

opción

Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,
Lingüística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 36, 2020, Especial N°

26

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

ISSN 1012-1537/ ISSNe: 2477-9385

Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas
Maracaibo - Venezuela

Identity Crisis in Randa Abdel-Fattah's Ten Things I Hate about Me (2006)

H. K. Abd al Janabi¹, Th. Rashid. Shayyal. Az-Zubaidy², Haider Hussein Katea³

Faculty of law, Thi-Qar University, Iraq

hazemalgenaby@yahoo.com

Abstract

The critical objective of this research paper is to identify the range of identities that the human being is made to possess in the contemporary era. In this paper, we focus on Randa Abdel-Fattah's novel entitled *Ten Things I Hate About Me* order to demonstrate the multiple character of identity as a concept, particularly in the context of diasporic communities like Palestinian refugees. Therefore, it can be a call for a deeper understanding of the multifaceted character of identity, the complexity of the human, and also the tragedy of large sections of humanity.

Keywords: Introduction, Theoretical terrain, Analysis and interpretations, Conclusion.

Crisis de identidad en las diez cosas que odio de mí de Randa Abdel-Fattah (2006)

Resumen

El objetivo crítico de este trabajo de investigación es identificar el rango de identidades que el ser humano debe poseer en la era contemporánea. En este artículo, nos centramos en la novela de Randa Abdel-Fattah titulada Diez cosas que odio de mí para demostrar el carácter múltiple de la identidad como concepto, particularmente en el contexto de comunidades de la diáspora como los refugiados palestinos. Por lo tanto, puede ser un llamado para una comprensión más profunda del carácter multifacético de la identidad, la complejidad del ser humano y también la tragedia de grandes sectores de la humanidad.

Palabras clave: Introducción, Terreno teórico, Análisis e interpretaciones, Conclusión.

1. INTRODUCTION

Palestinian diasporic community is the one of the largest homeless collectivities the worldover. They are more than five million Palestinians living in diaspora today and three million of them refugees (BOWKER, 2003). Most of these Palestinians live in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. However, many others live in the diaspora in other Arab and Western countries. The reasons of the Palestinian diaspora is the Zionist Palestinian occupation to Palestine that resulted in the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Therefore, about 750,000 Palestinian were uprooted from their homes and fled to the neighboring Arab countries and other parts of the world (AOUDÉ, 2001). This invites us to raise questions concerning identity.

Identity becomes an issue when it is in crisis and that is especially the case with the Palestinians. Their national existence and identity have been in crisis since 1948 (HALLS, 2006). These Palestinians have strong identity whether they were born in Palestine or not and they have the sense of the feeling that Palestine is the home. They are all connected to their homeland they left behind and they have a hope that one day they will return to their homes and lands.

Randa Abdel-Fattah is one of the diasporic writers who observe the actuality of diasporic existence in their literary contributions. She writes adult fictions based on the experiences of the Muslim young adults in the context of the multicultural Australia and the context of

the Arab country. She presents the crisis of the Muslim young adults' identity in relation to the context of the host land and the context of the homeland. The contributions of Abdel-Fattah to the Muslim diasporic literature since 2005 have granted her to be a noticeable and prominent Muslim diasporic woman writer. Abdel-Fattah has a unique position among Muslim diasporic writers because she has published her own literary writings and she focuses on the crisis of the identity and the urgent experience of the Muslim migrants around the world (RAIHANAH M., RUZY SULIZA HASHIM AND NOOR YUSOF, 2013: PERES ET AL, 2018).

Abdel-Fattah was born on 6th of June 1979. Her father is Palestinian and her mother is Egyptian. She was born in Melbourne, Australia. Her primary school was Catholic but her secondary college was Islamic. She has a bachelor degree in Art and Law. She wrote in a newspaper about Islam and Muslim when she was young. Her novels reflect the life of Muslim migrants in Australia. Here, I am going to present Abdel-Fattah's novels as the mirror which gives the readers the real picture of how Muslims are treated in western countries.

Moreover, she was the Media Liaison Officer at the Islamic Council of Victoria, and a role that afforded her the opportunity to write for newspapers and engage with media institutions practically in relation to their misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam as well. Indeed, she is a volunteer of many rights and migrant organizations including: the Australian Arabic Council, the Victorian Migrant

Resource Centre, the Islamic Women's Welfare Council, the Palestine Human Rights Campaign, and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

Abdel-Fattah presents the diasporic identities in the Australian teenagers' literature. She spots the light on these identities to make us rebuild the way that we understand the identities in Australia at both cultural and individual levels. At the culture level, one of the most important process to understand the racism and the gender's issue is to read the young adult fiction. Reading young adult fiction makes the literature as a powerful instrument at the reproduction of culture. At the individual level," the positions and relations created in the text both relate to existing social and psychic struggle and provide a fantasy vehicle which inserts the reader into the text" (WALKERDINE, 1984: 156).

In her novel *Ten Things I Hate about Me*, Abdel-Fattah becomes an exemplar for all Muslim teenagers who are not in their homeland. She gives the real image of the suffering and the struggling of the teenagers in the non-Muslim society to have their own identity and to find for them a place in the life which is surrounded by people who already have a negative view for Muslims. She shows us how teenagers are rambling and feeling unsafe in the host land of Australia.

Some studies of *Ten Things I Hate about Me*, focus on the aspect of Muslim minority. Young adults are members of the society that are "culturally embedded"(PERK.2000:10) in their circle while

developing a more relation with their parents, siblings and society. In the era of globalization, the young adults' world is becoming expandable with risks and dangers that young adults need to face due to the variation in the family structure and the rise of ethnic and cultural diversity in their realm of living.

For the young adult of minority, the challenges are made more complex given the contestation with the main stream culture and land. The protagonist Jamilah lives in a multicultural society which is Australia. She faces many challenges to be accepted in the mainstream. Therefore, she has to live in a risky life in order to protect herself.

“Minority Within: 2nd generation Young Adult Muslim Australian in *Ten Things I Hate about Me*”, which has done by Raihanah, M. M., Norzalimah Kassim and Ruzy Suliza Hashim in 2013, focuses on Muslim minority. Through the theoretical lens of multiculturalism, the researchers succeeded in exploring the contestation of marginalization by a Muslim young adult in such multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society of Australia as portrayed in Abdel-Fattah's novel entitled *Ten Things I Hate about Me*. The discussion in the study fundamentally focused on the two primary identity spaces within the discourse of multiculturalism private and public. Further, it reveals how the social, cultural and religious spaces have been inhabited by the young adult minority protagonist. That

influence her in the formation of her identity as a member of a minority community in a predominantly white majority society.

BAYAT AND HERRERA (2010) suggest "Youth have assumed a central, if complex, place in the politics and cultures of these societies [Muslim majority countries], as well as in societies where Muslims make up a sizable minority". Australia is multi-ethnic and multicultural society and that make the life of the Muslim teenagers there more complex. In *Ten Things I Hate about Me* novel, the young Jamilah faces the conflicts in her life which are beyond her peers. Jamilah bears the tensions and the difficulties to adapt the request and the demand of the public which surrounded her in school. Jamilah here as a Muslim young girl who tries to hide her religious background and her cultural heritage which are not a part of the society she lives in.

In this novel, Abdel-Fattah makes the readers feel how Jamilah experiences the tension and the stress to keep her real identity unseen. Jamilah is a young Muslim who tries to balance her identity to be safe from racism and discrimination that she faces in the Australian society. The heroine of this novel, Jamilah, works hard to make a separation between her Australian identity and her Lebanese identity. Despite Jamilah's youthful fancies of being accepted for who she is, Jamilah is "equally aware of her self-prejudicial and self-incriminatory attitudes"(RIHANAH M.M, NORZALIMAH MOHD.KASSSIM, RUZY SULIZA HASHIM :2013) Jamilah is a Lebanese Muslim

teenager who lives as an Australian teenager. She does not have close friends in school and she tries to be far from them. She never invites them to her house to keep her real identity hidden. When she starts having an online friend, she becomes more confident to talk freely with him with comfort.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to understand human experience especially in the context of a diasporic community or individuals, one must explore the concept of identity. Nowadays, people are asked how they defined themselves which almost relate to how others define them. The concept of identity is fundamental in modern social psychology. It is generally used to "define and describe an individuals' sense of self, group affiliations, structural positions, and ascribed and achieved statuses" (PEEK, 2005:216). The term identity has recently been a significant subject of study and discussion, inside and outside of the academic world (GILROY, 2006, 117). Identity can mean an individual's personal view of himself or herself, which situates and defines the individual (ROCKQUEMORE, 2006, 148). Social characteristics like gender, race, ethnicity, ability, age and sexual orientation can influence a person's attitudes, personality and motivations and can contribute to their identity formation, along with factors like citizenship status, political affiliation, family and education (JAMES, 2006, 43).

Identity can be visualized in many different ways. Cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall (2006, 250), identifies three very different concepts of identity: the first being the Enlightenment model, the second being the sociological concept and the third being the postmodern theory. The Enlightenment era theorizes identity "as the center of an individual, which remains essentially the same throughout their life" (Hall, 2006, 250). For these "essentialists", identity is fixed, ascribed and innate, much like eye colour or skin tone. The sociological perspective on the other hand, says that identity is formed in the „interaction“ between self and society. Individuals still have an inner core that defines the individual, but this is formed in a "continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds "outside" and the identities that they offer" (HALL, 2006). In other words, identity bridges the gap between the personal and the public worlds and is the direct result of mutual identification through social interaction (ROCKQUEMORE, 2006). Finally, postmodernist philosophy affirms that identity is not permanent, static or set. According to STUART HALL (2006, 250), postmodern subjects assume different identities at different stages in their life. These identities are never stagnant, but can constantly change and adapt to new circumstances and can overlap and intersect. In addition, each personal identity can mean different things to each person and can vary by favorability, importance, meaning and attachment (COLEMAN & LOWE, 2007).

With this theoretical terrain in mind we move now on to an examination of Abdel-Fattah's novel *Ten Things I hate About Me*.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Analysis and Interpretations

In her novel *Ten Things I Hate about Me*, Abdel-Fattah uses the protagonist Jamilah to reflect the grafting of the collective identity in the host land, Australia. She experiences a crisis in her identity as a teenager with a religious- cultural heritage that is not a part of the mainstream society. Jamilah is the main character of *Ten Things I Hate about Me*. Jamilah is a Lebanese Muslim teenager who lives in Australia which is a redundant country. Jamilah is connected to her root as a Lebanese background.

She grows up in Australia but she still keeping her root inside herself. She is happy about her Lebanese identity by spending time with her family and sharing the same customs and being close to each other in the difficult times in their lives. In the following speech of Jamilah, Abdel-Fattah carries a stamp of rootedness to the homeland in the identity of Jamilah and her family and how they become happy to be nostalgic to their homeland which is Lebanon in the selected novel. Jamilah says:

I can't deny that I love my Lebanese culture. I love the food. I love the fact that we have such a huge circle of family friends. I love my dad's stories about growing up in Beirut. I love Lebanese weddings and I love Arabic music, especially dancing to the latest pop songs. I love the way our friends stuck buy us when my mother died. (ABDEL-FATTAH, 2006)

Abdel-Fattah uses other characters in the selected novel to emphasize her idea about how these Muslim people, who live in a society which the majority is non-Muslim, are connected to their homeland. Mustafa has also an Arabic background and he is in the same band of Jamilah. He is deeply connected to his background and he is not affected by the opinions of others about his background. He tries to motivate Jamilah to be proud of her culture just like him. He argues that:

You have nothing to be ashamed of. If you dig what you are doing, they'll love you too. Do you think I walked around worrying whether people will dig my rap music? I am an artist. I respect my art. People can see that and they respect me for it. Man, we've got a rich identity! We've our feet dipped in different cultures. It is cool! Embrace it (Ibid). These words show that the people who left their homeland behind are closely connected to the culture of their homeland. Despite they face many challenges, they are proudly deeply connected to the culture of their homeland

Another aspect of their rootedness is shown in the main characters' speech. They speak Arabic together and they try to create a similar environment to their homeland in order to have the sense of belonging to their native culture homeland. The writer reveals it in the words of Jamilah, "My father always speaks to us in Arabic" (Ibid) in the speech of Jamilah, she reveals how her father, Tawfeek, is connected to his homeland. She declares that:

My father talks to us in Arabic all the time, watching Arabic satellite channels, reading Arabic newspapers. Sure, he watches mainstream TV too. He insists on watching every single news program and bulletin, even if they're back to back (Ibid). The other context that helps the fractured identity of Jamilah to be formed is the marginalization practiced in the host land. In *Ten Things I Hate about Me*, Abdel-Fattah does not hold back on describing how Arab Muslim migrants are marginalized in Australia.

In more than one context in the host land, Australia, we as, readers, notice how these Arab Muslim migrants in general and Jamilah with her family in particular are marginalized in the society of the host land. The writer gives us a very clear reflection of marginalization on the Arab Muslim minority and how they are violently marginalized. It is very clear when Jamilah says:

I remember my mum trying to fit in with the other mothers at my primary school. It was the Grade Five food fair and my mum came along to the mothers' meeting and made arrangements to cook something for me and contribute. My mum slaved in the kitchen for a day, making trays of traditional Lebanese food. I brought it along to share with the class and the kids just laughed at me. They had their Vegemite and cheese sandwiches and chocolate crackles and fairy bread. I had kebabs and kofta and tabouli and pastries. Some of the other mothers laughed. I could smell their condescension. It smacked my nose like milk gone sour. (Ibid)

The novel also reveals other ways of marginalization. It is not only by making and forcing people who have Muslim background to be far away. It is also by not giving chances to work with them and also they do not give them jobs that are suitable to their qualifications. Jamilah reveals this kind of marginalization when she explains:

When my parents migrated to Australia in 1974, my father could not find a job, despite having PhD in agriculture from the University of Beirut. His degree was highly specialized and the only work available would have required him to move us to the country (Ibid). It is clear that Tawfeek cannot find a job in Australia although he has a PhD and became well-qualified. He is one of many people who face the same problem because they are Muslims and they have different background from the Australian society.

It is therefore clear that Jamilah has two lives with two different identities. In her first identity, Jamilah is a proud of her Lebanese Muslim heritage. However, in her second identity, Jamilah is afraid of being racialized and discriminated. She keeps mangling between them and that causes the formation of Jamilah's collective identity. In her house and madrasa, she is Jamilah, the Lebanese Muslim girl. At her school and the public spaces, she is Jamie.

4. CONCLUSION

Abdel-Fattah's novel under consideration, *Ten Things I hate About Me*, deals with the problems, suffering, struggling and the

searching for the identities that Arab Muslims face in Australia. The novel makes it quite clear the two-way street of Jamilah's identity in the sense Jamilah and Jamie. Also, it shows the pressure and conflict invading Jamilah's identity as being a minority. Jamilah lives a very tiring life. She draws a picture of that life when she wants to compare her juggling between her identities as if she is juggling an orange or an apple or even a banana.

Then, she explains that her juggling is more difficult because all the previous things are the same; they are fruits. Her identities' juggling is more difficult because her identities are very different from each other. She starts talking to herself and comparing her different identities to understand the mess that she lives in. Identity has been used in this paper in a two-way style in the sense of the context and the theory. The first context is the homeland of Lebanon that is left behind and the second one is the host land of Australia. Both of these contexts are combined in my examination.

The context of the homeland is related to the sense of stability and being located, being connected to it and being attached to the background and heritage of it. However, the context of the host land is related to the sense of dislocated, being marginalized and racialized. Both of these contexts are linked to the fractured, multifaceted character of the identity of Jamilah in diaspora.

REFERENCES

- ABDEL-FATTAH, R. 2006. **Ten Things I Hate About Me**. Australia: Pan Macmillan Australia.
- BAYAT, A., & HERRERA, L. (Eds.). 2010. **being young and Muslim: New Cultural Politic in the Global South and North**. Oxford University Press.
- BOWKER, R. 2003. **Palestinian Refugees: Mythology, Identity, and the Search for Peace**. London, UK: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
- COLEMAN, P. T., & LOWE, J. K. 2007. **Conflict, identity and resilience: Negotiating collective identities within the Israeli and Palestinian diasporas**. *Safety Lit Journal*.
- GILROY, P. 2006. *Identity, Belonging, and the Critique of Pure Sameness*.
- HALL, S. 2006. **The Future of Identity**. In S.P. Sean & S. Bolaria (eds). *Identity and Belonging Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Society*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars" Press Inc.
- IN S.P. SEAN & S. BOLARIA (eds). **Identity and Belonging: Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Society**. (117-126). Toronto: Canadian Scholars" Press.
- PEEK, L. 2005. **Becoming Muslim the Development of a Religious Identity**, Colorado State University.
- PERES, P., MOREIRA, F., & MESQUITA, A. 2018. "Are Really Technologies at the Fingers of Teachers? Results from a Higher Education Institution in Portugal". **Journal of Information Systems Engineering & Management**. Vol. 3, No 1: 08.
- PTY LTD. AOUDÉ, I. G. 2001. "Maintaining Culture, Reclaiming Identity: Palestinian lives in the Diaspora". **Asian Studies Review**. Vol. 25, No 2.
- RAIHANAH, M. M., HASHIM, R. S., & YUSOF, N. M. 2013. "Researching the Muslim Diaspora, Engaging Multicultural Literacy: A Pedagogical Approach". In **Recent Advances in Educational Technologies Proceedings of the 4th**

International Conference on Education and Educational Technologies, January 30-February 1, Cambridge EET (Vol. 13, pp. 104-108).

ROCKQUEMORE, K. A. 2006. **Between Black and White Exploring the Biracial Experience**. In S.P. Sean & S. Bolaria (eds). *Identity and Belonging: Rethinking Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Society*. (147-161). Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.

WALKERDINE, V. 1984. **Someday My Prince Will Come: Young Girls and Preparation for Adult Sexuality**. In A. McRobbie and M. Niva, M (eds) *Gender and Generation*, England: Macmillan.



**UNIVERSIDAD
DEL ZULIA**

opción

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Año 36, Especial N° 26 (2020)

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.

Maracaibo - Venezuela

www.luz.edu.ve

www.serbi.luz.edu.ve

produccioncientifica.luz.edu.ve