

A Postcolonial Study of Displacement in Omar Said's *Serzemini Zikzike*

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دراسة ما بعد الاستعمارية للاغتراب المكاني في رواية سه رزه ميني زيكزيكه لعمر سيد

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الملخص

يركز هذا البحث على المنفى ومفهوم الاغتراب المكاني في رواية "سهرزمني زيكزيكه" ل عمر سيد من منظور ما بعد الاستعمار. فالمنفى لا يقتصر على مغادرة المكان فحسب، بل يُعدّ أيضًا حالة نفسية من الشعور بعدم الانتماء، حيث يشعر الإنسان بأنه مُقتلع من أرضه الأم ذاتها. تربط هذه الدراسة بين السرد وتجربة سيد الشخصية مع التهجير خلال حملة الأنفال، موضحةً كيف يؤثر الاغتراب في عملية تشكّل الهوية لدى الأفراد. كما توظّف مفهومي تداخل الثقافات و"اللا-انتماء المنزلي" (unhomed) عند هومي بابا ضمن إطار ما بعد الاستعمار، لبيان كيف تُحتجز الهوية في حالة من عدم الشعور بالوطن، مما يجعلها غير مستقرة ومجزأة. كذلك تتناول الدراسة مفهوم "الذات المُهمّشة"، موضحةً كيف يمكن للتهجير أن يجعل الأفراد غير مرئيين، وكأنهم غير موجودين، مما يؤدي إلى إسكاتهم نفسيًا بعد تجربة الصدمة.

Abstract

This paper examines exile and the concept of displacement within Omar Said's *Serzemini Zikzike* from postcolonial perspectives. Exile is not just about leaving but is also a psychological condition of being out of place, where people feel removed from their native land itself. This paper links the narrative with Said's personal experience with displacement from the Anfal campaign, illustrating how displacement alters the process of people constructing their identities. This paper incorporates the concepts of mixing cultures and being "unhomed" from Homi Bhabha's postcolonial perspectives, illustrating how one's identity is caught within the realms of not being at home, thus becoming unstable and fragmented. This paper will also incorporate the concept of the muted self, illustrating how displacement can render people invisible, as if they do not exist, thus silencing them psychologically after the experience of trauma.

Introduction

The recurring theme of the fractured self that reflects much of postcolonial works is seen in Omar Said's novel "Serzemini Zikzike." In an interview with the author himself, he declared that this story was inspired by his own life experiences as a displaced Kurd, and the lives of his relatives some of them lost their lives brutally under the Bath regime. He was born in Kirkuk in 1970, which means he spent much of his teenage life during a time of tension and insecurity. Said's life is tightened to his fiction, since he experienced the political unrest of the times and forced displacement. *Serzemini Zikzike* thus is not purely a literary creation, it rather appears

as a form of testimony, through which Said recalls his past and tries to highlight the silenced generation who were oppressed by the Bath regime. Having experienced displacement and life with those who went through similar difficulties, his personal and shared experiences echo throughout the novel's portrayal of fragmented identities, uprooted lives, and the psychological scars left by forced migration. The story revolves around the life of a young man who lives with his aunt and his ailing grandfather, who is living on a wheelchair. Not much is revealed about his parents, except of being killed by the Ba'ath regime, which creates a gap for the reader to fill with suspicion. After the death of the grandfather, the aunt collapses and is driven to a state of mental instability. After the forced displacement from their village by the Ba'ath regime, they are left to live in makeshift shelters and temporary cabins, leaving them in constant struggling to survive in the harsh conditions of exile. Said shift the focus to other characters in the story, those who continuously suffer from the tragic consequences of the displacement process. Each character has a different story, regardless of age or gender, they all struggle differently and mutually. Towards the end of the story, having lost her sanity, the aunt is found in her village, in the heart of the nature that was destroyed and burnt during the evacuation process. A tragic portrayal of the trauma and dislocation experienced by many under oppressive rule is represented through the aunt. Through his depiction of the aftermath of displacement, exile and the resulting sense of belonging, the novel stands as both a personal and collective chronicle of exile. Stories of displacement in postcolonial literature often reveal that the experience of exile involves more than physically moving away from a location. It can impact the manner in which one considers self—including their feelings, culture, and identity. This paper will examine the concept of unhomeliness devised by Homi Bhabha to demonstrate the manner in which the distinction between home and exile dissolves to leave one with the experience of 'not being at home.' Rather than conceiving identity as fixed, the discussion will examine the manner in which the experience of displacement places one in a condition of hybridity devised by Homi Bhabha. This approach will provide a useful application of the theoretical construct devised by Bhabha to demonstrate the manner in which the experience of exile in the story of Serzemini Zikzike operates through the condition of torn belonging, muted power, and the negotiation of home, voice, and self.

Unhomeliness: A Postcolonial Perspective

The notion of unhomeliness has been linked to Homi K. Bhabha to the present day, introduced in *The Location of Culture* (1994), the concept serves as a key of postcolonial theory. It shows the sense of existential and cultural displacement experienced by individuals facing hybrid identities under the shade of colonialism. Unlike physical homelessness, unhomeliness is deeply psychological a state of being uprooted both culturally and emotionally. This condition arises in the "in-between" spaces where cultural interactions occur, leading to identities that are fragmented, unstable, and confused. Bhabha explains that unhomeliness appears "when the borders between home and the world become confused" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9). Bhabha in *The World and The Home* explains that to be unhomey does not exactly mean to be homeless, nor is being torn between private and public life. Thus, the sense of unhomey approaches one's life like a forever shadow until it turns to an unexpected terror. In this context the boundary between home and world blurs; strangely, the private and public intertwine, presenting a vision that is both fractured and deeply disorienting. The unsettling echoes of unhomey creates a world which is less about forced displacement. Therefore, this new world is more about the complex and strange literary and social consequences of mandatory social adaptation, historical migrations, and cultural shifts. The home is no longer the domestic, or four walls physical construction, but it is the startling realization of the world within the home and the home within the world. Toni Morrison gives this problem of "unhomey" dwelling a lyric clarity: Whose house is this? Whose night keeps out the light in here? Say who owns this house? It is not mine. I had another sweeter....The House is strange. Its shadows lie. Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key? (Bhabha 141) This discussion examines unhomeliness, its ties to hybridity and ambivalence, and its significance in the study of postcolonial literature and identity. Bhabha describes unhomeliness as the unsettling shift of the familiar into what can be described as strange, where the private domain of home becomes disturbed by public and cultural conflicts. He characterizes the unhomey as "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home in an unhallowed place" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 13). For postcolonial individuals, unhomeliness is the reflection of the tension between indigenous traditions and colonial ideologies, which results in a hybrid identity that is neither wholly rooted in one culture nor fully assimilated into another. This creates a dual space where individuals exist between cultures. The concept of unhomeliness is deeply intertwined with Bhabha's broader theory of hybridity. Hybridity refers to the mixing of cultural effects and negotiations that take place in what Bhabha terms the "third space" which is the zone of cultural translation and transformation (Bhabha, 1994, p.

36). This third space is not only transitional but also generative, offering the possibility of redefined identities. However, hybridity also triggers alienation, as individuals inhabiting this space often experience the unhomely, unable to fully belong to a single culture. Bhabha sees this condition of in-betweenness as central to the modern postcolonial experience (Bhabha, 1994, p. 56). The individuals feel trapped in a space between both cultures; thus this space does not belong to any of them completely. It is but a blend of both cultures which causes an unstable state of belonging to neither. Moreover, unhomeliness includes ambivalence, a state of duality in which individuals feel both attracted to and repelled by cultural identities. This ambivalence depicts the psychological displacement faced by colonized individuals, who often internalize aspects of the colonizer's culture while trying to resist its authority. Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/1986) provides a striking example of this phenomenon. Fanon describes the "double consciousness" of the colonized subject, torn between adopting the colonizer's language and values while remaining excluded from their privileges (Fanon, 1986, p. 17). This internal conflict mirrors Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness, where identity is contested, blurred, and unsettled. The concept of unhomeliness, according to Bhabha is viewed as a lens for analyzing the complex aspects of cultural dislocation, identity, and the sense of belonging in postcolonial contexts. By highlighting the ambivalence and hybridity as seen in the postcolonial experience, Bhabha challenges the perspectives of identity and investigates its dynamic nature. Showing that the nature of postcolonial literature changes. Literary works by authors like Toni Morrison and Salman Rushdie vividly portray the unhomely condition, giving profound insights into the existential struggles of experiencing cultural intersections. As a basic concept in postcolonial theory, unhomeliness remains deeply relevant in understanding the cultural and psychological impacts of globalization and colonial legacies. Therefore, it is difficult to understand postcolonial literature without knowing what unhomeliness means and how it appears. As stated by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002), postcolonial literature examines such topics in its representation of "the complexities and ambiguities of cultural identity, hybridity, and belonging" (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 9).

Cultural Hybridity and Unhomeliness: Identity in Exile

Torn between the past, present and the future, between the homeland and displacement within the homeland is what the main characters go through in Serzemini Zikzike. They are situated between memory and reality, belonging and alienation creating an eternal state of in-betweenness. Said starts the story by a sheer description of the new so-called home, the place where the people were moved to after the Anfal mission by the Ba'th regime. The Ordoga, functioned less as a place of refuge than as a grotesque camp of containment. Visually, it resembled a distorted kitchen, a space meant for sustenance yet transformed into a site of decay. At the same time, it evoked the image of a black, seven-headed dragon: a monstrous body marked by countless infected wounds, oozing and ruptured. It appeared to fold inward upon itself, as though the camp itself were collapsing in the final moments of its life. (1)The Ordoga is a spectacle of forced hybridity in terms of physical-space transformation, serving as the location of displacement and lacking belonging and cultural continuation in favor of the disrupted existence imposed by violence. In contrast to serving as a refuge site, what happens is that the camp becomes a grotesque camp of containment and represents the oppressive conditions under which the displaced community is obliged to articulate their identity. In fact, the camp's own structure reverses in favor of the disruption of the notion of "home." That the imagery of Ordoga is meant to convey this message of imposed hybridity is confirmed by the imagery used. The similarity between Ordoga and this twisted kitchen, which is traditionally a place of sustenance and domestic normality, indicates the disruption of this normality brought about by displacement. However, because this domestic imagery is so abruptly displaced by its transformation into this terrifying creature, which is a black seven-headed dragon with infected and ruptured sores, this blending of the normal and terrifying indicates the fractured character of the displaced individuals' own sense of place. This imagery suggests that the hybridity that takes place in Serzemini Zikzike is one that is caused by disruption rather than cultural exchange. The displaced are forced to occupy a liminal world where the integrity of their former selves is undone without any possibility of something else being constructed. Instead, what is created is a world of domination, one that is characterized by an identity suspended between what is lost and what cannot be fully sustained—in this case, represented by Ordoga. The camp represents an "unhomeliness" that makes its inhabitants always alien. Although most of the characters in the story are in a psychosocial struggle of the displacement process and the Anfal mission, three characters are highlighted. From the very start the psychological consequences of displacement is seen in the character's feeling of unhomeliness. The unnamed young male character who seems to be the narrator of the story, feels trapped in his room, compares his situation of not belonging and trapped to Kafka's *Metamorphoses* and how he is unable to escape

the reality. He says: "I return to my old bed, and under the faint light of the lantern, I contemplate Kafka's picture on the book cover looking at me with two big ears and open-wide eyes waits to see me turn into a monster." The narrator's sensory disconnection from home affects him by feeling lonelier. He begins to feel as if he is less than a human being. This is similar to Kafka's Gregor Samsa character. His transformation into an insect indicates extremely high levels of isolation and being kept away by everyone around him. In the same way, the narrator's displacement causes him to lose his identity since home is what gives one identity with others. This narrator's feel of being a monster or an insect is not physical but psychological. His isolation has led him to think of himself as such. In this regard, the comparison of the narrator to the insect-like Kafka character indicates how the narrator becomes dehumanized through his displacement. This is because loneliness causes him to view himself as a stranger in space as well as in society. As the story continues, the grandfather dies and gloominess further steps into their lives. The aunt goes silent and numb, she detaches herself from the surrounding and life too. the unnamed character is left totally alone, living just for the sake of living. He describes his situation, complaining and saying that previously he had the company of a disabled man and a crying woman, but now they too left him, "in this attic, cold in winter and hot in summer, I either cry or read or sleep. To live another empty. day and cycle. Now, for me who has no life, I am totally alone." (65, 65) Some characters are muted, some never stop crying and others remain in their delusion of going back home. There is the old man who sells "Awrma" a man once had a family of nine, now it is only him and his son. His only remaining son is a soldier somewhere on the boarder, and comes back once in two months. This old man's house was destroyed not only once, but thirteen times. As the narrator explains: Till now, he has built houses thirteen times which were destroyed one after the other by on his head by the government. The last time was two years ago, when the Ba'th and the Jash came during the Anfal mission to the villages and burnt it. This time, even the women and children didn't survive. Now and after, no one knows how many other times he will built houses so they destroy it for him. (66, 67) In the story, Said's characters are like people who are condemned to be homeless forever, a state that continues even after the collapse of the Ba'ath state. Instead of finding closure in political change, there is a new kind of violence in the form of a civil war that emerges. The displaced people are still reeling from the trauma of the Anfal campaign when they are once again thrust into a state of insecurity. This kind of return to violence only cements that state of "unhomeliness," which Homi Bhabha has described, "where the distinction between safe and dangerous becomes impossible, so that homeland itself becomes insecure." Home ceases to be a place of security but becomes a place of insecurity. This state of unhomeliness is strongly conveyed by the figure of young men assembled at the borders, who are portrayed as "a hundred young boy each with the hope for a better world, tonight ready to throw themselves in the ocean of darkness, tonight we escape the world we created ourselves" (117). The border becomes a liminal area that represents a state of liminality, as conceptualized by Bhabha, where the characters belong neither to the land that they leave nor to the land that they are trying to reach. The use of the ocean of darkness again represents that there is no fixed homeland that they can go to, and that it is not just a desire that propels them towards escaping but also that it is not possible for them to be in that land that they have made for themselves. The state of unhomeliness is no longer a temporary state that is experienced by the characters but becomes a continuous one because of the cycle of displacement that is perpetually experienced by them. Disappointment ensues after hope as the young men find themselves ambushed by a gendarmerie, where they are brutally shot at. At this instance, the hope for freedom shatters, and instead, the young men find themselves lost and stranded in a condition of absolute unhomeliness. The young men no longer have a place where they can stay and a destination where they can go. lacking money, security, and freedom, they have no choice but to return to the Ordoga after surviving the gunfight. The narrator conveys this painful experience when he reveals, "loser and without money, I took the path of return. Life in the hell of the Ordoga is better than death on the border" (118). The return does not indicate a sense of belonging but instead confirms Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness, where home and exile provide no security and no sense of identity. The young men's home, where they were forced to survive, becomes the best alternative among the two options, while the border becomes a place of certain death. The young men find themselves stuck and caught up in this state of unhomeliness, where they constantly move back and forth between hostile places, where hope and belonging have been replaced by survival. Now where is my home, and where am I heading, my home is no longer on this earth. I wish a burning bullet, would have made my heart its home and freed me from this pain and loneliness. Death for me is the best medicine and treatment which I never had the chance to have. After ten days, I returned to the Ordoga, empty handed and the victim of Human smuggler. (119) In this passage, the complete disintegration of the feeling of

belonging that the narrator expresses, where the concept of 'home' itself loses any tangible connection with a place, can be understood through these rhetorical queries: "where is my home, and where am I heading." The concept of 'home,' here, exists "not on this earth," thus suggesting that the process of displacement has disrupted not only the relationship with a place but also the possibility of 'belonging.' The desire for death that the narrator expresses through the metaphor of a "burning bullet" becoming a 'substitute for a home for the heart,' thus represents the complete internality of trauma that one undergoes during this process of displacement. The fact that "death is the best medicine and treatment" further reinforces the lack of healing in the frameworks provided to the displaced subject. The life in exile provides no solace for pain or loneliness; rather, living becomes tantamount to suffering. The ultimate return to Ordoga "empty handed" and as "the victim of [a] human smuggler" further reinforces the cycle of displacement in which escape leads to further suffering and loss. This also further reinforces Bhabha's notion of "unhomeliness" in which neither homeland, border, nor exile provides solace. The protagonist remains stuck in this state of perpetual displacement in which identity, hope, and home are irrevocably shattered.

Conclusion

This paper employs the concept of unhomeliness as conceptualized by Homi Bhabha to demonstrate that the issue of exile goes beyond the idea of displacement from one's home and that it's a condition in one's heart and mind as well. It further argues that the issue of displacement brings about changes in one's identity and as such the idea of one's home and belonging become uncertain and shattered as the issue of belonging is constantly postponed. The paper further argues that through the concept of cultural hybridity as conceptualized by Homi Bhabha, the identity of the individual remains in a liminal stage that's full of silencing and mental fragmentation. The paper further argues that the issue of memory assists the displaced individual in surviving by assisting them in dealing with the gaps between the past and the present. Finally, Serzemini Zikzike concludes that the issue of exile can be seen as one where the issues of one's home, voice, and identity remain in a process of negotiation due to the impact of historical trauma and forced displacement.

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