

## DIASPORIC REJECTION AND DOUBLENESS IN *AYESHA AT LAST*

Rafi Atha Ramadan<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Fayyad<sup>2</sup>, Ken Firda Rahmawati<sup>3</sup>, Sari  
Fitria<sup>4</sup>

UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

[rafi.atha19@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id](mailto:rafi.atha19@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id)

---

### Abstract

The diasporic issues, including rejection and doubleness of cultural identities, are still existent and requiring attention and solutions. These issues may be expressed in the form of diasporic literature. The article used the concepts of rejection and doubleness of cultural identity to analyze the novel. The researchers analyze the novel *Ayesha at Last* which contains diasporic characters and issues in order to highlight the problems diasporic people encounter expressed in the novel. The main issues that are analyzed are the diasporic rejection and doubleness of cultural identity. The article found these problems and issues of rejection and doubleness faced by the diasporic characters in the novel. The article concluded that these rejections and doubleness in diaspora found in the novel is an expression of the real world issues the diaspora community faces.

**Keywords:** *Diaspora, Doubleness, Rejection*

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

Diaspora may cause issues for people who are diasporic in nature. Diaspora itself may be defined as a condition in which people live far from their ancestral homelands because of various reasons such as migration or moving elsewhere (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). With this, we can infer that diasporic people live in places that are geographically different from their homelands of origin. This may result in the existence of both the cultural identities of the original homeland and the current home to exist within the person. However, these may cause issues related to the diasporic cultural identities of a person such as rejection and doubleness.

Rejection is one of the many forms of problems and obstacles a diasporic person may encounter. In relation to diaspora, rejection may come in the form of rejection by the country of origin or rejection by the host society (Badea et al., 2011). This means that a diasporic person may be rejected by the community in which they are currently residing in or by their original homeland. An example would be how a diasporic person may be rejected for their multicultural identity by their current home or their original homeland because they may disagree or dislike them. Related to this, immigrants may face questions pertaining to their multiple cultural identities such as how much of their new cultural identity they want to take or how much of their original identities they should keep (Badea et al., 2011). In the United States of America alone, there has been a significant discrimination against refugees from parts of the world fleeing war and oppression and immigrants (Szaflarski & Bauldry, 2019).

Doubleness in diaspora is also an issue diasporic people face. In relation to diaspora, doubleness is a state in which a person possesses multiple cultures at the same time (Fitria, 2022). This would mean that, in a diasporic person, their cultural identity belongs to more than one culture. As a result of being in a different place from their original homelands, people's cultures belonging to their homelands and their current homes may clash. These multiple cultural identities can produce cultural conflicts. These cultural conflicts are differences in culture and its values that make people at odds with one another in potential conflict (Turner, 2006). When the two cultures possessed by the diasporic person clash, they might conflict and produce a cultural conflict. For example, if someone has a more traditional homeland culture and a more modern or liberal current home culture, their values may conflict and they may need to resolve the issue somehow, such as by picking one culture over the other or accepting both or any other way. In the 2011 UK, Syrian women refugees had to adopt new roles and challenge their preexisting gender roles while also having to maintain their position as household caregivers (Nasser-Eddin, 2017). They're forced to reject their homeland's culture and adopt their current home's culture. These are just some examples of the numerous diasporic issues that have occurred.

These diasporic issues are able to be highlighted and exposed in literary works such as novels. Diasporic authors may use novels to explore the issues of multicultural identities by weaving them into the text by assimilation or using motifs (Hussain, 2016). Thus, diasporic novels and other literary works can be used to spotlight these diasporic problems people face that require more attention. By analyzing these literary works, we are able to exactly pinpoint what problems or occurrences the author is trying to highlight or communicate to the reader and bring them into the spotlight. This would also provide more attention to the issues and thus drawing more potential solutions to the problems mentioned.

The diasporic novel analyzed in this article will be *Ayesha at Last* by Uzma Jalaluddin. It tells the story of two main diasporic characters, Ayesha Shamsi and Khalid. Ayesha is an Indian-Canadian woman who migrated from India with her family years ago. She is sassy and a believer to her faith and herself with some disagreements against her homeland culture. She is living in Toronto, Canada as a poet to pay her family's debts. In the story, she has to deal with an unwanted arranged marriage, her cousin Hafsa who does not want to get married, and deal with Khalid. On the other hand, Khalid is a conservative and smart Indian-Canadian living in Canada who gets engaged with Hafsa while thinking of Ayesha. He experiences many trials and obstacles but he gets through them in the end.

In conducting this analysis, the article contributes to the field of diasporic literature. This article also highlights the ever present issues faced by the diasporic community, which includes immigrants, refugees, or even the exiled. It highlights these issues in order to speak for the voices of the diaspora community who need to be heard and given attention in hopes to draw possible solutions and outcomes for the issues present within the novel and in general.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A condition in which diasporic persons encounter two or more clashing cultures, causing their cultural identity to become ambiguous appears in a number of literary works created by diaspora authors. One of them is the novel *Family Life*. The *New York Times* named this novel one of the top ten best books of 2014. Akhil Sharma, the author, received the PEN/Hemingway Award. He is a native of New Delhi who now works as an assistant professor of English at Rutgers University in New York City. Sharma portrays Indian diaspora characters in this research as a minority population in a multicultural society who have adapted to new customs. Regardless of how much they try to distance themselves from their true culture, the majority still rejects them. As a result, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate the lamenting doubleness of diaspora characters in Akhil Sharma's novel, *Family Life*, in three stages: liking the West, being rejected by the West, and othering the Self. It also seeks to depict how diaspora characters' chosen displacement causes them to mourn.

Diaspora characters are prone to mourning. Some studies dealing with diaspora issues have been undertaken by researchers. Jameel Ahmed Alghaberi conducted one of them, titled *The Concept of Home in Palestinian Diaspora Fiction: A Critical Study of Randa Jarra's Fiction* (2018). He examined Randa Jarra's literary work and saw miracles in identifying home and cultural identity as a result of being a Palestinian diaspora. Preteti Shirodkar (2019) performed another study on this topic titled *Trauma, Terror, and the Modern Day of Diaspora: Decoding the (Con)Text of Loss in Munaweera's Fiction*. Shirodkar noted in this study how a diasporic character is charming and enduring in her emotion for being positioned as other.

Moreover, diasporic persons also face the challenge of doubleness. In terms of diaspora, doubleness is the state of having multiple cultures at the same time (Fitria, 2022). This would imply that a diasporic person's cultural identity is comprised of more than one culture. People's cultures from their original homelands and their new homes may conflict as a result of being in a different location from their original homelands. Cultural disputes can arise as a result of these diverse cultural identities. Cultural conflicts are variations in culture and values that cause people to disagree and potentially conflict (Turner, 2006). When the diasporic person's two cultures clash, they may clash and cause a cultural conflict. For example, if someone has a more traditional homeland culture and a more modern or liberal present home culture, their values may clash, and they may need to address the issue in some way, such as choosing one culture over the other, tolerating both, or any other way. Syrian women refugees in the UK in 2011 had to embrace new responsibilities and question their established gender stereotypes while simultaneously maintaining their status as household carers (Nasser-Eddin, 2017). They are forced to abandon their homeland's culture and adopt the culture of their new home. These are just a few of the myriad diasporic concerns that have arisen.

### III. RESEARCH METHOD

The analysis is conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach. The analysis is done by analyzing the text found within the novel *Ayesha at Last*. Text from the novel relating to the topics of diasporic rejection and doubleness will be extracted and analyzed. The focus of the analysis is on the two diasporic characters of the novel, Ayesha and Khalid, and their issues of diasporic rejection and doubleness and how they reacted to these issues. The data itself is the text found in the novel that is about the diasporic characters mentioned and the occurrences of the aforementioned issues in their lives. The study utilizes the concepts of diaspora, rejection, and doubleness of cultural identity to assist in the analysis. Conclusions will then be made in relation to these topics.

### IV. FINDINGS

In this section is the explanation of the existence of doubleness of cultural identity concept and the concept of rejection experienced by diaspora characters in the novel *Ayesha at Last* by Uzma Jalaluddin, as Indians when living their lives in Canada or the west. This novel reveals that cultural identity is something that is not easy and difficult to define for people who experience diaspora problems, which we usually call it as inner conflicts against their own identity. This novel, written by Uzma Jalaluddin, describes the problems of the diaspora through Indian families who immigrate to Canada in this novel. Although in essence the departure of these diaspora characters are based on their own volition. However, their diasporic journey in establishing cultural interactions has made their culture identity and their own identity doubled. In this case they are seen as regretting their current identity issues, because they have to struggle with doubleness of identity, apart from doubleness they also feel the stages of rejection being carried out on them as diaspora from India.

- **Doubleness**

"Ayesha had been early for the meeting, and after she'd found a spot in the empty prayer hall, took out her purple notebook. But it was no use. She was too tired after her late night at Bella's, and the confusing conversation afterwards with her mother and Nana". (Uzma, 2018: 51)

The quotation above shows how the diaspora character has a double identity in Ayesha's character because she comes to Bella's which refers to a lounge where the majority of Canadians (West) often come to the lounge to have fun, meetings, or just spend their time. Therefore, the character Ayesha in this novel accepts the western concept, but if you remember her name, 'Ayesha', she has a doubleness in her cultural identity. The name shows the east side while going to the lounge is the west side of the diaspora character.

"I thought I did blend in. I speak English, I work hard, I do my job well. What is the problem?". (Uzma, 2018: 43)

The quotation above shows how the diaspora character has a double identity in Khalid's character because judging from his name "Khalid" which is an Easterner's name, but he speaks English, which is the everyday language used in the west. Indeed, sometimes a diaspora feels confused by such a situation, because they don't actually come from that place. Not only language, but food issues are also often a concern for a diaspora. As evidenced in the quote below.

Ayesha began again. "I was telling him about your food, and he really wants to learn a few authentic recipes, so I thought maybe you could give him a lesson on how to make your delicious parathas." (Uzma, 2018: 112)

The quotation above illustrates the doubleness of the diaspora character. It's hard for a diaspora to get rid of his love for anything related to his homeland, one of which is food. In the quote above Ayesha tells her grandmother to be willing to teach Khalid to make delicious parathas, while parathas are food that is consumed almost every day by Indians, you could say parathas is a special food from India. Even though Khalid has lived in Canada for a long time, in Khalid's self, he is still in touch with his homeland, namely he still likes Indian food. And he offered to learn how to cook Indian food. Besides that, Khalid is also good at cooking pasta, which is a western food. From here it proves that the identity of the homeland still exists and coexists with the identity of the home.

Furthermore, the concept of doubleness is also seen in Ayesha. Muslims in India have an arranged marriage culture called Rishta, where Rishta is another term for ta'aruf. Rishta is an arranged marriage where a mother will send a proposal to her daughter's family and if the proposal is accepted, ta'aruf will be established. Unlike Ayesha, Ayesha disapproved of Rishta. Evidenced by the following quote:

Ayesha sighed. She wasn't sure what was going on exactly, only that Hafsa was dragging her into this ridiculous rishta quest whether she liked it or not. (Uzma, 2018: 57)

In the quote above, Ayesha disagrees with Rishta culture, in which she thinks that Rishta is a culture that is ridiculous and seems like a place for buying and selling women. Ayesha prefers independent culture, she also thinks that women can focus on careers. The above quotation shows the doubleness of the diaspora character. Because Ayesha has the name "Ayesha" which is an eastern name, but she chose the western way for her marriage, namely in an independent way.

- **Rejection**

"Khalid looked down at his clothes, heart sinking. Not this again. "I don't understand the problem," he said, keeping his voice flat. "If you can wear a dress to work, why can't I?" (Uzma, 2018: 41)

The quotation above shows how the diaspora character is being rejected by the West because he could change his appearance or the way he dresses from how he usually did in his homeland. When he wore these clothes, the West could not accept it because they felt it was strange, and was reluctant to accept this way of dressing. In addition, the clothes used are also seen as something that comes from the East so that the West cannot accept this way of appearance and dressing which he used.

Next, the concept of rejection by the character in *Ayesha at Last* Novel by Uzma Jalaluddin shows through the fact that Canada (West) considers that Canadians must have a white skin and western appearance. It brings the idea that there is rejection of the character in *Ayesha at Last* novel.

"Tell me, Khalid: Where are you from?". "Toronto," Khalid answered. His face flamed beneath his thick beard; he didn't know where to look. "No," Sheila laughed lightly. "I mean where are you from originally?". (Uzma, 2018: 12)

The quotation above shows how the diaspora character is being rejected because he has a different physique, and his way of dressing is different from the majority of people there. Where the majority of Canadians are white while Khalid is brown. The West cannot accept it because they feel that his physique and character in the way of his dressing doesn't suit the majority of Canadian society. Apart from that, the way of dress used is also seen as something that comes from the East so that the West rejected the physical characteristics and way of dressing.

Then, the concept of ejection received by the character is presented by the fact that Canadians regard "Paki dot" as a joke against Indian culture. It brings the idea that there is cultural discrimination so that in this fact we can see the concept of rejection in the following quotation:

"Ever wonder why Paki dots are red?" Kimmie asked Sara, handily blocking Ayesha's path. "No, why are Paki dots red?" Sara said, speaking loudly. A small crowd of students had gathered around them. "Leave me alone," Ayesha said quietly. "Leeeee-ve meee all-oowwwn," Kimmie mocked in an exaggerated Indian accent. (Uzma, 2018: 29)

The quotation above shows how the diaspora character is being rejected by the West because the character has a culture that is unique and unusual for western life which is why the majority of Indians make Paki dot on his face. Paki dot is usually used to symbolize intelligence by Indians. The West could not accept it because they felt it was strange and not in accordance with Canadian culture. It makes the West reject the character as a diaspora character originating from India, because the concept of pakidot or Bindi is considered a foreign culture to the people there.

Sometimes he wished he were different. But even if Khalid “edited” everything about himself—his clothes, his beard, his words—it wouldn’t erase the loneliness he felt every day. The loneliness he had felt ever since his sister left home almost twelve years ago. (Uzma, 2018: 14)

The quotation above shows how the diaspora character is being rejected by the west because in Khalid's daily life, he looks the same as he looks in his homeland. He wears Indian clothes to work, which is something that Canadians consider strange, where the majority of people there are white. Not only that, Khalid has a beard which is something that is very rarely found in westerners. Khalid's way of speaking was also different from the people at home and all this made westerners in his office have bad prejudices against Khalid. This is also evidenced by other quotes as follows:

The assumptions he saw in strangers’ eyes as they took in his beard and skullcap were painful to acknowledge. Khalid had considered shaving or changing his wardrobe many times over the years. It would be easier for the people around him, but it wouldn’t feel right. This is who I am, he thought. This thought was quickly followed by another: If it comes down to my clothes or my job, there’s no contest. I’ll quit. (Uzma, 2018: 44)

In the quotation above, there is rejection from westerners to Khalid. Western people assume that people with beards and wearing skull caps are something that is kooky. Khalid, who is a diaspora, is very confused by what happened to him. But Khalid still sticks to what has become his belief even though it is not uncommon for people to see him only based on his appearance which is different from westerners.

## V. DISCUSSION

This section explains the concept of cultural identity doubleness and the concept of rejection faced by diaspora characters in Uzma Jalaluddin's novel *Ayesha at Last*, as Indians living in Canada or the West. This work illustrates that cultural identity is difficult to define for those who are experiencing diaspora troubles, which we commonly refer to as inner struggles against their own identity. Uzma Jalaluddin's story addresses the issues of the diaspora through the eyes of Indian families who relocate to Canada.

Although, in essence, these diaspora characters are leaving on their own volition. Doubleness in diaspora is the state of having different cultures at the same time (Fitria, 2022). This would imply that the cultural identity of a diasporic person is made up of more than one culture. As a result of being in a different area from their original homelands, people's cultures from their original homelands and their new homes may clash. As a result of these varied cultural identities, cultural conflicts might occur.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The novel displays various occurrences of diasporic rejection and doubleness of cultural identity. These events are experienced by the characters

Khalid and Ayesha. The existence of these issues highlight the struggle and problems of rejection and doubleness of cultural identity of diasporic people. They may struggle to find a set cultural identity amidst their multiple identities, or face rejection from cultures that do not accept them. The issues they experience in the novel is related to their diasporic cultural identity, in which they are both Canadian and Indian. These issues mirror those of real life diasporic issues that must be given solutions or paid attention to. Problems of diasporic people have been and are still present to this day as a problem that is continuously occurring in people's lives whether they foresee it or not. Giving attention to these issues may incite discourse and produce possible solutions

## REFERENCES

- Badea, C., Jetten, J., Iyer, A., & Er-Rafiy, A. (2011). Negotiating dual identities: The impact of group-based rejection on identification and acculturation. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 41*(5), 586-595.
- Fitria, S. (2022). Akhil sharma's family life: regretting doubleness of diaspora individuals. *Poetika: Jurnal Ilmu Sastra, 10*(1), 61-68.
- Hussain, Y. (2016). *Writing diaspora: South Asian women, culture and ethnicity*. Routledge.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Diaspora. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diaspora>
- Nasser-Eddin, N. (2017). Gender performativity in diaspora: Syrian refugee women in the UK. In *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (pp. 142-154). Routledge.
- Turner, J. H. (2006). *Sociology*. Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Szaflarski, M., & Bauldry, S. (2019). The effects of perceived discrimination on immigrant and refugee physical and mental health. In *Immigration and health*. Emerald Publishing Limited.