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The Negotiation of Egyptian-American Identity in Miral Al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the problems and identity negotiations carried out by the protagonist, Hend, in the novel Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*. This research is a qualitative research with descriptive analysis method. This research begins by parsing the intrinsic structure of the novel using Robert Stanton's Narrative Structure theory to show the main issues of the novel. It is continued by discussing Hend's identity negotiation using Stuart Hall's identity theory about the identity of being and becoming. The results showed that the protagonist in her migration from Egypt to America experienced various identity problems, namely longing for the homeland, alienation, and identity crisis. All these problems encourage the protagonist to create efforts to negotiate between her past and present (Egypt and America) in several forms, namely; using English to show her position as an American, carrying out dating traditions, drinking beer, dancing tango, and wearing open clothes. These efforts can be seen as becoming part of American belonging and gain self-existence. Hend's identity in America is not dominant to one side. She becomes half Arab and half American (a hybrid identity). The research also found that her romantic needs for American man (Charlie) became the starting point of this American negotiation. Her willingness to be in love with an American man by doing all Anglo- American behaviours and cultures can also be considered identity negotiation to claim her rights as an Egyptian-American, whose identity tends to be excluded from American citizens regardless the fact that she is American, but not white mainstream society.

Keywords: *American Belonging, Brooklyn Heights Novel, Egyptian-American Fiction, Negotiating Identity.*

Introduction

The phenomenon of easterners migrating to western countries has been rampant in recent times. It is undeniable that many countries have failed to ensure the personal security of their population, especially in the economic field. Therefore, the choice to migrate is the only way that can be taken to save themselves and their beloved families. As said by Zuhri (2021, p. 13), migration is a human phenomenon and a vital action, to the point that it can be said that only the dead cannot change their place of residence. Migration contributes to drawing a map of population distribution on the earth's surface, through which cultures, religions, ideas, and philosophies move. Migration is an incubator that leads to cross-cultural fertilisation that results in a pleasant mix of the many cultures of people living in the present day. Migration can also be said to be the movement from one country to another to achieve a better situation, whether in terms of economic, political, social, religious, or other aspects (Hasan, 2020, p. 712).

One of the countries that Egyptians migrate to in the west is the United States. It should be noted that the United States ranks first in receiving permanent immigrants from Egypt as about 14,000 immigrants immigrated there, representing 36% of the total Egyptian permanent immigrants during the study period (Hassanein, 2002, p. 46). In addition, their main purpose of coming to America is to seek a better life, especially in terms of economic needs.

Egypt and America have vast cultural differences, and these cultural differences greatly affect Egyptian immigrants. Thus, they need to adapt with their new environment. However, it is not easy for them to adjust to their new environment in terms of culture, language, social, even the taste of food. Egypt is part of the Middle East, which is predominantly Muslim. Meanwhile, America is a western region that is predominantly Christian. The process of adapting to a new area is certainly very difficult to see from the vast differences between the two cultures.

It is not surprising that these immigrants experience a sense of alienation, indecision, unrest, and even longing for their original homeland, but on the other hand they have to get used to their new environment. The emergence of anxiety and indecision within the immigrants causes an identity crisis (Szaflarski, etc. 2017). This occurs due to cultural clashes that cause conflicts in interpreting identity in the midst of cultural differences. As we know, different cultures, values, norms, lifestyles, and ways of thinking in a new place create their own problems. How the very thick cultural differences between Egypt and America must go hand in hand between the past and the present. Identity crisis is problematic for a person because it is not easy to establish his/her position in society and define his/herself in relation to others. This is what makes an immigrant in the process of searching for self-identity.

As for language, Egyptian immigrants will certainly have great difficulty communicating with American society. The language they use in their homeland is Arabic, while in America they must use English as the official language of the country. The difference in daily language use makes it difficult for them to communicate with people there, and therefore they are required to learn English in order to be accepted in the community.

Among the doubts and anxieties of immigrants, in fact, every human being will make efforts to adapt, slowly follow the new culture in order to be accepted or want to be able to exist in the midst of society, because in essence humans will definitely make efforts to overcome alienation, and the uncertainty they feel by making changes and forming a new identity due to cultural encouragement. Therefore, he/she tries to position his/herself in a new place because that identity will continue to be sought by someone to adapt to a new place (Mukhtar, 2019, p. 4). Identity is important for humans to identify themselves in their environment, their role position and their relationship with others (Wodwaard, 1997, p. 1).

One of the arts that raises or illustrates issues like this is literature. Literature is the result of human thought expressed in artistic expression (Ma'luf, 2002, p. 28). Multiculturalism ideas such as identity, diaspora, hybridity, diversity, and difference can be found in multicultural literary works. Such is the case with novels. Novelists usually utilise in their works their life experiences, other people, or major or interesting events that they see in life and put them into novels. In this sense, we can understand how the art of fiction - like all literary arts - derives its material from life (Ismail, 1968, pp. 101-103).

One of the most common novel themes related to humanitarian issues is novels that tell stories about migration, such as the migration of eastern countries to the west. This cross-cultural migration causes cultural clashes and cultural mixing. As a result, it causes a lot of problems such as dominant culture, discrimination, stereotypes, alienation, and many more.



In the midst of these various problems, the theme of crisis and the search for identity is a theme that often appears as the focus or conflict of the story. Diversity and conditions that allow cross-culture do make identity something that is not easy to define.

The phenomenon of identity is conveyed in many literary works such as novels. One of the novels that discusses identity issues due to cultural clashes that occur is the novel *Brooklyn Heights*. *Brooklyn Heights* is the fourth novel by Egyptian novelist Miral al-Tahawy. The novel was published for the first time in 2010 by Merit Publishing House Cairo to be printed, published and distributed in Cairo, and later published by Dar Al-Adab to be published and distributed in Lebanon. The novel was shortlisted for the Arab Booker Award in 2011 and won the 2010 Naguib Mahfouz medal for literature (Seymour-Jorn, 2017, p. 110). The novel was released in 2010 in Arabic and translated into English by Sameh Salim.

The novel tells the story of Arab immigrants (Egypt) to New York (America) through a female narrator who presents her experiences between those two different cultures. Hend and her son move to Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn Heights in an attempt to escape the shackles of a failed marriage and broken family. Hend's difficulties, such as cultural differences and her lack of English language skills, became a major factor in her sense of alienation and insecurity in America. Hend had difficulty communicating with people there, and they could not understand what Hend meant. Even when she mumbled to herself in Arabic, people there looked at her with a strange look. Therefore, Hend decided to take an English course so that she could communicate well and be accepted in the community. In addition to the language case, Hend also started going to bars and dating an American man in order to become an American.

Based on this description, it can be assumed that this novel describes the process of negotiating and forming a new identity from contrasting Arab and American identities. It is also assumed that there is a trigger that makes Hend do that, namely the need or romantic relationship. The negotiation process not only arises or rests on the need for self-existence but also arises from simple things such as romantic needs (romantic relationships) where it indirectly and unconsciously creates a process of negotiating two existing cultures. Therefore, this research will discuss the negotiation process that begins with the need or romantic relationship that leads to the formation of the identity of the main character Hend in the novel *Brooklyn Heights* by Miral al-Tahawy.

This research is also related to previous research, namely research conducted by Hala Ghoneim (2014) with the title *Imagined Audience and the Reception of World Literature: Reading Brooklyn Heights and Chicago*. Furthermore, Khoulah Li'amuri (2015) in her research entitled *Al-Ightirab fii Riwayah Brooklyn Heights*. Then, Katie Logan (2018) in the *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, (re-membering displacement: Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* and the politics of memory). Furthermore, Wael Najmy (2019) in his article entitled '*Tasykilat al-Huwiyyah fi Riwayati Bruklin Hayts li Miral al-Tahawy*'. Finally, Ariel M. Sheetrit (2013) in his journal entitled '*Deterritorialisation of Belonging: Between Home and the Unhomely in Miral al-Tahawys's Brooklyn Heights and Salman Natur's She, the Autumn and Me*' in the *Journal of Levantine Studies*.

Meanwhile, this research departs from Khaulah Li'amury and Wael Najmy's previous research on identity issues. First, Khaulah in her research only highlighted the issue of alienation experienced by Hend. Hend experiences various alienations between her homeland Egypt and her new country America. However, her research did not discuss how Hend adapted and negotiated in her new place while the shadow of her past was still clearly attached to her memory. The vast cultural differences between Egypt and America made her feel alienated.



While the second, Wael highlighted more on the loss of identity. The conclusion of the research conducted by Wael Najmy is that there is a separation of identity or Hend's inability to integrate with fellow newcomers or with native Americans. In addition, Wael Najmy's research also highlights more on Hend's son who succeeded in integrating.

From the two previous studies above, the authors see that both only discuss the issue of dilemma and anxiety. In this study the authors discuss the other side, namely the process of negotiating the main character's identity (Hend) in dealing with alienation, indecision, and anxiety she experiences for the formation of a new identity. In addition, the authors also discuss how she makes efforts to exist and be accepted in the midst of society in the midst of a far different cultural clash by negotiating her identity for the formation of a new identity, between combining the past and the present, or maintaining the old and taking the new.

Therefore, related to the above problem, the researchers use the identity theory proposed by Stuart Hall, namely the identity of being and becoming which says that identity does not only exist but becomes (Hall, 1990, p. 225). This research is generally a descriptive qualitative research.

Method

The type of research used in this study is descriptive qualitative research. Meanwhile, the literary approach used in this research is an objective approach. The objective approach is an approach that views and examines literary works from the intrinsic aspects that build a literary work itself (Semi, 1985, p. 44). This study begins by parsing the intrinsic elements namely character, plot, and setting in the novel to see the elements that build the novel and re-emphasise that identity issues related to the negotiation of the main character's identity are the main issues in this study.

Structure is not just a combination of elements, but a set of phenomena that are mutually reinforcing and dependent on each other. And linguist Lalande defines it by saying: "Structure is any component of a phenomenon that is coherent, or solid, so that each element in it is related to the other elements, and cannot be meaningful except within the scope of the whole" (Al Firjani, 2016, p. 6). Stanton states that the theory of structure in literary works is the main element that builds the structure of a literary work which includes characters, plot, and setting which functions as a record of the imaginative events of a story. When summarized together, all these elements are called 'factual structure' or story levels. Stanton divides the elements in literary works into three parts, namely story facts, themes, and story means. Character, plot, and setting are part of the story facts. In this study, the author only uses the elements in the novel *Brooklyn Heights* in the form of story facts and themes (Stanton, 2012, p. 22).

After parsing the intrinsic elements of the novel, the next step is to analyze the main character's identity negotiation in the novel *Brooklyn Heights*. The theory used is Stuart Hall's identity theory. According to Hall (1990, p. 225), identity is a construction that can change and can adjust to the situation. Cultural identity is a process that is not just about being but also a process of becoming that refers to the past and the present. This process of 'becoming' happens continuously according to social, cultural, spatial and other circumstances. Identity is the name we give to the way we position ourselves differently, and position ourselves in the past. Identity is important for humans to clarify their role and position in relationships with other humans and in society (Wodwaard, 1997, p. 1). In this case, identity is related to how humans position themselves and how humans are positioned by others. Diasporic identities are identities that continuously produce and reproduce themselves anew, through



transformation and difference (Hall, 1990, p. 235). The same changes highlight the ways in which tensions between being and becoming are negotiated, released, or resolved. As psychologist Olivia Espen has argued, immigrants tend to reflect on the relationship between geographical location and life events, giving 'place' great significance as a result of its association with events in their life journey (Fourtier, 2005, p. 183). An effective method of negotiation in human interaction is like a game played by several parties, they must reconcile interests, not positions. Negotiation helps a person to understand his/herself with his/her abilities and capabilities in persuasion, discussion and participation in managing disputes. Thus, negotiation is considered one of the broad and important topics in contemporary life, whether at the individual, group or institutional level, as it almost accompanies most of the activities that individuals do during their lives (As sabab, 2019, p. 595).

In relation to this research, negotiation is carried out as a process to be able to find identity. The increasing diversity in society, the word difference is increasingly evident in life, hence the need for negotiation. Negotiation of differences is carried out to achieve conformity within oneself. An immigrant must be able to recognise and negotiate the differences that are evident in social relationships. Therefore, negotiation is necessary to bridge these differences.

Results and Discussions

This research was preceded by analysing the intrinsic elements in the novel. The purpose of this intrinsic element analysis is to look at the existing elements and re-emphasise that identity negotiation is the main issue in the novel *Brooklyn Heights*. The main character in this novel is Hend, because she has quite a lot of intensity and is the centre of the story. While the additional or secondary characters in this novel are Hend's son, Hend's father, Hend's mother and Charlie, because they do not have more intensity than Hend's character or they become complements or subjects that oversee the dynamics of the main character's life. Hend experienced two periods of life, namely during in Egypt and America. Life in Egypt is Hend's past life from childhood to marriage before finally moving to America.

Character, Plot, and Setting Analysis

Little Hend has a loner and moody nature. This is because Hend feels or is not considered beautiful by her environment so that she seems ostracised and cannot mingle or be accepted by the environment. This situation eventually shaped Hend's personality who was quiet, isolated, and difficult to get along with. Her lack of social skills caused her to only have a handful of friends. In America, Hend still has the same character as in Egypt, which is a loner and even worse. This is due to the new things that exist in America, the loner nature in the past was finally carried over and increased because of the new challenges she had to face in her new environment. Hend has difficulty mingling with new people there. Hend has lack of ability to speak English, so Hend often speaks alone using Arabic, which makes people there look at her strangely. In addition, Hend has a weak character as evidenced when she feels indecisive, restless and homesick for her homeland. Because a strong person will not feel indecisive and restless, she will find it easier to adapt to her new environment, forget the past and be able to face life.

Next is Hend's father. Hend's father educates and loves Hend wholeheartedly. Hend's father teaches Islam and eastern culture to Hend. Hend's father's concern for Hend, especially about teaching and fostering Islam or eastern culture, eventually fostered awareness and feelings of animating Islam and eastern culture. In addition, her father also caused Hend to get a contradictory education, namely when telling about the arguments of the Qur'an



coupled with actions prohibited in the Qur'an (drinking beer). This interaction creates a sense of dilemma experienced by Hend when living her life in America.

Meanwhile, Hend's interaction with her mother is a mother and son interaction with several problems. Her mother loves Hend very much, but sometimes Hend becomes her mother's outlet from her hard side. Because her mother was treated badly by her husband, Hend became the victim of her mother's abuse. This interaction caused Hend's mental health problems to be disturbed so that he became a quiet and loner. Then, her interaction with her biological son is better. Her son was eight years old when Hend migrated to America with a visa inheritance from her husband. Her son's age is still too early to accept the new culture they face in America, so Hend's son is easy and open in accepting American culture. Hend's son played a large role in introducing American cultures. This is what helps Hend in adapting and starting to animate American culture in the midst of her longing for eastern culture. Indirectly, it was her son who supported Hend to get used to her new environment.

Finally, there is Hend's interaction with Charlie. His warm temperament and love of playing women allowed her to get close to Hend. It can be said that Charlie played a lot of roles in introducing American culture to Hend. Starting from learning to dance, drinking beer, and dating. Indirectly, Charlie is the one who leads Hend to try new things that she has never done before.

The plot in *Brooklyn Heights* is a mixed plot. The novel has a complicated structure. The plot in this novel is divided into 3 parts, First: the initial stage, which opens with the climax stage. There are conflicts and clashes experienced by Hend in America due to cultural differences or her move to a new place. Starting from Hend not being able to speak English well, even her English skills are very bad and cannot be understood by others. Hend's loner nature also added to her loneliness in America, and she also had difficulty socialising with new people. Hend began to gradually experience anxiety and bitter memories of her life in the past. This climax introduces Hend's past. The second part is the middle stage, which tells Hend's past. The story of Hend's past begins with memories of her father and mother who educated Hend hard and firmly. Then continued with the story of Hend's short-lived marriage and inherited a visa by her husband which brought Hend to the present, America. It can be concluded that this middle stage tells about the life of childhood, adolescence, then marriage and not getting happiness in her marriage. This is what caused her to migrate to America and find new things there. Then the final stage is the stage of Hend's life in America, adapting, getting to know a new culture, and experiencing longing for the homeland. Hend's life in America begins with adapting to her new environment, and starting to socialise with others. Then, the story of her romance with Charlie. It can be concluded that the final stage in this novel is the dynamics of Hend's life in America.

The setting in this novel has two major settings, namely Egypt and America. Egypt is the first setting before Hend migrates to America. The setting of Egypt is the setting of half of the story. The setting is when she lived her childhood until she had a son and also where she received education in eastern culture and so on. Next, America is her new setting after migrating from Egypt. In America she starts her new life with her son. The existence of two different settings, namely Egypt and America or more broadly called east and west, shows the issue of migration, displacement, and the contradiction of meeting two cultures. Two settings that have been considered to have vastly different cultures. The Arabic-themed settings in America mentioned in the novel give a realistic effect of the main character's longing for Egyptian (Arabic) culture. It also shows the contrast with the American settings where the two cultures meet.



This story takes place around the end of 2008, as evidenced by the event of Obama's election as President of the United States, while the time setting in Egypt takes place before 2008, around the 1980-2000s, namely Hend's childhood life until she had a son around 8 years old. In addition to the time of the story in this novel, the night setting is also often mentioned in the novel. The night setting is a description of Hend's mood who feels herself in anxiety and loneliness in living life. Hend always feels alienated in her new place. Moreover, she has difficulty making friends with new people so Hend feels herself lonely in solitude. The night atmosphere is one of the dominant time settings in the course of this story.

Based on the description above, related to the naming of western novels for Arabic novels, it has two major settings, namely Egypt and America, then the story of female immigrants from Egypt to America who experience various difficulties due to the cultural differences she faces which encourage her to adapt and negotiate with the circumstances she faces. Therefore, it can be concluded that the theme of *Brooklyn Heights* is the dilemma and dynamics of the clash of Egyptian and American cultures and identities.

The Problems Hend Faces as an Immigrant from Egypt to America

Brooklyn Heights addresses issues regarding the lives of immigrants in relation to identity matters. The main character, Hend, experiences identity struggles due to cultural differences that lead her to feel alienated and nostalgic in her new environment. The identity she grapples with causes her to undergo a process of self-discovery. The cultural differences between Egypt—a Middle Eastern country rich in Islamic culture—and America—a Western country known for its freedoms—are starkly contrasted. This disparity drives the necessity for self-expressions, one of which is negotiation. Negotiations concerning these differences are undertaken to achieve a sense of personal alignment.

Hend's arrival in America with her son brings several new conflicts she must face. The differences between Egypt and America are significant across all aspects, from cultural distinctions between Eastern and Western societies, which inevitably lead to feelings of alienation and longing in their new surroundings. Moreover, the differences in daily language, food, clothing styles, appearances, traditions, and everyday habits are far removed from what they were accustomed to in their homeland. Below are some of the issues Hend encounters in America alongside her memories of Egypt.

Identity Crisis

Hend's identity crisis becomes evident when she reflects on her situation after her English class. At the course, she meets people of Arab descent, but they refuse to speak Arabic and instead converse in English. Hend contemplates her struggle with English proficiency, feeling inept in the current circumstances. She feels out of place and believes she is different from others. This is illustrated in the following quote:

"She reflected on the cold that thickened around her face, turning her into a weary autumn woman, a naked and solitary woman who resembled no one." (part 1, p. 26)

This quote showcases Hend's self-description and expresses her exhaustion regarding her identity. Hend finds herself in a bewildering situation. Among her English course classmates, she is the only one still speaking Arabic, while others from similar backgrounds shy away from using Arabic, opting to speak English despite their limited fluency. This seems to suggest a necessity to present themselves as American, as if speaking English is mandatory. Conversely, Hend only wishes to communicate in Arabic, yet others perceive the Arabic language as nearly



obsolete and unclear. Consequently, all this leads her to describe herself as "a weary autumn woman." She is tired because she can only speak Arabic and cannot communicate in English, weary from experiencing an identity crisis. She feels alone, isolated, and unlike anyone else. She is no longer entirely Arab now that she is in America, yet she does not feel fully American either, as she is not proficient in English.

This is so because language is one of the main tools for interacting, so the inability to speak English well creates an identity crisis. This is in line with what Edwards (2009) said that the inability to communicate in a particular language can create a profound impact on a person's identity, especially in an increasingly connected global context. This phenomenon not only affects one's ability to interact, but also shapes their self-perception and social position in society.

Alienation

Alienation causes feelings of anxiety, dilemmas, and unease within individuals. In this novel, Hend's alienation is partly illustrated through the differing interests between her and her son when it comes to places to visit. Hend and her son often disagree about going to Bay Ridge (an Arab neighborhood in America), with her son frequently refusing Hend's invitations to visit. This is highlighted in the following exchange:

"I don't want to go to that place."

"Why not?"

"Bay Ridge is dirty and vulgar," she exclaimed in English. "I don't want to be one of them."

"We can eat Egyptian noodles."

"I don't want to!" she cried hysterically. (part 2, p. 47)

The text illustrates Hend's son's rejection of her invitation to visit Bay Ridge. The area, being perceived as dirty, leads her son to decline. This phenomenon fosters Hend's sense of alienation. Her son's refusal to visit Bay Ridge indicates a general lack of interest in that place. However, for Hend, it holds a special significance in alleviating her longing for her homeland. She feels alone in her desire to visit that location.

Hend and her son share a familial bond, as a mother and child, which typically would suggest shared interests and preferences. However, in this case, they have opposing likes: Hend is drawn to Egyptian or Arab culture, while her son prefers American culture.

Moreover, there is the issue of language. In Egypt, Hend speaks Arabic, while in America, it is English. Hend encounters difficulties communicating in English with people there. This can be seen in the following quote:

"I enjoy going to places where cultured people gather, pretending to be one of them even though I don't quite understand what they are saying. I sit in the far corner so that no one wants to ask me anything, and I don't feel the need to say anything. The expression, 'Excuse me, what are you saying?' that I hear all the time makes me freeze." (part 1, p. 23)

The quote above shows that when Hend went to a crowd of people who were gathering, Hend pretended to be one of them. Even though Hend did not understand what they were talking about, Hend only joined in order to have many friends. However, Hend deliberately chose to sit in a chair in the far corner so that he did not have to say anything and no one asked. Hend deliberately avoided people because of her inability to speak English, but still wanted to join the people there. This shows the alienation experienced by Hend in terms of language. This is



what makes Hend see the world through the eyes of a stranger and feel inferior and separate from others.

One manifestation of identity crisis is cultural alienation. When a person is unable to use a particular language then he/she will experience alienation. This happens because he/she cannot enter or be in a group opinion. Pavlenko (2009) said that language problems greatly affect a person's emotions, which then create alienation.

Hend's Longing for Her Homeland

The cultural differences between Egypt and America not only have an alienating effect on Hend, but also cause a sense of longing for her homeland. The strong eastern culture taught by her father was very influential on Hend's life in America. This is what makes Hend feel a sense of belonging to her homeland, giving rise to longings for Egypt, her hometown. This can be proven by the following text excerpt:

'Are you going to make Mama go alone?'

'Why do you like it so much?'

"Maybe because it reminds me of home."

'But I don't like Bay Ridge! And I don't want to go back to Egypt either.'" (part 2, p. 47)

The excerpt above shows Hend's longing for Egypt. Bay ridge is an Arab neighborhood in America. The atmosphere there is very Arabic, giving Hend a nostalgic impression of her homeland. As well as many photographs and maps of Arab antique cities hanging on the walls, besides that there are many sellers who sell Arabic pastries such as falafel, a typical Middle Eastern cake made from ground chickpeas then compacted into small balls and fried. Then there are Egyptian specialties like Kushari, plus many sell halal meats and seafood. All of these things allow Hend to experience the Egyptian atmosphere she longs for without having to return to Egypt. Because in Bay Ridge, Hend gets quite the same atmosphere as her home country and can chat with people there comfortably. She can smell the aroma of her mother country "Egypt", eat halal food and speak Arabic without feeling inferior.

The Main Character's Negotiation Efforts to Find Self-existence

Negotiation is carried out as a process to accommodate the two cultures that exist in Hend and to overcome the identity problems she experiences, namely the conflicts and dilemmas of Egyptian and American culture. Therefore, to bridge these differences, a process of identity negotiation is needed.

Efforts and Use of English to Show Her Position as an American

One of the first efforts made by Hend in the adaptation process in her new environment was to recognize and learn the new language that she had to use every day, namely English. Hend's English skills are very bad, and therefore it is no wonder that people do not understand what Hend is saying even though she has tried to be correct in her pronunciation. Finally, Hend decided to take an English course. This can be proven from the following quote:

'My name is Hend. I came here from Cairo - why, I don't know exactly. I'm trying to learn English. I feel very embarrassed whenever I have to speak in English. Even the words I have learned correctly I seem to pronounce in a way that no one can understand. I have serious problems communicating with people. (part 1, p. 23)



The text above shows the initial meeting when Hend joined the course or the introduction that each participant makes when attending the course. As an Egyptian who speaks Arabic but then she learns English and then is able to speak English indirectly is a form of identity negotiation carried out. She does not leave Arabic when with family or friends of her compatriots but with American society she gradually speaks English. As in the following quote:

"Hal turīdu shay'an ākhar? Hal tuḥibbuhā ma'a al-krīm wa al-sukkar... skīm mīlk am blāk?" ("Do you want something else? Do you like it with cream and sugar... Skim Milk or Black?") Section 7, p. 133

The quote above is when Hend is working at a cafe called dunkin donuts, she serves the buyer to ask the order that the buyer will choose. She offers in Arabic mixed with English. Seen from the sentence 'skim milk am black'. The use of Arabic mixed with English is a negotiation in the language aspect by Hend. The effort to use English vocabulary is to adapt to American situations and conditions and to create successful communication with American society. Superficially, Hend's practice aims to make buyers understand what Hend means, even though she has not fully used English, but Hend at the end of the sentence uses English sentences to convey the meaning of her conversation. However, regardless of Hend's limited ability to speak English, or her unaccustomedness to giving up Arabic, Hend's language mixing can be interpreted as a negotiation process that unites her native language with English to be able to blend in and erode the problems and differences in identity and language differences she faces. Speaking English is a cultural formation and negotiation to be considered as an American so as to gain existence and access in social life in America. English disguises her Arab identity to become more Americanized.

Doing Dating Traditions

Dating is a common occurrence in America. Dating is considered a natural thing to do a closer introduction. In fact, it is not uncommon for people there to go on dates just for fun. Because the urge for free association in America is great as well as the urge for self-existence, Hend follows the dating tradition like others. This can be seen from the following quote:

"Do you know that you were the first person to ask me out in this city? She muttered sadly. She had hoped to soften her heart and make her see her as a woman. (part 5, p. 96)

The text above shows the beginning of Hend's courage to go with a man other than her son. She began to mingle and learn to be able to socialize with new people there. In Egypt, which is predominantly Muslim, there is no dating culture, because it is prohibited by Islam. Hend's willingness to date means that she puts her identity as part of America because she ignores her eastern culture, values and norms and follows the culture and traditions of American society. In addition, Hend's actions can be interpreted as a negotiation process carried out to achieve the existence of her identity there. The interesting thing is that throughout the story Hend is seen close to the opposite sex only in her love story with Charlie. This shows that the instinct of relationships between the opposite sex triggers Hend's negotiation efforts.

In her daily life, she still has an Eastern tradition, but for the sake of romance and the dream of her love relationship, she is encouraged to practice dating. Because on the other hand, fulfilling the impulse of love and romance is also part of the search for self-existence. This is in line with Ward & Rana-Deuba (2000) that the phenomenon of establishing romantic relationships with locals as a form of self-existence in a new country is a complex manifestation of the need for social integration, cultural acceptance, and identity validation.



This practice needs to be understood in the broader context of sociocultural adaptation and transnational identity formation.

Drinking Beer in Her Relationship

Drinking beer is something that all Americans do on a daily basis. In contrast to Eastern culture, which forbids drinking beer, due to social influences and the demands of having a normal date with an American, Hend occasionally drinks beer. This can be seen from the following quote:

She reached out to her with a glass of white wine, and they sat on a bench facing Coco Bar. Sweat poured from her forehead, and from under her armpits. (part 6, p. 125)

The smell of alcohol and sweat came out of her open mouth and she started panting like an amateur horseman. (part 6, p. 126)

The text above shows that Hend is getting used to this drink, which is forbidden in Islam or eastern traditions. To be able to exist in her romantic relationships and generally socialize in American society, Hend follows the culture of drinking beer. Drinking beer is a form of assimilation and making oneself part of the traditions and associations in America. Drinking beer means putting oneself or one's identity as part of America or American culture. Her relationship with Charlie requires her to have the identity that Charlie wants. Charlie is a drinker, so Hend must also be a drinker. The interesting thing here is that Hend only drinks beer when she is with Charlie, not in her daily life. This is a negotiation between her past and her future prospects. She drinks beer with Charlie for the sake of her romantic relationship. Here it can be seen that drinking beer is Hend's effort to make her dating with Charlie look normal like American culture. If Hend refuses to drink beer, it will create problems. Thus, with his dating model, it forms Hend's American identity in relationship.

Learning and Dancing Tango

Tango is a dance of longing or resembles a love game. Tango is a kind of therapy that helps understand the basic rules of love and life, rules whose time is slowly running out: distance, attraction and balance. In America, this dance is performed in pairs of man and woman. Usually, it is a woman or a man who has recently divorced, because tango is a dance of sadness. Whereas in eastern culture, a woman should not dance even just a game of hopscotch is not allowed because it can show her legs. Unlike in America, dancing is a natural and desirable thing for many people, especially women. In this case, due to social influences, the demands of self-existence, and the encouragement of her romance with Charlie encouraged Hend to try to learn and dance tango. Plus Charlie is Hend's dance instructor and lover. This can be seen from the following quote:

Charlie took her hand and started teaching her the first step: one, two, three, four. (part 6, p. 115)

The text above shows Hend starting to learn to dance tango with Charlie. Charlie is Hend's lover, so to be with and accompany Charlie, Hend must be able and learn to dance with Charlie. Dancing tango is a tradition in America, by dancing tango means that Hend puts herself as part of America. Her previous identity, which was anti-dance, changed to a dancer. Her relationship with Charlie requires her to be the person or identity that Charlie wants her to be. Charlie is a dance instructor, so Hend must also learn to dance and become a dancer. This can also be interpreted as negotiation. She let go of her eastern traditions and norms by



daring to become a dancer. By dancing tango she will gain the existence of her relationship with Charlie and find herself as part of America

Wearing Revealing Clothes

Little Hend is a religious person who wants to be holy and great among her friends. She wore a head covering, loose clothes, and all black. However, when she grew up, she took off her head covering and left loose clothes. As was the case when she first set foot in America, Hend still used loose clothes to cover her body. However, over time because of the demands of self-existence, Hend ventured to take off her loose clothes and replace them with short dresses. As in the following quote:

She examined her body as if she had never seen it before. She contemplated her small scars and blemishes, all the more visible now in the short dress she wore. The stitches on her knee after falling off the swing at her uncle's house. (part 6, 115)

The text above is when Hend is learning to dance in the dance studio. It can be seen from the text above that Hend is wearing a short dress that shows her knees. Wearing open clothes is the opposite of Hend's previous identity. Her previous identity as a very religious person changed into an open person. She no longer looks fanatical about Easternness and begins to place herself as part of America. What is also unique here, Hend uses short dresses only when dancing at Charlie's dance studio. Like dancing Tango, this also shows the negotiation of identity by Hend by slightly releasing her eastern traditions and norms for the existence of her romantic relationship. In addition, the dance studio is a public space where blending in with their clothes is part of the effort to assimilate and accept themselves by the audience.

Wearing a revealing dress has the same position as drinking beer and dancing tango, which is to perfect Hend's love relationship with Charlie. The perfection of Hend's relationship with Charlie must certainly be shaped by American traditions or in harmony with American culture itself. These behaviors are clearly contrary to Hend's values, norms, and Egyptian culture, but she tries to become an American by doing those forbidden things. It is in accordance with Hall's opinion (1990, p. 225), which says identity is a construction that can change and can adjust to the situation. Cultural identity is a process of not only being but also a process of becoming that refers to the past and the present. The process of "becoming" occurs continuously in accordance with social, cultural, spatial, place and other circumstances. Hend's need for self-existence in the new country of America creates an effort to negotiate her Egyptian culture with America. Her process of becoming American within the scope of her relationship with Charlie is her effort to become and form a new Hend identity.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the forms of identity problems faced by Hend are longing for the homeland, alienation, and identity crisis. All of these conflicts have encouraged the protagonist, Hend, to make efforts to negotiate between her past and present (Egypt and America) with several forms, namely; efforts and using English to show her position as an American, doing dating traditions, drinking beer, learning and dancing Tango, and starting to use white American fashioned styles. Indeed, the protagonist maintains her hybrid identity, half Arab and half American. She also maintains Arab culture, animates Arabs but also blends in and becomes part of Anglo-American cultures. Hend's identity is not dominant to one party, she becomes half Arab, also half white American, a mixed and hybrid identity.



This research provides findings that the protagonist, Hend, actually still has an eastern soul but her behavior that shows the negotiation process is driven by the figure of her lover; Charlie. The behaviors that were initially for the sake of the continuity of her relationship with Charlie (although in the end they separated) indirectly also benefited her self-existence and identity in the midst of her new life in America.

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