

Original Research Article

Religious Dilemma and Identity Crisis in Saud Alsanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk* (2015)

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ABSTRACT

The current paper aims to investigate the religious identity crisis in the themes of Alsanousi's *The Bamboo Stalk* (2015). It also determines to explore the kinds of the identity status depicted in the novel as well as the causes of identity loss. The paper takes the qualitative approach for data interpretation and adopts the descriptive discourse analysis (DDA) method. The analysis is then guided by the intercultural communication theory (ICT). The paper found that the protagonist and some other characters face identity crisis and suffer from religious dilemma due to several reasons the most of which is the dominance of the socio-class norms that prevents religion from playing its role in making its adherents equal. The paper also confirms the negative effect of hybridization on the religious identity formation. It reinforces the validity of the application of ICT on fictive data and contributes new form of IC analysis on fictive data.

Introduction

The famous novel *The Bamboo Stalk* won the International Prize of the Arabic Fiction 2013 (Belkhasher & Badurais, 2016). The novel is counted as one of the literary works that are concerned with discussing the consequences of the of the social, ethnic and class discrimination in Kuwaiti society (Al-Mutairi, 2016). Due to this feature, among others, the novel attracted the attention of many readers, literary critics and social researchers. Therefore, the current paper aims to take it as data for the Intercultural communication (IC) analysis.

Since the novel depicts the multi-racial and multicultural conflicts occurred in a particular society (Kuwaiti), it constitutes a fruitful corpus for the IC analysis which is concerned with the sort of communication that takes place with those whose cultural backgrounds are distinct (Samovar & Porter, 2004).

Although, the previous studies investigated the novel from the identity angle, as we will see later in details, none of them has explored the religious identity crisis depicted in the novel in as deeper as this paper aims to do. By applying the ICT on fictive data, the paper can contribute something new to the field as it is poor in the matter of analyzing fictive works (Hirvonen, 2014).

Objectives of the Study

The paper aims to explore the illustration of the religious identity crisis in the novel. It also attempts to investigate the kinds of identity status and the factors that causes the crisis.

Hypotheses of the Study

The paper hypothesizes that some characters face religious identity crisis. It also argues that the main character goes through most of the kinds of identity status. In addition, it assumes that the main cause of identity crisis is the multi-racial and multicultural identity of the hybrid characters which restrain them from assimilating in the indigenous society due to its exclusive socio-class attitude.

Methodology of the Study

This paper aims to analyze a written text (fictive novel), so it does not need any means of data collection. It takes the qualitative approach which suits its purpose of understanding the concept religious identity crisis in the data (Mason, 2002). It also takes the descriptive discourse analysis (DDA) methods which adopted in the qualitative approach (Gee, 2010). The paper does not freely investigate the data, rather it is guided by the intercultural communication theory (ICT).

The IC theory argues that identity is constructed, maintained and modified in communication. The individual perceives his own identity and forms it through communicating with others. The intercultural context provides the individual with the opportunity to learn more about him/herself via comparing his/her attitudes with the others (Hecht et al. 2005).

The Scope of the Study

The scope of this paper is limited to the analysis of the religious identity crisis in the novel in particular and it is not concerned with concept of identity in general. It takes into consideration the all the relevant factors that has to do with religious dilemma or identity crisis. It is also limited to analyzing the events depicted in the novel and it has nothing to do with the real community of the novel (Kuwaiti society).

Literature Review

Definitions of the Relevant Concepts

Religious Identity

According to Molaiy et al. (2016, p. 185), religious identity is the 'sense of belonging' to a religious group due to the acceptance an individual has to the group's beliefs. Mattis and Watson (2008, p. 92) defined it as adherence to the prescribed beliefs and ritual practices associated with the worship of God or a system of gods' (Ajibade et al. 2015, p. 3). The above definitions highlighted the conception that religious identity refers to the individual affiliation to a particular group as a result of sharing its members their beliefs. The measure adopted in the current study for considering the individual or the individual's behavior as being *religious* depends on the motivation underpinning the behavior or the nature of the action itself. That is, every individual behavior is labeled as *religious* if it depends on a religious guidance. The individual himself is considered religious when he acts according to the beliefs of the group he belongs to.

Identity Crisis

The word crisis refers to the time when great change or difficulty happens. The term identity crisis is defined as the situation when the individual is ranging between firm identity to diffused identity (Baumeister et al., 1985). Eriksons (1998); Erikson, (1968) defined it as 'the 'insecurity and worries that teenagers experience when they become youths create a lack of knowledge and confusion about the present and the future in terms of the roles that they will have in future' (Dombrovskis, 2016, p. 5). Dombrovskis (2016) also pointed out that identity crises occur in middle-aged people and during the transitional stages of life when young people seek to answer questions concerning what career to choose, what political or religious group to follow. Based on the above definitions, identity crisis emerges when the individual feels fear about his future which seems to him ambiguous or diffused. It also emerges due to the sense of inconsistency the individual feels as a result of wavering between two or more alternatives regarding his racial or religious belonging.

Baumeister et al. (1985) stated that identity crisis springs from the lack of bases upon which the person can make consistent decisions about life affairs. They identified two types of identity crises: motivation and legitimation. Motivation crisis arises when the person lacks guiding commitment which helps him to draw goals and establish values. Legitimation crisis emerges when one has several commitment 'which prescribe conflicting behavioral imperative in some situations' (ibid, p. 2). For example, the legitimation crisis emerges in a case of a child whose parents are committed to two different contradicted religious faiths in a way that the child will not be able to commit to both of them (ibid). It is also assumed that 'motivation crises tend to be caused by internal changes, whereas the conflicts of legitimation crises are brought about by situational changes' (Baumeister et al., 1985, p. 4)

With regard to the emergence of identity crisis, Marcia, (1980) stated four kinds of identity status: *diffusion*, *foreclosure*, *moratorium* and *achievement*. During diffusion, the person faces no crisis as there is no identity commitment. In the foreclosure status the person also faces no conflict as he commits to the identity that he has not experienced by himself but was handed to him by the parents or significant others. During the moratorium status, the individual is searching for identity from the available alternatives and has not committed to anyone yet. Here the individual faces the crisis of being confused by the alternatives. In the final status *achievement*, the individual has chosen his identity and became aware of it and aware of why it was chosen. The young person here has undergone a crisis (Nair et al., 2015).

Religious Pluralism

According to the Oxford Dictionaries the word pluralism means 'condition or system in which two or more states, groups, principles, sources of authority, etc., co-exist' (Fawwaz, 2018, p.7). Therefore, it gives the same meaning as diversity, Ndayambaje (2013). Based on the above definitions, RP occurs in a society that encompasses distinctive religious groups. RP is a concept that makes these groups coexist in harmony and in a degree of acceptance that allows them to exchange peaceful treatment if not they exchange religious knowledge. One of the most remarkable features of RP is that it prevents religion from acting its role as source of power that unifies society (ibid).

According to Roumeas (2015, p.11-15), RP has four meanings, two of them suit this purpose of this paper, i. e. (a) *Theological Pluralism* assumes that all other religions are equally true or might have part of the true; (b) *Sociological Pluralism* stands for 'the social phenomenon of religious plurality or diversity' (ibid, p.12). In its modern scope in Europe and the United States it allows the different groups of the society not only to coexist, but it went deeper to allow them to modify the religious faith itself

Hybridization

The term hybrid is originally used in botany and zoology to describe a plant or an animal that is a product of two different species.' It designates a crossing between two species that give birth to a third one called hybrid' (Al Areqi, 2017, p.2). According to Lazarus (2004), the term hybridity/hybridization has several other synonyms used to give the same sense including diversity, unhomeliness, and multiculturalism. Some other researchers use ambivalence, third space, in-between identity and mimicry to stand for the term hybridization (Al Areqi, 2017).

According to Al Areqi (2017), hybridization denotes the state of being torn between two different culture in the sense of being unable to choose one. This study argues that the hybrid character whose father and mother differ in their races, religions and cultures will be affected by this difference in his identity formation as he will find himself torn between two opposing religions and cultures

High and Low Contexts

Low-context society is characterized by the individual's kind of behavior. That is the individuals 'have the right to develop him or herself according to personal choice, whether or not that suits the society' (McLaren, 1998, p. 22).

High context society tends to make the social behavior by the group, so the conducts are inherited, stable, rooted in the past and slowly-changed (McLaren, 1998).

Previous studies on *The Bamboo Stalk*

The Bamboo stalk is considered as one of the works that explores the ramifications of the class discrimination and ethnic prejudice in the Kuwaiti society (Al-Mutairi, 2016). Many researchers have discussed the complicated themes and the identity conflict as depicted in the novel. The previous reaches investigated the novel from various angles. The current study will review the ones that are the most relevant to its domain.

Belkhasher and Badurais (2016)

Belkhasher and Badurais (2016) conducted a research titled *Third Space Identities: Hybridity in Saud Alsanousi's Sag Al-Bamboo (2015) – Bamboo Stalk*. The research purpose is to explore the concept of hybridity as reflected in the novel. The study posits that its significance lies in the fact that the novel under study belongs to a new horizon in Arabic literary canon, termed as the literature of the marginalized (ibid). One of the main issues discussed in the study is the protagonist's religious identity. His religious affiliation is waving between his father's religion (Islam) and his mother's (Christianity), due to his fluctuation between the two groups. Similarly, the current paper aims to analyze religious identity but in greater depth.

Al-Mutairi (2016)

Al-Mutairi's (2016) *Reconciling Two Opposing Cultures: The Bamboo Stalk and the Arabic Bildungsroman* is a qualitative research that seeks to read the novel *The Bamboo Stalk* from the angle of tracing the protagonists' journey of age with reference to the Arabic Bildungsroman. The study concludes that Jose succeeds in overcoming these difficulties and realizes his identity through reconciling two cultures. The study also reveals that the key point of its results is that it could demonstrate that the novel *The Bamboo Stalk* 'resonates with sufficient affinities to warrant its classification as an Arabic Bildungsroman' (ibid:1). Although the study painstakingly searches the protagonist's life and his identity construction, it does not analyze his religious identity in particular.

Elayyan (2016)

Elayyan (2016) selected three novels from among the Arab literature that discussed the issue of expatriation. He chose these novels as a corpus through which to trace the experiences that face the expats in the Gulf countries. The novels are Ibrahim Nasrallah's (1993) *Prairies of Fever*, Ibrahim Abdel Meguid's (1994) *The Other Place* and Sanousi's *Bamboo Stalk*. The study points out to the impact of the post-colonial political situation in the Gulf countries. It argues that the exploration of oil in the 1950s attracted expats from Arab and non-Arab countries in search for quick money. Due to this, the Gulf communities changed from closed societies to open multicultural communities that have joined a spectrum of people from different colors and backgrounds. The study could be relevant and useful to the current one since it highlights the factors that cause Jose's identity conflict. The most noticeable of these factors is the social rejection Jose faces due to his Filipino features.

Hezam (2017)

The study of Hezam (2017) *A Dismembered Dream: A Critical Study of Alsanousi's Bamboo Stalk* attempts to analyze the novel as a quest of the protagonist's dream to live in Kuwait (the homeland of his father). The study's goal is to examine the cultural barriers that dismembered the protagonist's dream. The study analyses the novel from the following angles: title, language, religion and cultural identity. The study concludes that the quest for religion is one of the main themes of the novel. Although Hezam (2017) explored the religious conflict that Jose experienced in an excellent way, the brief scope of his study did not enable him to provide a full picture of the religious crisis depicted in the novel as the present thesis tries to do.

Summary of the novel *The Bamboo Stalk*

The novel is centered on recounting the tragedy of a young Kuwaiti- Filipino boy *Jose* who was born as a result of illegitimate marriage (it is called illegitimate marriage in Islam as it is based on the acceptance of the couple without the permission of their families and without being declared to the public) between his Filipino mother, *Josephine*, and the son of her Kuwaiti employer *Rashid Al-Tarooof*.

The themes of the novel are set in the protagonist's father's and mother's lands as he migrates between the two in quest of identity and stable life. The story traces Jose's fluctuation between two races, three religions, three languages and cultures. The boy was born in his father's land, but he could not live long there as his father was forced to cast him out of Kuwait as the father divorced his mother due to the pressure of Rashid's mother *Ghanima*, who feared social criticism. By returning to Philippines, his mother lost her job, which was to be a source of income to the family, a thing that stirred the anger of his mother's father *Mendoza* who, in turn, started to hate the boy regarding him as the cause of losing his mother's job. Grandfather's harsh treatment to Jose and his cousin *Merla* reached the extent of cursing them as illegitimate children, though Merla really is, but this is her fate not her fault. This treatment has massive effect on the two children and played a passive role in breeding a sense of belonging and national identity on them.

From the very early days of his life, Jose experienced a sense of identity fracture as he found himself confused in the pronunciation of his name, which is pronounced as Jose in Filipino and Isa in Arabic. Moreover, he found himself wavering between more than one nationality, religion and race. With regard to religion, which is the focus of the current study, Jose was born as Muslim and given a Muslim name, and his mother was not serious in teaching him Christianity during their stay in the Philippines as she was influenced by his father's promise to take him back to the Kuwaiti Muslim society. Unfortunately, the news of his father's death came to them. Sometime later, Ghassan, the intimate friend of Rashid, came to take Jose to Kuwait in fulfillment of his dead father's will.

Surprisingly, Jose was encountered by the saddest kind of treatment, especially from his grandmother *Ghanima*, who drove him away of being considered as a family member in fear of the communal prestigious norms that condemns having a half-Filipino son. Jose's two aunts *Noriah* and *Awatif* supported their mother's viewpoint and the youngest one, *Hind*, was wavering between her mother's stance and her social duty in defending the rights of the *Bidoon* (*bidoon* literally means "without" in

Arabic. The term comes from “*bidoonjensiyya*”, which is Arabic for ‘without citizenship’ and is used to refer to the stateless in Kuwait (Belkhasher and Badurais 2016, p.6). His half-sister *Khawla* is the only one family member, who welcomes him, stands with him and tries to settle down Ghanima's anger and severe treatment towards him.

Although Jose was not deprived of his financial rights in Kuwait, he was denied of his social and familial intimacy. During his stay in Kuwait, he concluded that he will no longer bear to live there with the social refusal he faces, so he decided to return to the Philippines, where he joined his beloved cousin Merla and got married. Eventually, he succeeded in adapting himself to an acceptable kind of life (Al-Sanousi, 2015).

Discussion

The Name of Jose

My name is José. In the Philippines it's pronounced the English way, with an h sound at the start. In Arabic, rather like in Spanish, it begins with a kh sound. In Portuguese, though it's written the same way, it opens with a j, as in Joseph. All these versions are completely different from my name here in Kuwait, where I'm known as Isa. How did that come about? How did that come about? I didn't choose my name so I wouldn't know. All I know is that the whole world has agreed to disagree about it' (Alsanousi 2015:3)

José started talking about the different opinions regarding the pronunciation of his name and that the way it is pronounced in Kuwait is completely different from the other countries. The person's name reflects part of his identity, as it might symbolize the religious and/or social background of his parents. Parents always want their children to grow up in their footsteps (foreclosure identity). José was given the name *Isa* by his father who was a Muslim. This indicates that his father planned to bring him up as a Muslim. This could easily happen as many Muslims worldwide do so. However, Jose was wavering between Islam and Christianity since his father was a Muslim and his mother a Christian.

To choose a name then is to choose identity. This is because sometimes parents give their child the name of the person that they wish him to grow up like. Nevertheless, the child may grow up and choose his own way of life and sometimes might be opposite to his/her name. The differences in José's name in the different countries indicate the various facets of his identity. If the people do not agree on someone's name, this means that they perceive him in various ways according to the different names.

The name *Isa*, which his father gave him paves his way to be an Arab Muslim belonging to his father's prosperous family (*Altaroof*), while his mother called him after the famous Filipino warrior Rizal:

'My mother called me José after the Philippine national hero José Rizal, who was a doctor and writer in the nineteenth century. Without Rizal the people wouldn't have risen up to throw out the Spanish occupiers, but the uprising had to wait till after he was executed' (Alsanousi:3).

José rose up to find himself wavering between various names, each of them indicating a different identity. For his misfortune, the society preferred to call him by the name or nickname in the place where he wanted the other name.

Hybridism and Religious Identity

According to Belkhasher and Badurais (2016), there are three main hybrid characters in the novel: José, *Gassan* (Rashid's intimate friend) and *Merla* (José's cousin):

'I wasn't the only person in the Philippines born to a Kuwaiti father. Plenty of Filipina women have had children by Kuwaiti men, or other Gulf men, and even other Arabs. The women worked as maids in houses in the Arab world or messed around with tourists from Arab countries who came seeking pleasure at a price that only someone in dire need would accept. Some people engage in vice to satisfy their natural urges; others, due to poverty, engage in vice to fill their stomachs. In many cases the outcome is fatherless children' (Alsanousi:4).

Poverty is the reason for many Filipino women to migrate in search for work; others were forced by circumstances to earn money by engaging in vice actions and the product of that is to have fatherless mixed-race children. The financial condition of some families drove parents to exploit their young girls for bringing money regardless of consequences of this greedy action on the girls and their children:

The hybrid children will face much more difficulties in life, for they will grow up to find themselves waving between two races and cultures.

The hybrid characters in the novel faced various sorts of societal refusal that affected the formation of their social and religious identities. Being hybrid directly affected Jose's religious identity:

'If I had been born Muslim to a Kuwaiti father and a Kuwaiti mother, I would be living in a big house with a spacious room on the upper floor, with a forty-six-inch television, a walk-in closet and an en suite bathroom. I would wake up every morning to go to a job I had chosen myself, wearing a loose white thobe and a traditional headdress'... 'I could go to the mosque on Fridays and listen to the man standing in the pulpit and understand what he was saying, instead of just raising my hands, imitating the men around me and repeating 'Amen, amen' like a parrot' (Alsanousi:47).

Regrettably, José expressed his hope that he would have been so happy if he had been born to a Kuwaiti father and mother and grow up as a Muslim. This reveals the negative effect of being hybrid on his religious identity.

'If I had been born to a Filipino father and a Filipina mother, two of a kind, then I would be a Christian, comfortably off, living with my family in Manila, venturing every day into a mass of humanity, exposing my lungs and the pores of my skin to vehicle exhaust fumes. Or I might be a poor Muslim living at peace among my people in Mindanao in the south despite hunger and harassment by the government, or a rich kid living in a fancy house in wealthy Forbes Park in Makati City and going to a school that only the rich can afford, or a Buddhist of Chinese origin, working with my father in a shop in the Chinese quarter of Manila, burning incense in front of a statue of Buddha every morning because it's good for business' (Alsanousi:48).

The reason that stands behind his puzzled religious situation is not having a defined racial origin. He expressed that his parents had put him in a real mess, for he became unable to choose a single religion. The loss of a single defined origin caused him a similar loss in the religious identity.

Here José has experienced identity crisis as he was ranging between his mother's religion (Christianity) and his father's (Islam). It was not possible to believe in both of them, and it was neither easy - for him - to choose one, so his religious identity crisis emerged.

The Religious Beliefs of Ghanima

'Although she seemed to be sensible and to have a strong personality, she was also superstitious and firmly believed what she saw in her dreams. She thought that every dream was a message that she couldn't ignore, however trivial or incomprehensible it might seem. She spent much of her time looking for an explanation for the things she had dreamed and if she was unable to do so herself, she would seek out people who interpret dreams. Although the various interpretations she obtained from these people were different, sometimes even contradictory, she believed everything they said and expected the things she dreamed to take place in real life' (Alsanousi:15).

The old lady Ghanima was a Muslim and she had some superstitious beliefs that are prohibited in Islam. Believing in omens is one of the characteristics of the disbelievers according to the Noble Quran and the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, peace be upon him. It is narrated in the book *SunanAbiDawud*: 3910) that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'taking omens is polytheism (*shirk*)'.

The old lady deviated from the correct Islamic belief by believing in omens and superstitions. Her belief in these superstitious signs of good and bad luck made her mistreat others as a result of her interpretations to certain circumstances:

'My grandmother thought her arrival was a very bad omen, and it showed on her face whenever she saw my mother. My father had an explanation for that. 'You came to our house, Josephine, around the same time a bomb went off near the Emir's motorcade,' he said. 'Without divine intervention it would have killed him. So my mother saw your arrival as a sign of bad luck'(Alsanousi:16)

Josephine's relation with Ghanima was not good as the latter linked between the arrival of the former and the bombing of the Emir's motorcade. Thus, according to Ghanima, Josephine is religiously rejected as it was thought to be a sign of bad luck. Ghanima's superstitious prejudices served as a cultural barrier that held back the intercultural communication between her and her Filipina housemaid, Josephine. Thereafter, Ghanima kept regarding all of Josephine's actions as evil, particularly the birth of her son José.

'Apparently some names bring shame on others, and that's what happened with Rashid. As soon as his mother heard the girl's family name, she rejected the idea of Rashid marrying the girl. Sometime later the girl married another man' (Alsanousi, p. 22).

Ghanima's religious superstitious prejudice affected her son's affair. Taking omens regarding some names made the old lady reject her son's marriage with the girl that he loved. It also made her son think that, before one loves someone, he has to think carefully of such religious-based thoughts.

'After Walid's death, the old lady agreed for the first time to have contact with your father by telephone. "I didn't really want to speak to you, but I just wanted to let you know that you're in for a run of bad luck. Look what happened to your friend after that horrible thing was born. It's a curse, like its mother," ... "Then come home and you'll find I have a mother's heart and I've forgiven you the horrible thing you've done (Alsanousi, p. 34)

The old lady regarded her son's tragedy as a result of the curse that was caused by the birth of his son (*the thing*) and the coming of his mother too. The old lady then exploited religion to achieve her social-based wishes. Ghanima's ethnocentric view hindered her contact with her own son. She preferred to cast out her son for fear of the community. Although she seemed to be a religious woman, she judged her son's behavior from a social prejudicial viewpoint, not from a religious one.

Josephine and the Religious Identity Formation

'My mother somewhat neglected my religious education in the belief that my future was to be a Muslim in my father's country. My father had whispered the Muslim call to prayer in my right ear as soon as he held me in his arms in hospital after I was born, but that didn't stop my mother from taking me to the small local church as soon as we arrived in Manila to baptize me in holy water as a Catholic. Apparently, she wasn't yet fully convinced at that stage that I would go back' (Alsanousi, p. 47)

Although his mother was a Christian, she bred in him a sense that he had to grow up as a Muslim like his father. Therefore, she took part in his identity diffusion status. She wanted to fulfill his father's will to bring him up as a Muslim, because his father started to hand him his Islamic identity by whispering the Islamic call for prayer in the very moment after his birth. Both of his parents thus agreed to this foreclosure identity status. So his mother was not serious to take him to the church, though it was the place of her own worship. For Josephine, Islam did not mean the way of salvation, rather it was the cultural element of the identity that she drew for her son. That is, she looked at the matter from a prosperous point of view rather than religious:

'But because life was hard and my mother painted a picture of the paradise that awaited me, I ended up looking forward to the day when I would be rich and I could get whatever I wanted without having to work for it. If I was impressed by an advertisement for an expensive car, my mother would say, 'You can have one of those if you go back to Kuwait.' If I pointed to something in the shops that my mother couldn't afford, she would say, 'In Kuwait Rashid will buy you one like that' (Alsanousi:55).

The poor life they lived in the Philippines made Josephine prepare her son to be a Muslim for the sake of easy richness, so she held him back from embracing Christianity for fear of preventing him from the prosperous Kuwaiti life. José's preference for Islam was thus extrinsic (for non-religious reasons), not intrinsic (for pure religious reasons), as he had been encouraged to accept Islam for achieving a non-religious purpose, i.e. a happy life. This would have its effect on his religious commitment as it would be linked with being accepted as a member of the Kuwaiti society.

'My first visit to the Manila Cathedral was with Mama Aida, who insisted I be confirmed in the cathedral rather than just in the little parish church where I was baptised years earlier. Mama Aida asked Uncle Pedro and his wife to come and witness the rite and to join her as my sponsors. The two agreed, but my mother stuck to her position – 'He'll embrace Islam sooner or later' – and she didn't attend' (Alsanousi, pp. 85-86).

José was attracted to Christianity by his aunt Aida while his mother was insisting that his future was to be Muslim. He was still in the status of diffusion or confusion and he had not experienced either of them. His hybridity caused him to be caught between two different religions and nationalities. This shows the great influence of the environment on the religious identity formation. His mother saw that it would be of no value to baptize him as he would soon leave to his father's land where he would eventually be a Muslim. The place and the contact with the adherents of a certain religion thus plays a substantial role in shaping religious identity.

José was willingly waiting to go to Kuwait, as his mother kept promising him, predicting for him to be a Muslim, so he refused to go regularly with his aunt to the church. This shows the family effect on forming religious identity. It seemed that he sometimes wanted to go to church, only for the sake of his aunt, until his mother's dream could become true.

'If only my parents could have given me a single, clear identity, instead of making me grope my way alone through life in search of one. Then I would have just one name that would make me turn when someone called me. I would have just one native country. I would learn its national anthem. Its trees and streets would shape my memories, and, in the end, I could lie at rest in its soil. I would have one religion I could believe in instead of having to set myself up as the prophet of a religion that was mine alone' (Alsanousi, p. 47).

Due to his hybrid character, José was ranging between two religions, countries and names. A family's agreement on one religious identity paves the way for the child to grow up with a cleared defined identity. José started his life with a confused religious view due to the multi-religious context he lived in:

'It's my destiny to spend my life looking for a name, a religion and a country. I won't however deny my parents credit for helping me, unintentionally, to discover my creator, in my own way' (Alsanousi, p. 50).

José's diffusion status drove him to find his Creator and religion in a subjective way. His religiosity seemed unique as if he was the Prophet of himself. His religion seemed to be a combination of multiple faiths as well as his character. The three main identity components he kept looking for, i.e. *name, religion and country*, each had a role in identifying the other. The country is the context where religion is learnt, and the name is the indicator of the religious identity the person has.

Since his parents did not agree on one religion, did not refer to one nationality and even did not give him a single name, they were responsible of leaving him wandering his whole life searching for what his parents did not agree upon. This identity diffusion status would lead him to an identity crisis, when he later was faced with the Kuwaiti societal refusal.

The Reason behind José's Rejection

Josephine read to her son a letter sent by his father some years ago. The letter informed her about the completion of the divorce procedure and the reason behind that.

'My mother cried when I read out the words 'I completed the divorce procedures', despite the fact that she had read the letter years before and had married another man after Rashid. I cried too, but that was when I read about my grandmother saying, 'Mind you never bring that thing back here again.' 'Why does Grandmother hate me, Mama?' I asked. My mother was busy mopping up my tears with a handkerchief that was already soaked with her own. 'As Jesus said, even prophets are strangers in their own country,' she said' (Alsanousi:58-59).

Rashid was ordained by his mother to divorce his wife and to send her with her son to the Philippines. When José questioned about the reason of his grandmother's hatred, Josephine gave him a religious reasoning that even God's Prophets were faced by the same refusal. She did not want to discourage him from going back to his father's land.

The old lady was affected by the societal viewpoint to the degree that she refused to accept her son and grandson. Moreover, she disowned her grandson and even did not regard him as normal human being as she called him *a thing*. Ghanima's attitude was due to the societal point of view. The Kuwaiti society seemed to have more superior effect on people's behavior than religion:

'My mother said she was stunned when she read the letter for the first time, not because of the divorce, which was how she expected the relationship to end ('The decision wasn't your father's. A whole society stood behind him,' she said)' (Alsanousi, p. 60).

Although Rashid chose for himself to marry a Filipino woman and to have a half-Kuwaiti son (personal identity), the community did not accept this kind of marriage (communal identity), so his own preference contradicted the social one, hence the personal identity was so weak that it could not confront the communal identity in this high-context society (see: 3.5).

Jose and the Family of his Father

Under the pressure of his half-sister *Khawla* (his grandmother's favorite), José was accepted to visit Tarouf's household. In the beginning of his visit he sat with all the family members, Grandmother Ghanima, the three aunts Awatif, Nouryia and Hind, his sister Khawla and his father's friend Ghassan who brought him to Kuwait to fulfill his father's wish.

During this short visit, José learned more about his family and the nature of Kuwaiti society.

'Awatif, my eldest aunt, was very happy. She didn't see a problem, and she was enthusiastic about me staying in Grandmother's house because, as she put it, 'He's our son.' Although the others ignored her opinion, she had insisted on recognizing me. 'He's my brother's son. God wouldn't like it if we disowned him,' she had said. Ghassan made me happy when he told me what she said. I was delighted to hear that God was present at the meeting to hear what was going on. Even if I hadn't seen Him, I was reassured that He was present in Awatif's heart, because that meant He was nearby. I asked God to enter my heart as well' (Alsanousi, p. 195).

This was the first meeting that joined him with his family to know something about their opinions regarding the affair of recognizing him. The first member to speak was his aunt Awatif, who was pleased to see him and to welcome him as the son of her brother. She seemed to be religious as she looked to the matter from a religious point of view, regardless of what people said. Although her other sisters did not agree with her, she insisted that José should not be disowned because God Almighty would not like that.

According to Awatif, religion should be superior to the social norms and as their family was Muslim, they had to judge this issue according to the Islamic view. José having a half-Filipino origin should not prevent him from being recognized as a member of the family since his father is Rashid Altarouf. Awatif's religious identity is stronger than her social one, so she defeated the social norm with the religious stance.

When Ghassan translated this to José he felt happy and came close to Islam. José approached Islam whenever he learned that Islam contributed to settle his identity crisis, so he was delighted with Awatif's words when she mentioned that God would not accept his disowning. At that time, he asked God to insert faith in his heart as well as He had inserted it into Awatif's. José's religious identity was, thus, dependent on his social one.

'Nouriya was totally opposed to me being around and had got angry with Awatif and warned her of what might happen if her husband, Ahmad, found out about me. Awatif wavered a while when her husband was discussed but she later relented. 'My husband is a God-fearing man and would not take a negative position if he found out,' she said'(Alsanousi, p. 195-196).

Unlike his aunt Awatif, his aunt Nouriya saw things differently. She ignored her sister's religious point of view, and, instead, relied on and feared the social norm. Although Awatif was religious, Nouriya was social. Nouriya tried to dissuade Awatif from her opinion by reminding her of its negative communal consequences. Awatif again relied on the religious teaching and told her that her husband would not have a negative position as he was a God-fearing man. Awatif and her husband's personal identity then was contradicted by the communal one, though the Kuwaiti society is Muslim, the native social norm contradicted the religious view that Awatif confirmed:

'Although Awatif had shown some sympathy for me at first, she later deferred to her sister Nouriya, who said, 'Ahmad and Faisal are friends and if Ahmad found out about the Filipino, word might reach my husband. You'd only blame yourself if that were to happen.' Awatif was weak. One day she gave me, through Khawla, a copy of the Qur'an in English and a prayer mat. After that she disappeared under orders from Nouriya, but I gathered from Khawla that she was always asking whether I prayed. I kept away from all of them' (Alsanousi, p. 215).

Although Awatif seemed to be God-fearing and hence stood with her nephew, her religious personal identity was not strong enough to confront the communal one, so she caved to the pressure of her sister who warned her against the aftermath of her view. Despite Awatif's positive stance and her gifts that intended to help José strengthen his religious identity, all this did not matter in solving his crisis since a whole society was standing against him. The personal identity was weak in case of the high-context society where the communal identity is dominant.

Religion and Society

'The Buddha says in his teachings that people are equal and that no one is better than anyone else, other than in their knowledge and their ability to control their desires,' I said. 'We're not Buddhists,' she said, shaking her head. I took the chain with the cross from the drawer near my bed. 'And in the Bible, St Paul the Apostle says there's no longer any difference between Jews and non-Jews, between slaves and those who are free, between men and women. They are all one in Jesus Christ,' I told her. She cast a suspicious look at me. She was about to answer but I didn't give her time. 'I know, I know, you're not Christians.' I went to my laptop and turned the screen for her to see a website page that I had left open since the night before. 'The Prophet Muhammad, in his farewell sermon, said, "All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab is not superior to a non-Arab nor is a non-Arab superior to an Arab; also a white person is not superior to a black person nor a black person to a white person, other than in piety and good deeds."' I folded the screen down on to the

keyboard. 'I'm not that evil,' I added. 'Enough!' said Khawla, and her raised voice shut me up. 'I'm sorry,' she added, and she did look remorseful. 'But this has nothing to do with religion' (Alsanousi, p. 246-247).

Although José was ranging between Islam, Christianity and Buddhism, he showed her that all of the three religions agreed that what they have done to him was wrong. These incidents showed the discrepancy in the Kuwaiti society's identity, for it takes Islam as the source on which the social life should be based. Khawla shook her head when he cited to her some of Buddha's words. Since they were neither Buddhists nor Christians, but Muslims, why did they not submit to the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad, who ordered them that there should not be any difference between Muslims according to their race?

Religion and social norms are two of the elements, by which identity is shaped. Religion is thought to be the base of societal behavior, so if religion was applied as it was originally taught, it would certainly have provided a solution to such identity conflict. José's identity crisis rose from the communal deviation from the religious teachings of their own religion, since his sister Khawla tried to convince him that the matter had nothing to do with religion. Her justification seemed to him illogic as the distinction between people and the social classification is found everywhere, even in his mother's land, but it did not reach the degree of disowning and despising each other.

José's religious identity was thus influenced by the confrontation of the communal behavior. In the time he would have achieved his religious commitment and learned more about his father's religion, which was handed to him since childhood (*foreclosed identity*), he had still waded in the *moratorium status*, where he could not commit to one defined identity as he lost the *religious support*, which should be gained from family, friends and religious leaders. The loss of the family support negatively affected José as he thought that God himself might hate him because he observed that the God-fearing people like grandmother and Awatif did not want to welcome him. This confirmed his thought that people's behaviors are the symbols that prove the validity of religion.

The Effect of Class Identity

Class identity tends to give some families high titles and prestigious position over the common and inferior ones. The communal norms thus contradicted the religious texts such as the *Hadeeth* (narration of the Prophet's sayings), which was cited by José that supported his idea that Muslims should be equal regardless of their social ranks.

The society did not care much about the national or religious identity when they fell in discrepancy with the class dimension. The class identity seemed more deeply rooted in Kuwaiti society than religious identity.

Khawla said, 'In his unfinished novel, my father said we're Kuwaitis only in times of need. We become Kuwaitis when there's a crisis, but we soon go back to that horrible putting people in categories as soon as things calm down' (Alsanousi, p. 248).

Rashid was criticizing his own community for having what he termed *horrible categorization*. In his unfinished novel, Rashid pointed out that the Kuwaiti was Kuwaiti only against non-Kuwaiti people, but when it comes to dealing with a Kuwaiti citizen, they go back to their sub-categories. Like the national identity, the religious identity seemed to have the same sense. That is, Kuwaitis are Muslims when dealing with non-Muslims from other nationalities, but when it comes to the treatment within the Kuwaiti community, the national and religious identities would no longer make sense, since class identity would arise.

Because of the social class, the family suffered from José's presence more than his suffering by their refusal to him. Khawla reasoned by explaining that the family members were not free to get out of the social net while José was. José could have his way to escape the community seize; he could flee away and shape his identity in the way that he wished. However, the rest of the family members could not do so.

Regarding religious identity, José and his family fell into identity crisis due to the effect of the social class categorization. If they had welcomed José and defended his rights, they would have sacrificed their family name, and if they had rejected him, they would have sacrificed their religious identity and caused him identity diffusion.

The communal position and duties the society put for the honorable families restrained the personal freedom of the individuals, so the personal identities of the family members were directed by the communal ones to the degree that they could not get out of the track the community has drawn for them. Thus, José's religious identity diffused due to the diffusion of his familial identity. His family refused to accept him for fear of the communal norm. The Kuwaiti society drove José to change his mind and turn back as he failed to achieve his dream; to become a Kuwaiti Muslim boy.

Identity Achievement

I left Kuwait in August 2008, about three years ago, abandoning everything except the bottle with soil from my father's grave, the small Kuwaiti flag that had been attached to the back of my bicycle, a copy of the Qur'an in English, a prayer rug (I don't know whether I'll use it regularly), and the empty, cracked shell of my dead tortoise, Inang Choleng (Alsanousi, p. 369).

Although José failed to fulfill his dream and to form the foreclosed identity that his parents prepared him for, he committed to his own identity. He was caught between multiple religions, countries and names. He finally settled himself to have his own identity that was a composite of portions taken from all these multiplicities. He did not commit to one of them and did not cover himself with any of the religious, social or national umbrellas. He made up his mind to choose from religions what he considered appealing. José committed to theological and sociological pluralism. His religious theological perspective appeared through his concept that he did not trust all that religion provided, and all the religions seemed the same to him.

His conversation with his friend Ibrahim Salam indicated his theological pluralism:

One night I asked him to tell me about the Prophet Muhammad in return for me telling him about Jesus Christ, rather like those bedtime conversations that Cheng and I used to have about Jesus and the Buddha. 'I'll tell you about the Prophet Muhammad, but you don't need to tell me about Jesus,' he replied. When I asked why not, he answered confidently, 'I'm sure I know more about Christ than you do' (Alsanousi, p. 268)

Unlike his friend Salam, who seemed to be confident and strict to the knowledge sources of his own religion, José was open-minded to acquire knowledge from every source. This showed his theological pluralism as he thought that the truth was not enclosed in a single religion and no religion was perfect. Therefore, he did not mind hearing from Salam who was a Muslim, Cheng who was a Buddhist and Aida who was a Christian. Finally, he came up with his own religion which was something different from all the above.

Religions are bigger than their adherents. That's what I've concluded. Devotion to tangible things no longer matters as far as I'm concerned. I don't want to be like my mother, who can only pray to a cross, as if God lived in it. [...] So, everyone who wants to find faith goes looking for miracles that don't exist. They make them up and believe in them, but their belief only shows how much doubt they still have (Alsanousi, p. 271-272).

Here he criticized the miracle stories religious adherents used to tell to back up their faiths. He indicated that he wanted to form his belief in his own way unlike all the different religious adherents that he came across.

To prove that his religious identity was something different he did not show hate or love for any one for pure religious cause(s). He also did not objectively study any religion in depth to know which one of them was true and deserved to be followed. He used to examine religions subjectively, that is, according to actions of the religion's adherents.

He did not ignore all religions nor did he think that he had no need for religion, but he achieved a religious concept identity that was not fixed to one single defined religion, rather he let himself free to choose from religions what he saw appealing.

It's my destiny to spend my life looking for a name, a religion and a country. I won't however deny my parents credit for helping me, unintentionally, to discover my creator, in my own way (Alsanousi, p. 50).

He clarified that he profited from his parents to discover his creator but in his own way (achieved identity), though his parents wished and prepared him to be a Muslim (foreclosed identity).

During his life journey he heard about religions and met adherents of different but opposing religions. He was affected by some of them in some parts of his life, but he left all of them aside and achieved his religious identity in his own way:

I was sitting in front of Ibrahim. He was silent, as was I. In my right ear I heard the call to prayer, in my left ear the ringing of church bells. The smell of incense from the Buddhist temples hit my nostrils. I ignored the sounds and the smell. I focused on my steady heartbeat and I knew that God was there (Alsanousi, p. 272).

He had come up to commit a pluralistic perspective that did not stick to one religion as a means of salvation. He settled himself to choose his faith by a way that concerned him alone.

Since his calamity was due to the social norms that were not put according to the religious teachings of the religion adopted by the certain society, he was thus led to think that it is better for him to choose from religions what he wished as the others

did. That is, he was caused by the adherents of Islam who chose not to follow the Islamic teachings concerning the acceptance of their son regardless to his racial origin, he was caused to select from religions what he admired.

It was mentioned above that when he was debating with his half-sister Khawla about the reason of rejecting him, he cited to her texts from Buddhism, Christianity and her religion Islam ordering people to be equal regardless of race. His sister told him that the matter had nothing to do with religion. This indicated that those who followed Islam gave themselves the right to select from the Islamic rules what achieved their interests and rejected what did not. It seemed to him that Muslims were not obliged to follow every Islamic instruction, so the Kuwaitis preferred not to establish their societal relations on the Islamic rules which condemn racial discrimination and order all Muslims not to believe that there is one Muslim better than the other for matters of race, richness or nationality, except piety (*taqwa*).

Conclusions

The Results of the first Hypothesis

The results show that the religious identity is illustrated by choosing names for the protagonist. The name that the character prefers for himself reflects the inner religious faith he wants for himself, while the name ascribed to him by the others show how they perceive him.

The results show that the religious identity is mostly enacted to achieve non-religious goals. The local society activates his religious identity only when dealing with non-Kuwaiti people, but when it comes to dealing within the borders of Kuwait, they refer to their non-religious categorizations. The results also reveal that some characters religiosity appears in their belief in some superstitious beliefs like taking omens and basing their activities on their own interpretations of some religious texts. Both the protagonist and the pure Kuwaitis exploit religion to achieve social-based wishes, so the religious identity is dependent on the non-religious goals.

The protagonist does not base any of his actions on pure religious reasons. Moreover, he does not objectively study any religion in depth to know which one of them is true and deserves to be followed (4.2.5.3).

The Results of the Second Hypothesis

The results support the second argument that the main character goes through most of the kinds of identity status. They reveal that both of his parents agree to this *foreclosure* identity status. That is, they prepare him to be Muslim. In the meantime, when he was to achieve his religious commitment and learn more about his father's religion, which was handed to him since childhood (*foreclosed identity*), he still waded in the *moratorium status*.

His religious identity crisis depends on *motivation* and *legitimation*. That is, his crisis is due to internal changes and external situational factors.

The results of the Third Hypothesis

The results show that there are several reasons affecting the construction of the religious identity. Poverty is the reason for many Filipino women to migrate in search for work.

The belief in superstitious signs of good and bad luck causes some characters to mistreat others as a result of the interpretations in certain circumstances.

The conflicting Islamic sects thus play a passive role in inviting José to Islam, as well as exploiting religion to achieve non-religious purposes. Some types of the sociological pluralism José experiences with his father's relatives seem to affect his religious concept and the superior power of the social norms over religion.

The religious and social prejudices serve as a cultural barrier that hold back the intercultural communication between the members of the same family. The religious identity depends on the socio-class identity, as José's acceptance of Islam is linked with his acceptance by his father's family.

Religious Pluralism

The results show that José and the local Kuwaitis have a somewhat pluralistic concept. He believes that all religions may be means of salvation or at least some truth may be found in the other religions, so he made up his mind to choose from religions what he considered appealing. José committed to *theological* and *sociological* pluralism. The Kuwaitis have some sort of the modern form of *Sociological Pluralism* as they have come up with their own interpretations of the religious beliefs. They exploit religion to achieve their non-religious goal. They tried to use religion to get rid of José.

Hybridism and Religious Identity

The results show that the hybrid characters in the novel face much more difficulties in life, for they grow up to find themselves waving between two races and cultures. José is waving between Islam and Christianity since his father was a Muslim and his mother a Christian. His religious identity is affected by being hybrid. Thus, his multi-religious and mixed-racial context is the direct reason behind his religious identity diffusion. Due to his hybrid character, José was ranging between two religions, countries, and names. He dreams to have a full Kuwaiti identity equal to all the other Kuwaitis, but his half-Filipino origin prevents him from that

Identity Crisis

The results show that José experiences an identity crisis as he is ranging between his mother's religion (Christianity) and his father's (Islam). It is neither possible to believe in both, and nor is it easy - for him - to choose one, so his religious identity crisis emerges. This identity confusion leads him to an identity crisis, when he later is faced with the Kuwaiti societal refusal. In the early days of his life before he comes to Kuwait, José is attracted to Christianity by his aunt Aida, while his mother is insisting that his future is to be Muslim. He is still in the status of diffusion or confusion and he had not experienced either of them.

José's religious identity crisis is due to some reasons. First, the lack of motivation, that is, he is not serious in searching for the true religion. Second, the great conflict between the Islamic groups leads him astray and puts him in massive diffusion. Third, the social norms that prevent his family from recognizing him. Forth, the communal deviation from the religious teachings of their own religion.

Regarding religious identity, José and his family fall into an identity crisis due to the effect of the social class categorization. If they welcome José and defend his rights, they will sacrifice their family name, and if they reject him, they will sacrifice their religious identity and cause him identity diffusion.

His identity conflict reaches its peak when it comes to the point that his family would no longer bear his presence in Kuwait. At that time, all of the Kuwaiti doors are closed in front of him, except only one door that leads him to his mother's land.

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