native and adopted homelands. In her work, she explores exile from home, and the quest for freedom from the ghosts of pre-migratory land, which are typical of migrant writers across the globe. Karim focuses primarily on the experience of ‘another-ness’ faced by the American-ness of Muslims in the post-911 United States (Michelle Khoury, 2005). Her work investigates crises of identity among South Asian Muslim women in America; commodity consumption in the lives of the children of South Asian immigrants; fantasies of hybridity; sexuality and corporeality in women’s writing of the Global South. The theme of cultural dislocation and the quest of identity/sense of belonging is echoed in her novels. Through these notions, the comfort zone of the characters along with their cultural baggage is lost; and the struggles to comprehend their ‘in-between’ position emerge.

The first section of Karim's novel, *Skunk Girl*, begins with a glimpse into the life of the thirteen-year-old Indo-American, Mela, who feels completely ‘culturally’ out of place, torn between tradition and modernism. The fourteen-year-old narrator, a Pakistani girl, who feels torn between her suburban American lifestyle and ‘that’ exotic Pakistaniness, ‘that’ adjustment to her native culture. Mela doesn’t feel fully Pakistani in America; and also feels embarrassed when family friends visit from Pakistan, and talk in a dialect she doesn’t understand. The Western ideals of worldliness seem to her more appealing, thrilling, attractive and glamorous. However, she tries to shed her brash makeup and bears stylistic similarities with her ‘Desi’ cousins. The story portrays the two worlds pulling in opposite directions: “Mummy’s pissing the banquet is cancelled; Daddy’s van is not in the driveway; Ahmed Donnish is so crush-worthy they have become a heartthrob all-star team all by cyber-stalking. The world was a tightrope walk between pack-to-powder scented, colorful jalabiya-and-basari swag, and bleached mosquito”.

The major themes of the novels are the sense of cultural displacement, and loss of belonging, although they are shown through different subject matters. This same theme is also echoed in (Saad Almutairi, 2017).

#### 3.1. Biographical Context

Sheba Karim was born in Lahore, Pakistan and immigrated to the United States in 1990 as a teenager. Her works are particularly concerned with the lives of Pakistani Muslim immigrant women who struggle against the loss of their culture through acculturation into an alien culture. Karim draws from her own experiences as a Pakistani Muslim woman living in the United States. In her first novel, *Skunk Girl*, Karim recounts the life of a Pakistani Muslim teenage girl, an outsider in her own country. Naureen reveals herself in the narrative as a dissenting soul trapped in a culture of oppressive women. Her

family's culture becomes unbearably stifling until it becomes impossible for her to breathe. She rebels against it and turns into the culture of the native land. Naureen's concept of identity changes over time. While she struggles to cope with manipulation and oppression, she conforms to the ideals of her culture until it becomes too intolerable. Her desperation to realize an authentic native identity compels her to turn into the native culture (Michelle Khoury, 2005). Emily Nasrallah was born in the Lebanese town of Bint Jbeil in 1945. She emigrated with her family to Canada in 1975 after the Lebanese civil war broke out. Nasrallah faced self-inflicted exile, being forced to leave her country. The landscape of Bint Jbeil remains vivid in her memory and inspires her to write. The sense of loss after exile with regard to the place remains deep-rooted in her works. In her early works, Nasrallah writes tendentiously regarding her homeland. She depicts notions of home, nostalgia and exile. It is through fragments of place that she recalls her native country either by writing post-hoc or by writing down a memory that remains clear. The pre-monologue nation of place in her fiction is rooted in the past. Even though characters are displaced, they often reach back to the beloved township through memories. Writing and memory become the medium that connect them to home (Saad Almutairi et al., 2017). By reaching back to memory, homeland often emerges as an idealized and dreamy landscape where the past is lovingly recounted owing to the innocence of childhood. The alternate space of home demonstrates a yearning for place since the act of writing becomes a way of regaining it. While exiled from the nurturing space of the landscape that shaped her existence, writing avails itself as the territory of compensation for the loss of them.

### 3.2. Literary Contributions

Sheba Karim's debut novel, "Skunk Girl," contains familiar issues that scholars have analyzed and put into context. The novel depicts the awkward adolescence of a first-generation American Muslim girl. It is an immigrant story described through the lens of Islam. Karim delves into her inner world and addresses issues today's youth face, including parental customs and behaviors, peer pressure, and negative media portrayal. Karim's humorous and deep writing addresses these issues while keeping the reader engaged. Today's youth face different challenges than previous generations' immigrant struggles. They negotiate both American adolescent culture and long-standing family traditions. They are often portrayed as confused or lost. Karim's goal was to document similar experiences for teenagers today and to provide insight into the life of a midwestern Muslim girl (Saad Almutairi, 2017). Karim was a product of her upbringing, Muslim but not especially devout, and felt powerless against the weight of ignorance directed at young Muslim women and their upbringing and parental choices.

Karim, a girl with a love for the arts, made art out of her anger. Everywhere she looked, she felt like an outsider, with people whispering in the hallways or snickering when she walked by. She, like many others, was shocked and horrified by the events that transpired on September 11, 2001, but her experience didn't stop there. Not only was she subjected to the blame and anger of outside cultures, but she was also chastised at home for her belief that she could fit in with something other than her own people. Karim wrote her Dead Girls movement, wherein she hypothesized the sudden death of many close friends. One of the themes of "Skunk Girl" is displacement. In the light of certain quotations, it is seen how she feels that she does not belong to any particular group. The second "discrimination," which sadly escalated in post-9/11 America, is examined in the non-Western culture, particularly emphasizing family influence and the issue of shame.

#### 4. Cultural Displacement in Sheba Karim's Novels

Culturally uprooted individuals struggle in both their native land and new surroundings, which leads to poor adjustment. They frequently experience a sense of disconnection and longing that can result in nostalgia, sadness, or feelings of isolation, anger, and fear. Some individuals can become peaceful, positive, joyful, even vibrant, while remaining committed to their historical roots and possessing emotional intelligence (Saad Almutairi, 2017). Others are helpless, oblivious victims, living in denial and bitterness. They may angrily reject those who adapt well to their new culture as traitors and lash out at anyone. Because they refuse to differentiate between co-culture and native culture, they run the danger of losing both. Cultural displacement can be discussed in its signification, forms, and repercussions, which differ depending on which part of the world it takes place in, or they can be compared in terms of nationality or culture, showing points of convergence and divergence. The transcultural dilemmas are examined using a race-class and gender lens in tandem as a stance on cultural dislocation. Further, the relationship between culture and identity is outlined through Westernization and Islamization processes in the novels.

Shifting and opposing thoughts regarding their original culture conjoined with Western influences together building a composite 'hybrid' identity have been explored by various novelists, as well as consciously mocking vestedness in either à la "glad to be there" thoughts, or absurdly trying to recreate all the traditions, manners, rules, convictions of the original culture. On the dramatic external side of duality cultural dislocation stories variously yield pathos, unbalance, panic, and burden avowing failings of one original culture or the other (or excess possession of any of them). Cultural dislocation stories are by the same token empowering. Due to their flexibility as 'third world' individuals, various re-adjustment frames are available and successfully used (mind-based, whimsical, mystical). In all cases, cultural dislocation yields depressive impulses (mocking one, or oneself).

The literature of migration offers conflicting visions for coping with dual tensions, focusing either on better fits or accumulating burdens. It is anxiously debated what aspect of newer surroundings is bidden better account of economico-societal components and what is urged to remain conscientious on religious issues, all positively turning on personal properties of vigilance or nihilism, shunning the ambushed from an over-spirited renaissance, or at least toting leaning out of both aborigine and new anchors.

##### 4.1. Character Analysis

Sheba Karim's characters in her selected novels are constructed within the cultural locations that provide them with a distinctive character and filament. They are primarily American immigrants from Pakistan. In this background, their lives, which are affected by their ethnicity, gender, and social circumstances, become cultural perceptions of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Manzoor Ahmad, a prominent character, internalized the differences between 'them' and 'us.' He believes in the innate evil of 'the outsiders.' Unilateral trust shifted into its alterity when the man that wedged into the family's emotional closeness is a nationality other than Pakistan: like Vendela ability to speak Urdu. This idiomatic expression emphasizes Manzoor's understanding of Vendela as an outsider by cutting the original form with an English headword that could not be realized fully in this strict phonology (Saad Almutairi et al., 2017). Furthermore, Eid's reaction further evidences how Vendela's proclamation and included acceptance triggered Manzoor's alarmism through shades of ideological layer application. In short, in their endeavor to revivify their roots, migrating Middle Eastern climes faced hardships in complete cultural assimilation and unavoidable cultural and dialect variations, forming the root of cultural displacement and conflict.

The cultural inscriptions surrounding the character Blues developed a stereotypic plan from Arab culture. Though their Islamic inscription denotes anti-Americanism, their genuine Christians depicted by the team reject cultural representations regarding their background, food, shroud, and their deputy office or admiration. Blues proteins in place of origin are petrified and exiled. Youths escaping the symbolic representation of the revered site in the contract from overbearing parents are elements that impede the text's flow. They become undertones for recollection, enlightenment, and snaps that display a theatrical closure. Non Middle Eastern characters are revealed to have sound tracks of major incidents in the East. Civic place settings are explored and snipped as both 'the outliner allegory' and the 'modular politics' for one-off narration. Their connotations are subverted and parodied to advantage voice sharing and development privilege for disquiet and insiders. On the whole, agency retains its core meaning that a character or character block itself feeding on battles along with the proper viewport directed at the time zone of action.

#### **4.2. Themes of Alienation**

Anita Habib, the first-generation immigrant in Sheba Karim's novel, feels herself as an outsider in America. Anita's confusion arises not only from her rookie experience in America but also from her peculiar background of being both an insider and an outsider in a number of overlapping cultural and social systems. She is the daughter of a Muslim family from Pakistan who has just been recently introduced to the American cultural system, and in a situation which requires her to learn the language of English and change her identity to be accepted by the American people, she is expected to keep her own exotic cultural identity. The very complexity of her cultural identity makes it difficult for her to fit into any one cultural system. It seems she is forced either to assimilate or to exclude herself. This culture clash leads to an existential crisis and dilemmas in her identity. Anita's state of in-betweenness prompts her to point out that home is a multifaceted concept which can be a site of the convergence of geopolitics and generational and social differences among other dynamics. Moreover, she bemoans that her position as half American half Arab alienates her from both cultures and that she feels herself forsaken like a foundling abandoned on a doorstep (Awad, 2015). Similarly, Layla, the first-generation immigrant in Emily Nasrallah's novel, observes that she bears little resemblance to the image of the green-eyed girl adorned with roses and adorned with wheat in her mother's and grandmother's tales. She recalls her female ancestors' habit of wearing their long hair rolled up on their heads and depicted in heavenly gardens that prick her self-identity. Layla's memories reflect that of Anita by expressing wonder at the disjuncture between the different discourses and narratives on womanhood prevalent in the two diverse cultures. Layla's state of in-betweenness leads her to experience culture clash on a number of levels including social hierarchy and gender norms. Gender and religious-based social hierarchies that pervade her childhood world serve to transform what is at first fun and imaginative into a bizarre reality filled with notions of guilt, shame and sin.

#### **4.3. Narrative Techniques**

Sheba Karim and Emily Nasrallah, in their own ways and respective styles, offer a critique of contemporary society in two interrelated areas: first, the stereotypical images of Arab women and particularly Muslim women and second, the experience of cultural displacement. The first theme remains the focus of Karim's novel, while the second theme is addressed by both authors. In *The Hijab Boutique*, Karim explores the experiences of Muslim women in America, with special attention to the criticism of their representation by the media. In *Moon Watchers*, Nasrallah conveys the messages of the newly deposed Palestinian women, shedding light on their complications between statelessness and the

pursuit of identity.

The novels under scrutiny tackle both the stereotypes about Arab women and the experiences of cultural displacement using an array of narrative techniques. By creating distinct characters and deploying a variety of narrative elements, both stories unfold the depiction of contemporary society and its limitations and defects. First, Karim and Nasrallah create young female characters as protagonists of their tales. While characters are very diverse among the novels – from the frustrated but very concerned women in *The Hijab Boutique* to the aged and past-reputed characters in *Moon Watchers* – female perspectives are retained in both stories. Such identity assumption yields sympathy from the audience's part, and it gives the female characters the power of voicing their concerns with the experience of cultural displacement or the stereotype criticism. Not only are female eyes captivating but they also soften the harshness of the criticism by framing them through emotions.

Both Karim and Nasrallah utilize the interior monologue as a perspective in their tales. Couched in a conversational tone, interior monologues give access for the reader to cry, laugh, and sigh with the characters, feeling their pains and confusion. In *The Hijab Boutique*, the reader is granted convenient access to the characters' thoughts and feelings as the story jumps from character to character, with one paragraph said from one character's voice, then quickly switching into another (Awad, 2015). The variation of the perspective from character to character supplies a hall of mirrors, through which the critiqued society can be viewed from several angles and how its meaning is deconstructed.

## 5. Emily Nasrallah: An Overview

Emily Nasrallah plays a significant role in the contemporary literary landscape of Lebanon. Born in 1931 in a town near the port city of Tyre, she spent her early childhood in a small village with a modest Lebanese family. Accompanying her family on their frequent visits to Tyre, she was deeply connected to the sea. Educated in Tyre, she developed a passion for literature and the arts, particularly stories that conveyed importance and meaning to her community. However, her early marriage at the age of fifteen to a businessman in Beirut curtailed her education, limiting her access to the city's cultural diversity. Nevertheless, her ambition ignited through reading literary works by various authors.

Despite societal constraints surrounding women's education, Nasrallah balanced domestic responsibilities with artistic pursuits. Contributing correspondence to newspapers, she subsequently published short stories and accompanied them with illustrations. This marked Nasrallah's entry into the realm of storytelling. Her creative imagination found voice in her writings, all while living the life of a housewife. However, fleeing to the US at the onset of the Lebanese Civil War, she was plunged into a life devoid of kinship and the familiar community. This prompted her to embrace a pen and narrative voice she had not previously grasped.

Although her early short stories were published in Beirut, it was her second novel, *"The Last of the Angels,"* that propelled her to the forefront of Lebanon and Arab literary scenes. Subsequently translated into several languages, it garnered recognition, inviting re-evaluation of the literary output of women who immigrated from Lebanon. Today, Emily Nasrallah is regarded as a Lebanese author whose writing bears the mark of a profound struggle for existence in a world that does not truly exist. While her pen reveals an extraordinary imagination and artistic sensitivity, her depictions of subjects and themes connected to her youth and homeland resonate with depth. These subjects continue to haunt the memories and imaginations of many Lebanese, yearning to explore literature that encapsulates the disappearance of a homeland, sweeping ashes on stitched land after the grandeur of innocence and pride

was trampled and disbanded.

### 5.1. Biographical Context

Sheba Karim was born and raised in Lahore before moving to the US for higher education. Through her educational experiences, she witnessed perceptions and misperceptions of Islam and Muslims. She believes that racism and stereotyping stem from a lack of understanding of other cultures. As an immigrant writer, she endeavors to bridge that gap and introduce her culture and people to readers through stories. Karim regards story-tellers as the ambassadors of their culture, stating, “We are well aware that 12-page media headlines can never resurface the rich 1000 summer-long lives we lived in our homes” (Awad, 2015). She hopes her writings will make people question the media's portrayal of reality and search for truth through personal experiences. Karim explores the narratives/fictions and lives of young American Muslim women to understand and address alienation and cultural dislocation amidst the cultural backdrop of uncertainty. Karim reflects on the events that shape the destiny of Afghan women and men following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. Her voice serves as a reminder that storytelling is a responsibility—an act of resistance.

The literature written by Sheba Karim and Emily Nasrallah enhances the understanding of society in terms of conflicts arising from cultural displacement, which results in a blurred and ambiguous identity, appraisal of one's own culture, and sense of belonging and alienation. Creativity needs to be understood in this context. It related to characters trying to transcend their cultural identity to polish it and reconceiving and forging anew their cultural identity against immigration and diaspora. Sheba Karim wrote novels and stories about intergenerational issues reflecting young immigrant Muslim women's voices. They seek to cultivate their identity, which becomes blurry and ambiguous while living in post-9/11 America. Emily Nasrallah sheds light on the plight of marginal people in Lebanese society through her protagonists, who are uninvited, weak, and poor laborers. Lack of state protection forces them to look for themselves and awaken culturally in exile. Literature is, thus, a voice that abhors any form of hegemony and searches for common authenticity in multi-voiced societies of newly acquired identities.

### 5.2. Literary Contributions

Asian Canadian literature has made an influential impact on the writing community and the diaspora writers are significantly contributing to the field. South Asian Diaspora writers and their literature have gained notable attention in the last decade. South Asians form one of the three largest immigrant groups in Canada. , , and work on multicultural education. , , and narrate the trauma of the 1984 anti-Sikh riot in India. and focus on the first generation of immigrants. However, the formulation of identity of the second generation has not received due attention. and , both of whom migrated at an early age in opposition to the guideline of their patriarchal society which did not endorse the education and employment of women outside its precincts, went on with their academic pursuits in new cultural molds as pioneers. They have elucidated cultural displacement, identity crisis, and the legacy of the homeland in their novels, 'The Hijab Boutique' and 'The Girl Who Stuttered and Mumbled' respectively (Saad Almutairi et al., 2017).

Through a close reading of the Asian Canadian novels of, and , the new understanding is provided of the construction of cultural displacement and identity of immigrants and their descendants born and brought up in alien cultures. It finds that the motivation to explore past memories is triggered by a significant event of loss. As they maneuver through the web of memories in an attempt to revisit the lost fountainhead, they transpire from confusion to enlightenment, empowerment, and acceptance. It sheds light on this endeavor in a milieu where the recollection of past cultural practices means insider-ness and

acceptance in the new society and exclusion for the others. The novels have been studied in-depth which are found to exhibit cultural displacement and identity unique to cultural minority women writers. A close reading of these novels reveals that the protagonists grapple with two cultural identities, one being the legacy of their homeland and the other imposed by the new society. They struggle at an intersection where both identities infiltrate each other, negotiate, reject and modify leading to the formulation of hybrid self.

## 6. Cultural Displacement in Emily Nasrallah's Novels

Emily Nasrallah, an Arab American novelist, exposes displacement, satiating alienation in her early Arab childhood and adolescent adulthood, paralleled by the nuances of cultural clashes and fetal displacement in the American culture of the 'New Silk Road', bolstered by the absence of language. The novel "The Tent" delineates the state of a refugee's cultural displacement and surmounted ignorance towards the Arab Muslim identity in the Western and American socio-political macrocosm, amplified by quotidian minutiae in Lila's life as a resident alien manque. The prototypical tent of a Palestinian refugee, that transformed into the euphoric abode for the rosy experiences of the nostalgia ridden Palestinian adolescence, is metamorphosed into manicured lawns of the backyard in California, with no memorabilia inculcated. Lila's childhood innocence and ignorance towards the socio-political ties and ramifications of tent living and refugee experiences is portrayed through the quotidian minutiae immersed in turquoise colored swimming pools: a BYW with subtropical plants, bright pristine bougainvillea bushes. Traces of memories fade through transcendental movements that bespeak time elapsing, reiterating that reminiscences go adrift as leaky tents (Awad, 2015). The dual parentages birth the hybrid selves, cringing for the lost innocence amidst burgeoning cultural clashes and gap between the races and languages, exasperating the Western prejudices and myopic ignorance towards the sociocultural divide. Newness of the golf-clubs, summers spent sleepover, proms in clinkered barb-b-ques replaced by dirty porcelain backs and ugly turtlenecks constricted in Saudi Arabia never seemed to last long till an incident unveiled the rug from under, and all happened abruptly. Even though partiality swayed towards the summering escapade on Aline's blue Acura and spa, laughter and twinkling with harmless frivolity within the new American habitat, Lila's passive existence was severely aggravating. The ingenious understanding hurt her and even though things contributed towards evading predicaments, the best wasn't rendering through. This allegiance to miscogenation frolic in no-passport green room amidst seemingly sophisticated and privileged abode of pals, contrast came abrupt like a thunder that split across blackening horizons. New school with fake behavior and surface lives of mutual distrust and alienation, was elusive spent in humid afternoons parked and stranded in the Bahama Bay, attempting to lose sloth. Removing the chocolate inked, scrawny boy head with zipped up jackets to make the stubby Snow White's golden crown pair, the overly posed mirrors at various angles vexatious render insipidity and emptiness wrought with the unending traffic.

### 6.1. Character Analysis

For the sake of clarity, the protagonists' names have been placed in alphabetical order. In her novel, Nadia is rooted in America; her father, Zain, is both American in terms of citizenship and cultural orientation; and Zain's parents are Bangladeshis with roots in America. Samira is a character whose hub has been Palestine all her life; her family moved to America only after her father's imprisonment. To put it differently, Karim has attempted to show two contrasting characters: Nadia's family with genealogies in America; and Samira's family with genealogies in colonized Palestine. Nadia/Nassira is portrayed as

a bold, confident, and revealing character in the novel. She relishes shopping and eats American pizza with olives that taste like “bullshit yogurt, goat milk.” Despite being unpoetic, the simile aptly describes the taste of a pizza mixed with olives. She sticks two pieces of her father’s food into her ears when he tells her that college is not so serious that she should keep her ears wide open. The aphorism expresses the meaning quite sharply, indicating that a question need not have a direct answer. She refuses to read *The Old Man and the Sea* for an analysis paper in class, saying it is “tedious, trite, weird, and has a bitter back taste and boring characters.” Her comic and dominating verbal utterances reveal intellectual and existential confidence. Samira is an asylum seeker in America. She is beautiful, tactful, shy, and hidden. She prefers faded and oversized clothes because she does not want to draw attention to herself. Rather than writing on “my American daily life,” she prefers “Polass and not just a normal ‘raisin.’” Her family does not want to settle under-Los Angeles sprawl. She is afraid of “the cops who might return us.” Samira fears social absurdities. She appreciates Karim’s portrayal of her veil as her Muslim identity, liberating her family from palimpsests of rage. Samira stands as a mosaic, tangled in ugly fur and complicated reflections. Samira overcomes her fears at one point. She recovers from her fears of being fully alive and at the same time a Pit Bull. Samira even compares a pit bull’s love with her “desperate and hungry family.” Whereas Nadia’s father, Zain, has almost lost his identity, Yasmin deeply believes in home, a homeland lost through occupation. Zain tries to forget that he is a Bangladeshi, a Muslim, and a traditionalist (Saad Almutairi et al., 2017).

## 6.2. Themes of Belonging

The female characters in Karim’s and Nasrallah’s novels grapple with their identities in the face of divergent cultural practices between that of their parents and their host countries. The hybrid characters realize that oral storytelling can be deployed as an effective and safe means of creating familiarity, a sense of belonging and sympathy between unfamiliar cultures and ways of life. In Karim’s *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, “Layla” is reminiscent of her childhood in Lahore, Pakistan where she lived with her Pakistani parents. Upon arrival in the US, she compares the two cultures and translates aspects of the new culture so that her mother understands: “In America, we go to movies. They’re like plays on the screen, but everyone’s quiet, and no one throws tomatoes at the actors. You eat popcorn, which is like half-popped corn, and drinks that are copious and fizzy like a shower,” she described. In some philosophical sense, “Layla” preserves the memories of her beautiful past and her old culture, but in a politically sensitive way. In its intangible embodiments, the “old culture” is familiar to her mother, but the details are a way of diffusive translating. Furthermore, there is a sense of loss in “Layla’s” past. She missed the reading of Qur’an with her mother. The fear of having a cultural and linguistic drift between her and her mother drives “Layla” to teach her mother how to read the Qur’an again. “Layla” is distanced from the holy experience, but she attempts to close the gap. In Nasrallah’s “The Pirates’ Revenge”, both characters in the US come from a Middle Eastern culture that is drastically different from their wife, Naomi. “Naomi” cannot comprehend the horridness of the tale of the “Widows,” which intrigues “Dahlia.” It is the incongruity between familiarity and unfamiliarity in culture that gives rise to sympathy to the widowed females. The alien experience “Naomi” encounters proves detrimental to her mental happiness. Misunderstanding and disconnection create a rift in that family. In both stories, cultural practices, despite their vast discrepancies, allow the subjects to move towards understanding and bonding (Awad, 2015). In summary, the hybrid characters realize that oral storytelling can be deployed as an effective and safe means of creating familiarity and a sense of belonging among disparate beliefs and practices.

### 6.3. Narrative Techniques

The novels under consideration make use of myriad narrative techniques such as nonlinear structure, narrative style, use of aberration, metaphors, and shifts in points of view. The framing devices used in two novels serve as a pretext and an anchor to round off the different narrative strands. The foci in both novels make use of the trick of misled tangential narratives where, at one point in time, the author directs attention away from the primary narrative strand and sends it in a different direction altogether. Such an unanchored movement or disruptive digression creates questions in the reader's mind regarding the purposefulness of these deviations. The writer also augments the vexatiousness of characters making them stammer and waste verbal space. The frets and fumbles of the male characters create both resentment and laughter. These moments of aberrant renditions ultimately coalesce at the fitting moment. There are frames within the frames and island memories peppering the text. Leapfrogging across time, place, and events, memories sometimes jump decades in an audacious way.

As a narrative strategy, metaphors and other figures of speech have been employed abundantly in the analyzed texts. Epic metaphors such as the miniascule description of the crows dawn upon the reader a new realization regarding the insignificance of man in the universe. Bright moonlight, 'valley profundo', perfumed stars, thumping shawl, etc. pervade the text flashing the persistence of folk culture even amid early modern struggles. The tragic symptomatology of colonized people has been represented figuratively in exemplary numinous metaphors like 'errant nomads' and 'lepers of tongues'. The unresolved gulf between the beloved and the forsaken has been imageably delineated in two two-part metaphors: the wounded tree and the rooted vine. Prime metaphors weaving varied narrative strands and extending their reach further proxies the suffering of the beloved nation.

### 7. Comparative Analysis of Karim and Nasrallah

The novels of Sheba Karim and Emily Nasrallah depict the lives of the protagonist women who go through a series of internal and external cultural displacements when they relocated to Western countries as new immigrants. While each author portrays from their vantage positions, the novels reflect the similarities in experiences of the women. However, while Nasrallah focuses on the nature and existence of the problems faced by the women, Karim brings a touch of humor to the problem in representing cultural relearning in a light-hearted manner. The novels reflect the importance of family and community as one of the characteristics of cultures in the existence of the immigrant women's satisfaction and discontentment. Both Karim's and Nasrallah's protagonists struggle with cultural dislocation when they relocate to a Western country. Misunderstandings between the women and their children result from the difference in cultural backgrounds. Karim's and Nasrallah's depictions of immigrant women's displacement are contrasted with the depiction of urban American life in the novels of Amy Tan, Ha Jin, and Jhumpa Lahiri. Displacement in the novels of Tan, Jin, and Lahiri is not social displacement; rather, it is cultural displacement, which results in identity crises in the lives of the immigrants. Both Nasrallah and Karim bring forth the voice of an underrepresented group in cultural representation, and in doing so, highlight their protagonists' struggles and experiences as immigrants in their respective countries. The visualization of culture and life in Nasrallah's and Karim's novels is contrasted with the exaggerated representation of Arab lives in the public sphere (Michelle Khoury, 2005).

## 8. Cultural Contexts

The early years of the United States as an independent nation were turbulent. White settlers were pouring into lands already inhabited by Native Americans, for whom the result of contact with white European settlers would be a flight in the face of expanding colonies, disease and the resulting devastation of local populations, or death in battles that would take place until the end of the 19th century. In 1830, the notorious Indian Removal Act defined the course of events in North America. The Pacific Railway Act passed by Congress in 1862 kicked off Transcontinental Railroad construction in the United States, arousing the hunger for new lands from sea to shining sea. In 1873, forming the daughters of Father Time, the first photograph taken from a mile up, looked down on the rapidly vanishing American West, scenes of train tracks running through endless plains dotted with horses or bison flocks. In 1890, on the very edge of the American frontier, Native Americans armed with bows and arrows faced off cannon bristling with crew-served weapons, the former against ushering in a myth of progress and civilization previously unfathomably advanced.

The more sobering realities of Native American removal from historical textuality run parallel to white America's successes. In search of "Manifest Destiny", New England Puritans forcibly displaced Algonquian Ancestors, displacing them west and scattering them. In lieu of their rich hunting grounds, Native Americans were served up rocky reservations, prisons within which they were subjected to economic "remedies" in the form of commodities, rationed by the U.S. government via Indian Agents, or gamblers disguised as agents. As observed, tribal lands existed as barren no-man's-land. Conflict between the tribes and agents and settlers continued on far smaller scales than were possible before the hardening sepulcher of reservations, with treaty violations protested in desperate attempts to cling to a true ancient existence.

At the turn of the century, the "final solution" was even more horrifying. In mixing a sincere desire to "help" the recalcitrant savages and loathsome commercial rapacity, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established an ambitious program of off-reservation boarding schools to "civilize" the young.

## 9. Impact of Cultural Displacement on Identity

The novel "Skunk Girl" and the work "The Last Flight" both explore the ways in which cultural displacement can affect a person's sense of identity. This investigation will analyze how loss of cultural, social, and familial ties leads to a fractured sense of self. By taking a closer look at these concepts, it becomes evident how cultural displacement influences the diasporic identity of a member of an ethnic minority group.

"Skunk Girl" begins with an exploration of Asiya's past memories of her homeland, Pakistan. These memories act as a comfort and a way for Asiya to reminisce about her old life. However, as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Asiya's desire to freeze time is futile. The events that transpire in the narrative take away these memories and leave Asiya with a bleak present absent of cultural, familial, and social ties. This admission reveals the influence of the past images of the land on her sense of self and frames the ecological example of her identity. Land is important. The deeper your roots, the taller and stronger you grow. When your roots are ripped out, you risk shriveling up. The sense of rootedness with the land imparted to Hayaat by her grandmother represents the ecological structure of identity. This organic attachment between the characters and their land signals the ecological semiosphere in which the grafted identity is formed. The evocation between "the handful of soil" brought by Hayaat and the vitality of her grandmother's body exhibits the intimate link between identity and land, representing the

space in which the ecological graft of identity is implanted and formed. The conflicts faced by the characters demonstrate the attachment of identity and land. The fight for a free Palestine survives in the lives of young characters because Palestinian history passes on from the previous generation to the current generation. Land and home remain inseparable. By writing a novel about the lives of young Palestinians in their homeland, the author is grafting onto the Australian literary landscape the enduring hope of a liberated Palestine, a place Palestinians can truly call their own. The focus shifts from the grafted identity of those born in Australia and their struggles to return to Palestine or Lebanon as the foundation of their identity rests on.

### 9.1. Psychological Effects

The grief a parent experiences when they lose a son or daughter is beyond words. As well as loneliness, it may also entail an enormous sense of guilt. This guilt can take its most extreme form. A young boy enters the screen of Hailu's eyes but he does not intervene. The young boy was an unattainable vision of beauty, grace, and serenity amidst chaos and violence. Could he have been saved? It haunts Hailu as he resolutely wades through the graveyard of bodies and blood.

There were also feelings of guilt present when Hailu lost Yonas. Dancing away from grief, Yonas became a voice. He became an unreachable son and became a burn to the ear and wrack to the body. There was also something in him that spoke another language. So full of music and wise tales, but galivanting amongst shadows, he didn't know which one to follow. Then he was gone and all the words congregated and choked Hailu. The loss of him had consumed him whole and nothing remained. All of Hailu's works turned into questions. It had only been models and forms which were objective, but in his world, apart from Yonas, there was a loss of dignity and nothing was acceptable anymore.

(for Translation & Literary Studies et al., 2024).

### 9.2. Social Implications

Sheba Karim's novel, "The Muslims", can be perceived as an afrofuturist exploration of issues surrounding an immigrant family in contemporary America in which the characters portray various responses to their displacement and the socio-cultural friction it has led to. The novel interweaves multiple storylines focusing on the character of Maira and her family who experience a gradual physical displacement. Maira uses uncertain language and dilated metaphors to explore the possibility of a future that is beyond the current anti-Muslim socio-political climate. Though Maira's attention to the scenario of her life in twenty years is . . . natural, by reaching back generationally, that is a subjective experience that seeks an external logic, Maira and her preceding generations have all been physically unnaturally displaced, and their loss cannot be reduced to that. Therefore, such a fugal expansion, this narrative technique alone might not lead to a horizon outside of frustration (Awad, 2015).

Maira's family, showing familiarity with the American way of life by participating in a multitude of activities and mechanically reiterating American cultural elements, then, yet uncomprehendingly, unwittingly and tragically recreating the symptomatic tropes of the anti-Muslim climate, exhibit the limits of the appliqué-conformist tendency in which return or any self-reflexivity is precluded. Rather their 'invention' reinforces the displacement of the future in the face of physical home. Their quest, thus follows an always-too-late trajectory that is lost in imperfect mimics. It is this disjunctive imagination, perhaps that renders Maira's being the typical subject of Afro-futurism's search for a nascent-second utopia rather than a foreboding.

Emily Nasrallah's novel, "The Time of Feathers", can be recognized as a more theoretical exploration regarding the need to recognize and halt the cycles of trauma and abuse generated by patriarchal and

imperial domination respectively. The multi-generational narrative, in bursts of theoretical examination, prolifically explores a vast array of consequences of patriarchal domination moving between a variety of links in a genealogical chain. It describes sideswiped moments of insights and regret in characters growing stunted by their wounds and idealizations of fleeced childhood.

## 10. Literary Reception and Criticism

Sins graduates to Self is an eclectic collection of ten essays written by Noor Khamis about significant Malaysian authors. Though it evidently belongs to the category of critical approaches, this compilation of literary interpretations and reflections on several Malaysian authors, belonging both to the pre-war and post-war periods, also exemplifies the genre of cultural history. Indirectly, it comments on the socio-cultural environment in which these writers have produced their works, and the positive and negative influences that these writers, through their works, have had on the society at large. Although sometimes burdened with superficiality of textual knowledge due to the author's insistence on brevity, invoking indirect commentaries on the texts rather than direct textual evidences, Noor's notion of approaching these authors and their biographical life with fresh insights unencumbered by intellectual preconceptions and traditions is refreshing and greatly de-historicizes the cultural condition underlying their literary concerns. To a certain extent, this technique of discourse imbues their life stories with a qualitatively wider appeal.

In the Malaysian context, the fact that these authors, with the original and sole intention of illuminating Malaysian culture and consciousness or Malaysian life and experience, themselves are foreigners, only intensifies the novelists' struggle for accommodation and acceptance. The cultural disjuncture and rupture, resulting either from international migration or simply from the cruelties of fate, unfortunately happens to condemn certain individuals, regardless of their excellence, to the status of the other. This condition breeds a widely felt sense of alienation which sometimes drives individuals to desperate attempts of cultural accommodation through mimicry, emulation and even overt conversion in the hope of social acceptance and redemption. This critique of the cultural condition of belonging or the lack of belonging brought about by a palpable sense of cultural dislocation and rupture is a definitive concern that runs across the novels of Sheba Karim and Emily Nasrallah. Sheba Karim's *The Calling* involves a gripping portrayal of the resentment and discontent of an Indian-American Muslim teenager with the ethnic scrutiny and monopolistic acceptance imposed upon her.

### 10.1. Critical Perspectives on Karim

Sheba Karim was born into a large Indian-Pakistani family who immigrated to the United States in the early 1980s. Inspired by her work with troubled kids at the after school program in Manhattan, she wrote her first novel, *"Belly Dancing For Beginners"* in 2002. Karim wrote a collection of short stories titled *"One Foot Outside"* which was published in 2006. Sheba Karim grew up in the Midwest and now resides in Ithaca with her husband and child. The volume contains stories about men and women of dark skin and hair struggling to move to America, the ensuing comic melodrama and the melding of cultures, identities, and family ties that occur in a new land (Saad Almutairi, 2017).

Karim has begun her 'happily ever after.' And yet, the anxiety persists: her new role seems impossibly difficult, her fears of motherhood almost overwhelming.

What of those bleary-eyed early mornings where you wonder how did this happen? You could have had a flimsy relationship with an overgrown pubescent who was entering the hole in the wall market; instead, you were here. Perhaps you had bitten off more than you could chew? All the time? This is not,

it must be said, the liveliest of novels. It has a somber, silly air about it, almost like a slew of self-parodying essays. Iman is practically the archetypal comic ethnic: the banished slacker populated in reverse order by girls looking for love and laughter. The narration wanders from man to man in a daze of self-disparaging humor. She is, no question, a nobody, a nonentity her family wants no part of.

### 10.2 Comparative Discussion

Both authors portray young women torn between different cultural identities. Nasrallah's characters face exile and war; Karim's characters navigate cultural dualism and generational gaps.

Karim uses humor and contemporary settings, while Nasrallah employs reflective and nostalgic tones.

Despite different approaches, both show that identity is not fixed but reshaped through displacement and adaptation.

### 11. Conclusion

The novels present portraits of two characters in two markedly-different settings who experience cultural displacement and subsequently struggle with their sense of identity. The question of identity in the novels under review, based on the protagonists' experiences of cultural displacement, intersects with other key themes of narration including love, family ties and generational gaps. Since the experience of cultural displacement is grounded in the specific socio-cultural and political context of a people, a review of the diasporic experience of women illuminates the landscape of cultural displacement in the novels. The characters have different socio-cultural and political backgrounds, but their experiences are similar in terms of how they grapple with the challenges posed to their sense of identity by their alienation from their native culture and their assimilation into US culture.

In the novels studied, a delineation of the interjection of intent, social history and the fictional point of view sheds light on the strategy which results in the effective representation of cultural displacement. Beginning with a discussion of cultural displacement, the notion is examined within the wider context of literature about the diasporic experience of women. A detailed summary of the novels is chronicled with respect to the protagonists' experience of cultural displacement and identity crisis as women. An analysis of the narrative modes is subsequently undertaken highlighting the use of dramatic irony and evocative diction in the representation of cultural displacement which functions to portray the halt in the protagonists' development of self-identity. The interplay of the narratives' epistolary quest for identity with their contemporary socio-historical contexts is examined in order to understand their implications in regard to the socio-political milieu in which they were written. It is argued that the representation of cultural displacement in the two novels elucidates how the cultural narrative shaped the political fate of a people and how diasporic writers deal with censorship and the gap in experience and sensibility which result from their exiled condition.

### References:

1. W. E. J., Ayad Ali Al-Fahham, S., & Saad Mohammed Sulaiman, S. (2024). The Psychological Impacts of Familial Distance and War in Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Inam Kachachi's *Tashari*. *for Translation & Literary Studies*,
2. Abu-Jaber, D. (2003). *Arabian Jazz*. W. W. Norton & Company.
3. Almutairi, S. A., Hashim, S., & M., R. M. (2017). Grafting eco-diasporic identity in Randa Abdel-Fattah's selected novels. [PDF].
4. Awad, Y. (2015). Displacement, Belonging and Identity in Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance*

of Exile. [PDF].

5. Awad, Y. (2015). Displacement, Belonging and Identity in Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile*.
6. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
7. Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge.
8. Clifford, J. (1994). *Diasporas*. *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 302–338.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1994.9.3.02a00040>
9. Hall, S. (1996). *Questions of Cultural Identity*. SAGE Publications.
10. Karim, S. (2009). *Skunk Girl*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
11. Khoury, M. (2005). Hybrid Identity and Arab-American Feminism in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*. [PDF].
12. Michelle Khoury, N. (2005). Hybrid identity and Arab/American feminism in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*.
13. Nasrallah, E. (1990). *The Others*. American University in Cairo Press.
14. Nasrallah, E. (1997). *Flight Against Time*. American University in Cairo Press.
15. Saad Almutairi, A., Suliza Hashim, R., & M. M., R. (2017). Grafting eco-diasporic identity in Randa Abdel-Fattah's selected novels.
16. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.