

"Membangun Budaya Literasi yang Bermutu melalui Kajian Isu Mutakhir"

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Depiction of Culture Shock Experienced by Immigrants in Mohja Kahf's "Manar of Hama"

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji latar dalam cerita pendek "Manar of Hama" (2005) karya Mohja Kahf, yang mengangkat topik gegar budaya. Manar dan keluarga kecilnya adalah imigran yang pindah dari Suriah ke Amerika Serikat. Penelitian ini menggunakan elemen intrinsik sebagai pendekatan untuk mengidentifikasi komponen intrinsik, khususnya latar, untuk lebih memahami bagaimana konteks latar berdampak pada karakter utama ketika ia dihadapkan pada perbedaan budaya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan MH Abrams, yaitu teori objektif yang berfokus pada analisis makna karya sastra yang berakar pada teks itu sendiri, terlepas dari interpretasi subjektif atau unsur-unsur eksternal. Teori ini merupakan unsur intrinsik karya sastra yang membangun karya sastra itu sendiri tanpa mengaitkannya dengan pengarang, penonton, pembaca, atau alam semesta. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa latar cerita sangat penting dalam menggambarkan hambatan dan upaya Manar dalam beradaptasi dengan lingkungan baru di Amerika Serikat setelah melarikan diri dari Suriah. Gegar budaya yang dialami Manar berasal dari perbedaan budaya yang mencolok antara kedua negara, yang berdampak pada kondisi emosional dan identitasnya. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa latar dapat memperkuat tema dan konflik sebuah cerita, terutama dalam konteks diaspora dan adaptasi budaya.

Kata kunci: unsur intrinsik, latar, imigran, Mohja Kahf, adaptasi budaya

ABSTRACT

This study examines the setting in Mohja Kahf's short story "Manar of Hama" (2005), which addresses the topic of culture shock. Manar and her small family are immigrants who moved from Syria to the United States. This study uses intrinsic elements as its approach to identify the intrinsic components, particularly the setting, in order to better understand how the context of the setting impacts the main character when she is confronted with cultural differences. The study employs MH Abrams' approach, namely objective theory that focuses on analyzing the meaning of a literary work in the text itself, regardless of subjective interpretations or external elements. This theory is the intrinsic element of literary work that builds the literary work itself without referring it to the author, audience, reader, or universe. The analysis finds out that the story's setting is essential in illustrating Manar's obstacles and efforts as she attempts to adapt to a new environment in the United States after fleeing Syria. Manar's deep culture shock stems from the stark cultural contrasts between the two countries, which have an impact on her emotional state and identity. This study found that setting enhances the themes and conflicts of a story, particularly in the context of diaspora and cultural adaptation.

Keywords: intrinsic element, setting, immigrant, Mohja Kahf, cultural adaptation

INTRODUCTION

Culture shock is psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments (Adrian Furnham & Stephen Bochner, 1986). Culture shock might be experienced when people come to the new environment, and they find the new habits, norms, or society that are different from what they knew before. Oberg (1960) stated that culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life. The cues can be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms. Dodge (1990, as cited in Winkelman, 1994) found that culture shock occurs for immigrant groups such as foreign students and refugees. Culture shock is a normal reaction when we come to a new place, and it will make us feel discomfort and anxiety.

There is a point that culture shock can be experienced by immigrants. It is portrayed through the main character in the short story "Manar of Hama" (2005) written by Mohja Kahf. The main character, Manar Abdalqader Sharbakly, experienced being an immigrant from Syria to America after the Hama massacre. Manar experienced culture shock after her move from Syria to America. The culture shock shows clearly through the action, the feeling, and the thought of Manar in the new country. She gets shocked with the food in America, the habits, and the society, which are different from her hometown in Syria. Since Syria is the eastern state and America is the western state, which has a lot of different cultures, this short story shows Manar's struggle to adapt in the new place. From the spiritual and social background that is portrayed in Manar, the role of place is really important to shape the identity of a people and the way they think. The culture of a place and the society in it build the identity for people, so it also influences their habits in life.

In 1954, Oberg mentioned some symptoms of culture shock: there are the excessive concern over drinking water, food, dishes, and bedding; delay and outright refusal to learn the language of the host country; excessive fear of being cheated, robbed, or injured; and that terrible longing to be back home. Culture shock can influence how people act while they try to adapt to the new environment. Delayed language learning and a desire to return home often lead to social isolation, hindering the development of social relationships and integration into society. The overall emotional and psychological impact of culture shock can make the adjustment

process more difficult and arduous. In some cases, culture shock can even turn into cultural alienation (Sari et al., 2023). Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the symptoms of culture shock and its impact is essential to help individuals overcome these challenges. Appropriate support and an effective adaptation process allow individuals to feel more comfortable and connected to their new cultural environment.

There are some previous literary studies that have focused on the analysis of culture shock. Darsini & Nagalakshmi (2022) study emphasizes the impact of culture shock, which is loneliness and loss. Bath & Nair (2022) delved deeper into culture shock, cross-cultural relationships, and the hybridity that occurs when two cultures meet and mingle in one's personal life. Moreover, Yana's (2017) study explains the adaptation process of culture shock based on four stages in accordance with Collen Ward's theory, namely the honeymoon phase, crisis phase, recovery phase, and adjustment phase. In addition to previous studies, this study brings novelty to the table to investigate how place may lead to culture shock in immigrants as an outcome of cultural differences between the new place and their place of origin. Here, this study proves that different places clearly have cultural differences, which would cause different reactions for people who are still unfamiliar with the new place.

The paper aims to examine the depictions of culture shock experienced by immigrants in Mohja Kahf's "Manar of Hama." The depictions of culture shock are found in terms of the main character's background and the cultural adaptation. Furthermore, readers expected to understand the effect of a place and the cultures to live the life even though in different environments.

METHOD

This research applied a qualitative descriptive method. Denzin & Lincoln (2004) said that qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the object of the study and the collection of a variety of empirical materials that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.

The data for this research were obtained from the short stories studied, journals, and

online articles related to this research. The data obtained was in the form of dialog and narration from the short stories that describe culture shock. The data was obtained through several steps in the collection process. First, reading and rereading the short story "Manar of Hama" to understand the content of the short story. Second, making notes about the main data that refers to culture shock. Third, skim reading sources related to the issue under study to find opinions that support this research.

After collecting the data, the researcher described and interpreted the data so that the reader could be on the same page as the researcher. The last step was analysis. The researcher analyzed the data that has been collected to prove that Manar, as the main character, faced culture shock. As the last step, the researcher made a conclusion of the whole research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this discussion, there are some behaviors and actions shown by the main character as the responses of the places she stays that would be analyzed. Manar is the main character in this short story, experienced as an immigrant from Syria to America. The different places and cultures make her experience culture shock. Here, the analysis would find the character's behavior and action as the impact of the places.

Family and Spiritual Background: Where the Belief Is Rooted

The protagonist, Manar, a Syrian immigrant, suffered greatly as a result of having to leave her own country. The place where Manar came from is called Hama, Syria. This is where the massacre took place. So, Manar had to move from Syria to America. In this short story, the authors explore the nuances of the city's past, focusing especially on the horrific 1982 massacre that left hundreds dead when the Syrian government violently put down an uprising. In particular, a massacre took place in the Syrian city of Hama. One of the worst episodes in Syria's recent history is the Hama massacre.

Under President Hafez al-Assad's orders, the Syrian Arab Army and the Defense Companies surrounded the town of Hama for 27 days in the dead of night on February 2, 1982, in an attempt to put an end to the Muslim Brotherhood's uprising against the Ba'athist regime. This marked the beginning of the Hama massacre. The conflict sparked a general uprising in the city, turning the night into one of killing and looting, leaving tens of thousands dead and the city in ruins. This ruthless act of

state violence aimed to quash dissent and solidify Assad's grip on power as hundreds of Islamic fighters raided regime leaders' homes and offices in a bid to seize control of the city (Danin, 2012).

The problems shown in the story are sparked by Hama's past. This tension arises not only from the difficulties of cultural assimilation but also from the burden of history Manar's Syrian background bears, specifically from the city of Hama in Syria. The author gives the protagonists a complicated scenario by employing Hama as a backdrop. Conflict arises from the city's past, which affects Manar's attempts to survive after that incident.

"When we [Manar and her family] left Syria months ago, my family had just been killed in the Hama massacre. Massacre, massacre, massacre, the Hama massacre, there I [Manar] said it. It is real. It [the massacre] happened. Even if I am [Manar] surrounded by people who have never heard of it [the massacre]. Hama: blank stares. Asad: blank stares. Syria: blank stares. A government that would gun down twenty thousand of its own citizens: blank stares and nervous shifting of eyes" (Kahf, 2005, p. 112).

The protagonist's suffering over losing a family member in the Hama massacre highlights the severe stress survivors endured. What will drive this story's plot is the information about Manar's birthplace and her historical background. This data packs a powerful punch within a few lines. The protagonist's anguish over the loss of their family in the massacre in the city of Hama underscores the profound trauma experienced by survivors, and the land of her birth is what will bring the plot of this story into motion.

"After the massacre there were soldiers everywhere and mukhabarat spying on people even more closely than usual, and sweeps and arrests. We [Manar and her family] were told to get out of Syria fast" (Kahf, 2005, p. 113).

Hama still experienced indiscriminate cleansing of the remaining residents. This made Manar and her family inevitably have to leave their country to save themselves. From Syria, Manar moves to America and meets new cultures that she has never seen before.

Hama is one of the cities in Syria, which we know is a country in the Middle East. Through this, we can conclude that the environment Manar came from was a conservative or religious one. It is described in her confession:

"I, Manar daughter of Shaykh Abdal Qader Sharbakly of the Hama Society of Learned

Ulema, and his wife Fatima Rizkalla of the sparkling reputation..." (Kahf, 2005, 119).

From her confession, it is clear that Manar came from a respected religious family in her old hometown. It is also reinforced in the dialogue when Manar said, "You [Suzy] said: La ilaha illa allah,' I [Manar] said, 'This is from my faith'" (Kahf, 2005, p. 117). Through her confession, there is also an explanation about her religion, that is Islam. Her belief will certainly be very different from the situation she will face in America, which is known as a liberal country.

In "Manar of Hama," the setting functions as a silent, yet potent character, a figure that shapes the protagonist's experiences and views. The protagonist's adventure takes place against the menacing backdrop of Syria. The social and historical context provides a strong foundation for understanding how the city's past could impact the characters' present problems.

"This [the situation when Manar gathered with mixed people] was unreal. I [Manar] had never done anything like this in my life. Come running across a meadow to total strangers. Sat down to eat with people whose families and faiths I [Manar] do not know. I [Manar] was very careful, taking only some hummus and yogurt with bread, not wanting to eat any impure food. And a little bit of some roughly cut tomatoes and lettuce. I [Manar] guess there is no danger in salad" (Kahf, 2005, p. 115).

From the narrative, it can be felt that there is a sense of Manar's distrust in dealing with the situation that is happening to her, gathering with a heterogeneous environment, which most likely she has never done. Given Manar's religious background, gathering between men and women is not allowed. Through her disbelief, Manar's attitude here shows that she is experiencing culture shock, which has become her current trouble. Cupsa (2018) said that culture shock is a process that someone goes through as he or she is experiencing a new, unfamiliar situation or environment that requires developing new modes of symbolic representation and new perspectives on self, others, and the environment. However, given that she had just encountered such a situation, Manar still held firm to her beliefs. She was cautious of unfamiliar things that clashed with her beliefs. This is also reflected in her careful choice of food. As a Muslim, of course Manar will choose what food she can eat and is allowed in her religion.

The way Manar held on to the teachings of her beliefs is because they were so deeply rooted in her that they became part of who she is. According to Cupsa (2018), as individuals, we all

have bonds to our culture, starting with our family culture, which provides us with our first implicit memories in the form of primary relational patterns. It can be the reason why Manar holds on to her beliefs strongly, because it is what she has believed in since childhood. We know that the family is the closest and most frequently encountered person in daily life. What she sees on a daily basis, how people behave around her, how her elders convey the teachings of her beliefs, they will later settle in Manar's memory, become a habit, and eventually become what she believes in until now. It also constructs her identity. Her family and surroundings also share the same understanding and beliefs, so Manar's beliefs are strongly connected to her.

Thus, it is critical to emphasize Manar's family history, which encompasses her spirituality. This is due to the fact that understanding Manar's past will enable this analysis to explain her behavior in her new nation and why she experienced culture shock.

The data that have been discussed is evidence for its contribution to the growing literature on the experience of culture shock. The data has provided a new angle to the influence of one's background on culture shock that previous studies have not fully addressed. Although some studies have discussed culture shock, through the data discussed, this research expands the understanding of culture shock itself by emphasizing the real aspects that can be missed in the discussion. Thus, in addition to strengthening previous studies, this study also fills the gap in the discussion of culture shock.

Cultural Adaptation: Facing The New Environment

In the short story "Manar of Hama," Mohja Kahf represents Manar as part of the Syrian immigrants who migrated to America. The immigrant signifies a person in a specific relation to the nation and contains within it a sense of movement: the immigrant has moved or is moving, crossing a border to get from "there" to "here" (Chang, 1997). Simply put, an immigrant is a person living in a country other than that of his or her birth (Bolter, 2019). Manar, as an immigrant in this story, became an immigrant from Syria to America as she escaped from the massacre in Syria. America represents the place where Manar goes to continue living after the Hama massacres in her hometown in Syria. America is the place where Manar starts a new life away from Syria in the hope of finding a life filled with freedom and opportunity.

Despite its representation as a place where Manar starts a new life, America is a source of

culture shock for Manar. This statement can be found from Manar's point of view about her difficulties that she must face in America. Culture shock is frequently experienced, normal, and unavoidable (Cupsa, 2018). As an immigrant, culture shock is a natural thing for Manar to experience, and it is quite normal and cannot be avoided.

"The food here [in America] is terrible. The meat smells disgusting. There is no real bread, or coffee, or olives, or cheese. They [Americans] have a nasty yellow kind of cheese and even the milk—Khalid [her husband] says make cheese yourself if there is no cheese, but even the milk is tasteless. Even the eggs are pale-yolked. I [Manar] don't know what they [Americans] eat in America. I [Manar] have lost five kilos already in the months since we left Syria" (Kahf, 2005, p. 111).

The quote illustrates that Manar has not been able to adapt to her new environment even though she has been in America for several months. She has not been able to accept the characteristics of the food in her new place, which has caused her to lose weight. As we can find in the early story from that quote, there is a conclusion that Manar cannot accept the foods in America. The statement in the first and second sentences expresses strong disappointment with American food, in the words "terrible" and "disgusting." Based on Cambridge Dictionary, "terrible" means very unpleasant or serious or of low quality. Furthermore, "disgusting" means extremely unpleasant or unacceptable. From those definitions, it indicates that she has had a bad experience with food in America. The absence of "real food" also makes Manar feel that the availability of food in America is not as complete as in her hometown.

The significant cultural differences between Manar's home, Hama in Syria, and her new environment in America are reflected in that narrative. Food is a daily staple, and everybody needs food to survive; meanwhile, there is the explanation that Manar is dissatisfied with the food in America. Since Newmark stated that food is also a part of the culture, Manar's dissatisfaction with the food in America led to the assumption that she was experiencing culture shock.

Referring to Oberg (1960), there are some symptoms of culture shock; one of them is excessive concern over drinking water, food, dishes, and bedding. Kohls (1979, as cited in Winkelman, 1994) also stated that one of the major and severe symptoms of culture shock may include compulsive eating and drinking. From that, it is explained that food and drink are

the crucial problems when someone gets culture shock. That is why America is a significant place in this short story, because this place shows Manar's struggle to adapt to the culture in it.

As a newcomer to America, Manar also experiences culture shock about the language used daily there, which is very different from the language she uses in her hometown, Syria. This statement is strengthened by the following data:

"My children can babble away in English by now and they look at their mother [Manar] who cannot speak two words to the school secretary and I [Manar] know they are embarrassed. They are already in another world, one I [Manar] don't understand [it means that her children were influenced by the culture in America]" (Kahfi, 2005, p. 111).

That data shows that Manar still cannot adapt in the scope of socio-culture in America. Ataca (1996) states that, as would be expected, sociocultural adaptation is a function of resources such as education, income, and language fluency, as well as the amount of contact with host nationals. Language is the most important point because language is a tool to build communication with each other. Mastering the language in a new environment will make it easier to understand the surrounding environment, culture, and society because we can transfer information. In any case, what Manar experienced is included in the symptoms that she experienced culture shock, as mentioned by Oberg (1960) in his book, that one of the symptoms of culture shock is delay and outright refusal to learn the language of the host country.

America becomes a nightmare for the main character, Manar, as she experiences culture shock even after several months of living in America. This country becomes important because this place shows a source of culture shock for Manar due to differences in food and language. America is the place where Manar's character faces a conflict or problem with herself, that is, culture shock, and shows her struggle to adapt.

The data analyzed refers to quotes or statements in the story Manar of Hama that support the argument about Manar's culture shock experience. The data serves to show the challenges she faces in adjusting to the new culture, especially regarding food and language. This illustrates Manar's internal conflict that is at the center of her struggle to adapt to her new life in America.

This can be related to the real-life experience of immigrants, who often face similar

difficulties when adapting to a new cultural environment. For example, food habits and preferences are strongly linked to personal identity and comfort, making it difficult to accept unfamiliar cuisine. On the other hand, language barriers often lead to feelings of isolation and frustration, as communication becomes a challenge in daily interactions. Manar's story demonstrates the difficulties that many people face in general and emphasizes how important it is to maintain and understand our own culture as we go through this transition.

The Place Shaped Behavior and Action

After Manar and her little family chose to move for safety and a better life in America. Moving to America meant that Manar and her family had to adapt to a new culture and environment. This can be seen in the following quote:

"His wife [her sister in law] is Palestinian but she [sister in law] was born in America and has forgotten her roots [the culture or her identity from her hometown]. She [her sister in law] wears pants and knows only a choppy little Arabic and speaks to me [Manar] out of her nostrils. Treats me [Manar] as if I [Manar] were an ignoramus. I [Manar] looked back at her [the Palestinian girl] because I [Manar] was wearing the kind of clothes that, in our social environment in our country and among people of taste, is a dignified thing for a woman to wear. There, she [the Palestinian girl] and her pants will be seen for what they are: tasteless, uncivilized, and inappropriate [because it does not conform to their beliefs]" (Kahf, 2005, p. 112).

The quote shows a comparison between Manar, who went through a long time in her hometown, and the girl who is Palestinian but was born in America. Palestine and Syria are nations with similar backgrounds and beliefs because they are located in the Middle East. In this comparison, it can be seen that the beliefs that are rooted in Manar and the girl have different strengths. The clothes worn are a symbol of dignity and purse within Manar's social circle. This indicates a strong cultural norm where clothing is a marker of social status and group identity. Since Manar is a Muslim, there are rules about how Muslims dress. The term "our social circle at home and among people of taste" reinforces the existence of certain social standards that are recognized and respected by certain groups. This reflects a conservative view of appearance, where in Manar religious teachings, women are expected to adhere to certain standards of dress in order to be considered decent and respectable. This quote also highlights how personal judgment is often influenced by social and cultural norms. What is

considered decent or unworthy, dignified or not, often stems from the collective standards taught and accepted by society according to the place where they live.

According to Zarnadze et al. (2022), the social environment and the individual always interact. The environment influences personality and contributes to its formation. A person, acting in the social environment, forming relationships with other people, and participating in the activities of various communities, thereby creates this environment and gives it certain social properties. This quote states that the social environment plays an important role in shaping one's personality. This means that the values, norms, and social dynamics around an individual will influence the way they think, behave, and develop. In addition, the statement "social environment" and the relationship between individuals and the social environment are reciprocal and continuous. It appears that these two things cannot be separated and continuously impact each other.

Manar is a woman who was born and raised in an environment that is thick with religious teachings. Her environment certainly affected how her personality was formed. The data discussed above serves to enrich the study of the relationship between social environment and personality traits, especially in the context of the culture shock phenomenon. This study provides a different perspective by highlighting how the social values and norms of someone's home environment influence the way they adapt to a new culture. This study also contributes by underlining the social aspects that influence the adaptation process. As a result, this study not only affirms previous findings but also gives a new and different perspective in discussing culture shock.

CONCLUSION

The short story "Manar of Hama" portrayed the impact of culture shock on a person through the character, that is Manar. Manar does not just move between two places but also moves between the two very different cultures. This analysis revealed how the displacement of both place and culture can affect how the individual lives the life, which will bring the story from the beginning to the end. The issue of culture shock that is experienced by Manar becomes the main focus that is based on or caused by where she lives, both before migrating and after migrating. This contrast highlights how a character's identity and behavior are shaped by one's social environment clearly.

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