



RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring Ecofeminism through Cultural Narrative of Homelessness in Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

¹Tayyeba Ashfaq* and ²Umm e Habiba

1. Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, Fatimah Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, Fatimah Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author: Tayyebaashfaq84@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study aims to investigate Ecofeminism through the cultural narrative of Homelessness in Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*. It investigates the Ecofeminist concept of Nature and Women dualism in Western philosophy, with a focus on the formation of a sphere of otherness through oppressions such as gender, race, and colonization. This qualitative study focuses on the interdependence of gender, nature, and women's experiences in the global village proposed by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. Romanticizing and sentimentalizing nature is viewed as a third area in which modern people crave women, namely women's bodies. The current understanding of nature has devolved into a deceptive process, with women perceived as inferior to men and their sexuality as subservient. Homelessness is a major issue in America, with Arab women like Salwa facing colonialism, homelessness, and refugee status. The study emphasizes the importance of accountability and self-awareness in navigating the complex dynamics of gender, nature, and women's experiences for upcoming researchers.

KEYWORDS Ecofeminism, Homelessness, Nature, Submissive Sexuality, Women

Introduction

Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* concentrates on the dislocated Gulf periphery and the migrant issue in the Mediterranean region as a bourgeois colonialist burden. Salwa and Jassim, two Arabians who immigrate to the United States and become estranged from one another, are the subjects of the book. The barren landscape represents the want for water as well as the general drought and disillusionment of discovering a cultural wilderness in America. Water is a motif that expresses the gap between past and present and is related to transmission and restoration. Both remote tracks, broad and complex, represent water as a shared necessity and the US horizon is pictured as a distinct picture. It is a universal human requirement, as both deserts underscore the need to comprehend and resolve this issue (Cariello, 2017).

The said novel offers an informative glimpse into the scraps of life in the post-9/11 United States. The writer challenges the Western perspective on the lives of Arabs in the United States, representing a conspiratorial and religiously zealous America. Following the event, her characters grew increasingly prejudiced and skeptical of Arabs and Muslim values. The author depicts prejudiced and intolerant natives who are filled with doubt and fear and a post-traumatic period marked by "anti-Arab racism." The unavoidable colonial insight into life is markedly alienated between Eastern and Western global disasters such as dearth, scarcity, and conflict. Halaby believes the incidents were the result of these outbursts. She expands on the idea that Americans unknowingly see themselves as distant from disasters that threaten all countries. The story serves as a warning fiction, training the natives to surpass a dual edge of position to avoid additional disasters from occurring either inside or outside the limits. The simplest relationship between this text and *Ceremony*, written by Silko is noted. They include customary tales in their narratives. In addition,

her caution that the threat of radioactive destruction impacts everyone, despite their geography, serves as an echo of her assertion that the potential for worldwide calamities ties all transnational nations to a shared fate. Consequently, both authors promote partnerships among Eastern nations and Western nations, emphasizing the importance of all societies transcending national boundaries and social divisions to address global disasters (Lloyd, 2012, p. iv).

Ecological feminism examines the associations between womanhood and landscape employing fundamental principles such as "gender equality. It provokes a reappraisal of non-chauvinistic phenomena and a worldview that values natural events, integrated relationships, and the worth of insight and collaboration (Kaifa, 2024). The simplest relationship among Halaby's text and *Ceremony*, written by Silko is noted. They include customary tales in their narratives. In addition, her caution that the threat of radioactive destruction impacts everyone, despite their geography, serves as an echo of her assertion that the potential for worldwide calamities ties all transnational nations to a shared fate. Consequently, both authors promote partnerships among Eastern nations and Western nations. Ecofeminists investigate the role of gender categories in demonstrating how societal norms unfairly dominate women and the environment. The idea rejects that the customs are central to partially understanding the world, and its experts propose another view that considers the land to be holy, depicting the human race's reliance on the natural world holding the entire lifecycle as treasured (Miles, 2018).

Literature Review

The symbolic functions are transposed by Halaby, who moves it away from patriotism and obedience into communism and opposition. Figures created by the writer fight to break free from the stereotypes that are forced upon them. An automobile is shown as a way for people from various socioeconomic and cultural origins to meet together, and the novelist develops a comprehensive compassionate story that dismantles the mainstream story of the US after 9/11. Her protagonists fight for societal acceptability. Using their vehicles, they establish relationships with members of the lower social strata. While Salwa starts dating Jake, an American colleague who is also a heroin trader and addicted, Jasim becomes acquainted with Penny, a laborer woman. Jassim meets individuals from various national and cultural origins while driving the Mercedes through Penny and Evan's relative's impoverished community. Salwa's automobile became the focus of many conversations with Esteban, a Mexican worker. Salwa's Nissan and Jassim's Mercedes are places that shape their social interactions. Nonetheless, prejudice, sexism, and social segregation in the outside world are challenged by the symbolic territory they encompass within their automobiles. Therefore, by improving their awareness of their environment and hyphenated individualities, the two's interactions in their automobiles aid in moral transformation (Qaoud, 2022, p. 261). The conflict between the characters and the earth is obvious when Salwa says that they are unable to live there ever again, as the pair realizes that the American ideal is a hoax and if she had not lived this life for a decade, all of her experiences of schizophrenic reactions to American culture, her contempt for the shallow she concealed with every new acquisition and advancement, and the spray of hatred she had declined to defend her present agreement suddenly came flooding back.

Halaby shows how Salwa realizes herself as an unwanted Arabic immigrant. Halaby suggests that hatred, derision, and doubt always dominate the group dynamics in a multi-ethnic society like the US, so the continuity of minority groups will always be doubted. Salwa suffers a miscarriage, hinting that there is no future left for them in the United States. Salwa reevaluates her experience in the US concluding, that the fake life she has opted for was not worth it (Halaby, 2007, p. 91). Salwa is shown as disappointed in the US and she still feels herself to be a stranger even after living there for many years. Once in a Promised Land illuminates the evolving features of segregation and strangeness after 9/11 sociopolitical context. The text affords significant awareness of the increasing legality as well as

normalization of racism and the hatred in America in particular, which is reflected in broader international social dynamics. Alnwairan et al. study exclusion and othering by applying Michel Foucault's theories on these constructs and argue that Halaby's novel illustrates new trends of the exclusionary spirit diagnosed by Foucault. Halaby's novel portrays how immigrants in the US are barred from their social and political context following various exclusionary practices, after the 9/11 attacks. This results in the eventual dissolution of marital ties, ending the protagonists' experimentation in the US (Alnwairan, 2022, p. 58).

Jassim and Salwa feel insecure and discover they need to assert their Americanism to avoid increasing hostility towards the immigrants. Joan, Salwa's friend gives Salwa two American flags and labels with the guidance to Place it onto the rear windshield of your vehicle. Possessing it allows others to tell how you belong as you cannot anticipate what they are saying. Joan's advice to Salwa is interpreted in the light of Foucault's idea, Joan, as an American believes she has the right to tell as a wise woman who can advise and control Salwa instructing her what to do. Joan's identity is well constructed in the text, while Salwa's is undeveloped yet. That is unfortunate to hear. Do you want to arrest all Arabs at this time? "Do we not utilize your minds?" she goes on. You're worrying about your crappy tiny business, and there are more than 50 hundred million individuals in this nation. However, you are going to get numerous topics to discuss in class. You may claim that you had to alert protection after seeing a real-life Arab (Halaby, 2007, p. 30). The interchange between Amber and Salwa exemplifies the two different perspectives on identity, making it clear that Amber never perceives Salwa as a true American. Her statement is unable to conceal her outlook toward Salwa. Foucault (1972) defines the "statement" as a very "*special mode of existence*". Amber's discourse is the key to Salwa's understanding, Foucault, discourse is an instrument and is affected by power and hindrance, it is a stumbling block rather than a point of resistance and initiates an opposing strategy (Alnwairan, 2022, p. 55). A Palestinian lady named Salwa recognizes her native citizenship and her family's displacement as a result of the Israeli statehood. She claims to be as American as a native Tucsonan and declines to be granted U.S. citizenship. Thinking that the American Dream is a myth and that she did not originate from a society that values happy endings, she purchases a ticket to Amman to be with her family again. Salwa completely embodies her worldwide diasporic ethnicity by renouncing her U.S. citizenship. A beautiful child born "out of place" to her immigrant parents is enchanted by Hassan and the Ghula in the folktale that concludes the tale (Conte, p. 11).

Two Arab-American ladies, Jassim and Salwa, marry to achieve the American Dream. But they fall victim to American materialism and are unable to conceive, which creates a terrible cycle of deception. The loss of Arab-American safety and joy on American soil is symbolized by Salwa's loss. Jassim is self-centered and concentrates on internal factors, yet his love of water rekindles his enthusiasm. She is a part of the outside world, and they mimic the Big Lie by ironically killing their hopes. Jake stabs her, and Jassim misses his companions and employment. The narrative employs a seek-find-lose structure to emphasize the repercussions of adopting the American way of life, the strength of falsehoods, and the illusory nature of the American Dream (Fateh, 2017, p. 250).

Material and Methods

Mies and Shiva's seminal text, "*Ecofeminism*" (2014), is taken as the theoretical research methodology with a qualitative research framework. The text notes that gender and diversity are interlinked in multiple ways. According to Mies and Shiva, the same incapacity to deal with diversity is connected to the emergence of women as the "second sex." According to the patriarchal mindset, a man is the ultimate value, and variety has no place. Women are viewed to be subordinate and unequal because they are dissimilar. The greatest way to understand the rationale of variety is to look at ecological diversity and how women relate to it. It assists in examining hegemonic systems from a lower, diverse

perspective, exposing "monocultures to women's Indigenous knowledge" as ineffective and the knowledge that generates it as archaic rather than advanced. Women, or more specifically women's bodies, are regarded as a third area of desire for modern males, alongside aggression and passion. Most men base their desires on a woman's physical appearance. An in-depth analysis of the third location may shed light on the link between desire and environmental destruction. In contrast to cultured or intellectual individuals, primitive people are treated inhumanely; however, this is the same type of glorification that we have previously observed about women, Native Americans, or nature. The desire for women and barbarians represents a romanticizing of creation or a yearning for it. The concept of the "natural world" emerged with the Enlightenment. With the advent of Enlightenment, the contemporary understanding of the natural world evolved into a duplicitous procedure that resulted in devastation, which defined the contemporary period (Mies and Shiva, 2010, pp. 134-64).

Results and Discussion

In "Literature and Environment" Buell et al. assert that ecocriticism initiates with the apprehension that imagination contributes to the way out of environmental problems (Buell et al., 2011, p. 418). Bianchi pens that the prime intention for the introduction of the theory of ecofeminism is to examine the shared enmity, crisis, and exploitation, which results from uprooting and relocating as the environment and women are equally the subjects to this change and dualism emphasizes the theoretical and practical control in feminist theory. She affirms ecofeminism assertions that the issue of sexism is strictly associated with racism and environmental destruction, for being reliant on the authority of male-decision making (Bianchi, 2012, p. 226). The Main objective of ecofeminism is the elimination of male gender privilege and authority over women. Whatever helps to weaken the oppression and subservience of a woman, in any setting inherently fits feminism (Warren, 1997, p. 213). Val Plumwood records the destruction in the non-human world as a result of a hegemonic fascination with this dualism. As a result, the environmental cost of development and uprooting identifies females as the subjects of this change (Bianchi, 2012, p. 3). When a woman is confronted and threatened for trespassing on male culture, they have no choice but to leave their home, place, and the grieving trees (Dailey, 2017). Postcolonial ecofeminism binds ecocriticism and ecofeminism for environmental exploitation and women's subjugation is closely interlinked with the elements of class, race, and colonial structures. Postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminism separately fail to voice the issues of postcolonial ecofeminism sufficiently, as both are wholly "Eurocentric". These fields separate cannot interpret "the double-bind" of being a female and being colonized.

After the morning of September 11th, there was a further halving, and Salwa was convinced that *"We cannot live here anymore.... It is different now, she thought. If I am pregnant, I cannot raise my child here, away from everything I know."* Salwa has become suspicious as an Arab Muslim woman, though she is no more veiled and it is America that has become alien to her. Salwa is an American-born citizen of migrant refugee parents and after her engagement to Jassim, Salwa's father, Abu Siham, refers to her as *"Palestinian by blood, Jordanian by residence, and American by citizenship. That is why she uses so much water and has a taste for luxury. We tease her that she is the first world. A colonizer"* (Halaby, 2007, p. 110). Regardless of her father's jocularly describing her fine tastes, she is half of the halving. When a "native Tucsonan" lady refuses to work with her at the bank, her stories about politics that reveal disparities in culture and struggle to be translated into one worldwide vocabulary are expressed in the text. The oral tradition of Nus Nsays is retold in an Arabesque tale. The pleas of a vendor peddling fertility fruits are heard by a lady who is eager to get conceived. The mother gives birth to a little son named Nus Nsays, which translates to "half of a halving" in Arabic, as she only consumes 1/2 of the apple. Following her premature delivery, Salwa has a nightmare about this tale. There is a difference that could not be cut in half since she had not informed her husband about the conception.

The worldwide community sees the emergence of two groups of homeless people. A single organization, like Jack, owns the entire planet as its assets and is movable on an international level. In addition to praising Jordan when recounting his child's nuptials and journey to Jordan, he mistreats her boyfriend, Salwa, labeling her an "Arab Bitch" who is traveling to a barbaric location. Homelessness is the outcome of the other group, to which Salwa and Jassim belong, losing their mobility within rootedness and living as refugees, conquered, and reserves. Mobility was a social problem of the late nineteenth century because of the ongoing dislocation brought about by progress and the global marketplace. The state acts as the feudal father and takes control of life when the homeland paradigm is removed from the creating nation rhetoric (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 98). Salwa, who grew up in the United States, was made fun of for being labeled "Made in USA." It was an ancestral gag when her aunt gave her 4 daughters satin pants when they were 6. Salwa claimed how her mom looked at her as though she had descended through the skies because the pants left her appear as an empress. Salwa's titles thus grew ingrained, ranging from the loving Her Pants to the derisive Princess of Pants, Satin Salwa, proprietor of the Pant Market (Halaby, 2007, p. 47) Salwa says Jassim is the "*Father of Water Preservation*", "*a hydrologist*" "*a water man*" and "*Swimming for Jassim is like prayer.*" On the contrary, the text implies that Salwa made mistakes, such as running the shower for long and letting a foot of water saturate the place overnight, which caused them to pay a high amount of money to extract all away (Halaby, 2007, p. 23).

Jassim tells Salwa that Jack informed him that as the first plane flew into the World Trade Center, Jack was talking about how beautiful Arabic females are (Halaby, 2007, p. 36). Salwa thought of him as someone who she spent her personal life with. He responded angrily, on her leaving home, telling her that she was fleeing the trash she came from, as she sensed a change in the hierarchy of authority. Moreover, a woman is considered dependent on a man. When Salwa is destroyed by Jack, another man Esteban comes to her rescue, who is not American, presses his fingers on her face to stop the blood. Salwa could feel her veins flowing out and onto the greenery (Halaby, 2007, p. 318-20). As Jassim turned over Salwa's sanitary pad between his fingers, he commented, "Lightweight materials... posts? A rug of enchantment? A towel designed for airplanes? Extremely Sticky Headed Brushes. Returning to the washroom, he spilled half a cup of water over the pad. Following that more. He sensed it. He looked for any signs of leakage. They ought to promote them for the avoidance of flooding. Beauvoir portrays the body as a tool that holds the world. The body is not only giving life but it also risks life. For this reason, superiority is essentially linked to humanity and not to sex. Salwa went through a miscarriage, and the blood and the sperm both slid into the drain, as Halaby narrates it, Time went by in a flow, a rush of water, a rivulet, and bleeding, with the odd bulk throughout. Again, though, she did not search for her husband; rather, she was searching for his sperm had produced. She had a parting expectation that a little baby would pass through drainage gaze up at her, and signal goodbye with its little, flawless hand. She was unaware of the fact that she was sitting above her own blood beneath the water, for long. Jassim's voice came through a mist in the distance, was she fine? and she replied that she was fine (Halaby, 2007, pp. 87-99).

Carolyn Merchant offers an agreement on the ethics of caring for the environment that does not favor women as caregivers or identify the environment as female but rather stems from female interactions and encounters with the land as well as from cultural conceptions of nature as erratic and unexpected (Merchant, 1995, p. xii). To find oneself as a mystery, one must have eyes filled with enigma, for a supreme awareness is necessary to get the trust necessary to draw out the dip from the middle of a woman's cheek and restore the fading snaps. Passion and lust can be taken off by any assertiveness. A woman's sexuality is subservient to a man's desires. She is not permitted to practice her will (Beauvoir, 2010, p. 671. According to Sandilands, maternal ecology views females as the stewards of family purity and the mothers of offspring (Sandilands, 199, p. xi). It is considered women's responsibility to "green" the environment. In the said novel, the writer presents a parallel between the bareness of Jordan for both Salwa and Jassim to come to America for

opportunities and Salwa's bareness as she is unable to bear a child. Thus both dreams are distorted in the end. Moreover, Salwa being an Arab is considered an "environmental other" in America and at the same time, she is unable to establish a bond with Jassim. In this respect, she becomes subservient to the patriarchy and the foreign place which she considers her land. According to feminist existentialist Beauvoir, she was just one day newborn when I discovered a tiny label on her cradle that declared it to be a female! Another infant, whose tiny label declared that he was a boy, was in the adjacent bassinet. We were there, oblivious to the difference between a male subject and a feminine object that would determine our fates (Beauvoir, 2010, p. 8). Susan Griffin, in her seminal book, *Woman and Nature; The Roaring Inside Her* asserts that man does not ruminate himself as a part of nature, but considers that nature is designed for the benefit of man. Regarding their understanding, women are considered to have a different nature from men, for they are intellectually more like children, having feebler bodies and minds. The scripture says that Eve was born of Adam, he named her saying, "*he shall be called Woman*" (Griffin, 1978, p. 9). Mies and Shiva mark losing sovereignty to outward hegemony showing consumption as an instrument. Power is taken as a militarized patriarchy and masculine identity and patience become effeminate and weak (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 109).

The research on *Once in a Promised Land* finds out the formalities of literary research in a quest to dig out the research gap. As the text is not yet analyzed from the ecofeminist point of view, the review opens the possibilities for ecofeminist research for further research. Feminist philosophy and ecological feminism account for Western philosophy for dualism and the edifice of a tightly defined domain of oddness in the forms of oppressions like gender, race, and colonization, discussing its logical formulation. With dichotomy, the suppressed are assumed and assimilated as living within their beings and the values of the master and the controller interpret their identity. As Plumwood puts it, the leading concepts of the anthropological relationships in the western hemisphere feature correspondence to rational Feminism and "the Mastery of Nature structure"

Conclusion

Homelessness in America is a significant issue, with Arab women like Salwa facing colonization, homelessness, and refugee status. The modern concept of nature has evolved into a deceptive process, with women often seen as inferior to men and their sexuality submissive. Salwa's miscarriage serves as a reminder of the value of accountability and the need for self-awareness. The research investigates the Ecofeminist notion of Nature and Women dualism in Western philosophy, focusing on how oppressions such as colonization, gender, and race produce a sense of otherness. The interconnectivity of women's experiences in the global world, including gender and ecology. A third source of desire for women in modern society is the romanticizing and sentimentalizing of nature, namely women's bodies. The current understanding of nature has been perverted, with women being considered less valued than males and having subordinate sexuality. With Arab women like Salwa experiencing colonialism, homelessness, and refugee status, homelessness is a huge issue in America. The importance of self-awareness and accountability in navigating the intricate links between nature, gender, and women's experiences. In America, women are viewed as "environmental other" and obedient to patriarchy, as they are viewed as inferior to the environment they call home. The relationship between gender and diversity is examined in works like Mies and Shiva, highlighting the complex dynamics between gender, nature, and women's experiences.

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