

Searching for Identity as a Newcomer Refugee

Is my identity a creation of mine? or is it pre-determined by my upbringing?

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Abstract

How do I perceive myself in Canada as a newcomer refugee? Identity is constructed by ethnicity, gender, class, nationality (etc.), and its formation is a continuous process shaped by the ever-changing life experience (Gosh & Wang, 2003). I attempted to document my identity formation through self-reflexive analysis. I observed four culture shock stages that influenced my identity in Canada. My journey from Syria to Canada has made me create my current identity and motivated me to question what it means to be Syrian- Canadian.

Approach

- I attempted to self-explore my identity formation through self-reflexive analysis.
- I projected the four culture shock stages on my transnational identity formation influenced by Canadian and Syrian culture.
- The four culture shock stages are (Honeymoon phase, frustration period, adjustment period, and acceptance period) (Gosh & Wang, 2003).

References

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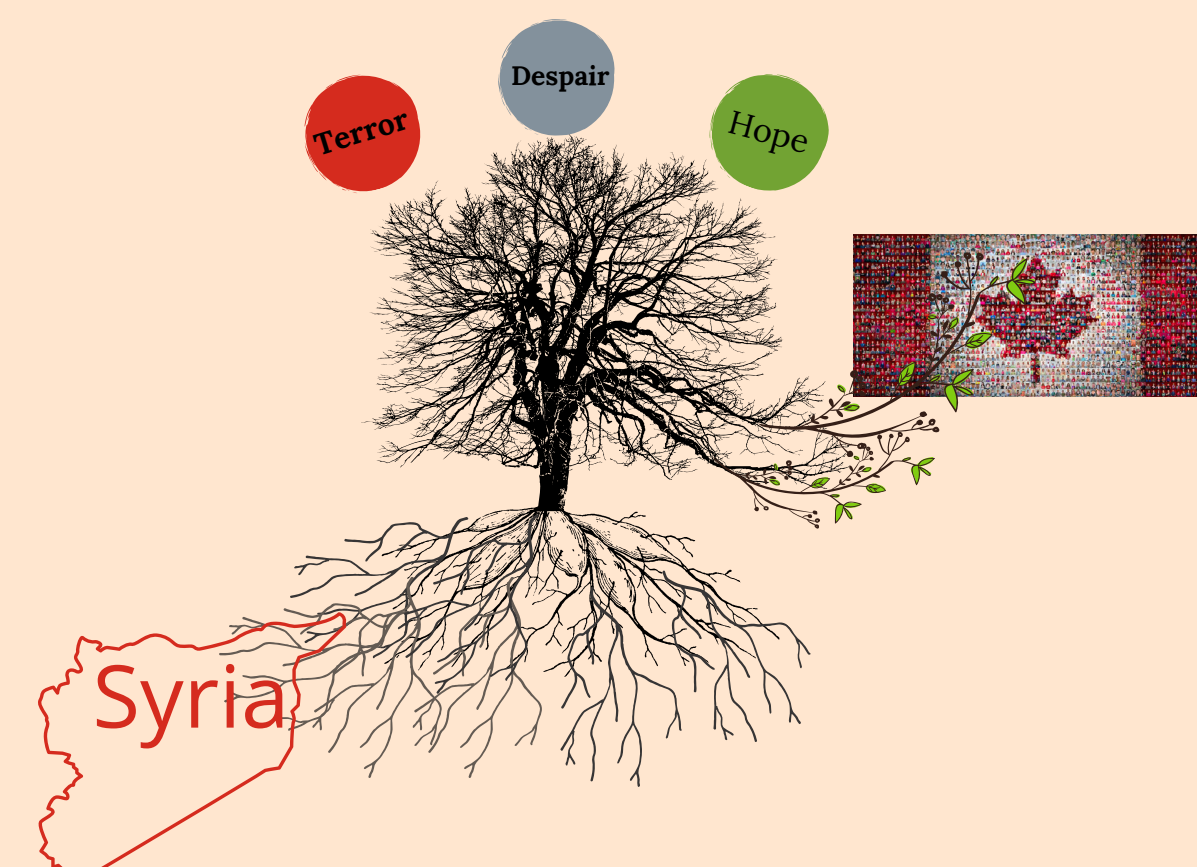
Results

• Pre-migration social Identity

I was born in Damascus "the city of Jasmin", which is considered the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. Growing up in Syria as an Anglophile made me self-assimilate myself in a culture that I don't even live within. This self-assimilation process made me think of myself and my community through a hegemonic western lens rather than my own local lens. Therefore, I rejected and felt somehow detached from my Syrian identity as I became more and more attached to the idea of living as a 'Western' elsewhere. I was struggling with associating my Syrian identity with any ideas other than war, pain, and fear.

• Journey to Canada

"Migrants come from three different diasporas- hope, despair and terror"
Appadurai (1990, 7)



• Honeymoon Phase in Canada

- I was fascinated by the cultural diversity in Toronto, and was able to embrace my Syrian identity in Canada as I felt comfortable being part of the multicultural mosaic.
- Feeling that I can pursue my "Canadian dream" through hard work.

• Frustration Period

- Dealing with Unprocessed emotional trauma from past experiences due to war.
- Worrying about the safety of my family members and friends back in Syria.
- Feeling frustrated from bureaucratic processes.

• Adjustment period

- Connecting more with my Syrian Identity through engaging in the Syrian community in Canada.
- Having splitting identities "Syrian-Canadian". Being Syrian when interacting with my Syrian family and friends while acting 'Canadian' when I am apart from the.
- Managing to create a balance between my two identities through painting and making art.

Results

Adjusting to my Syrian-Canadian Identity through Creating Art

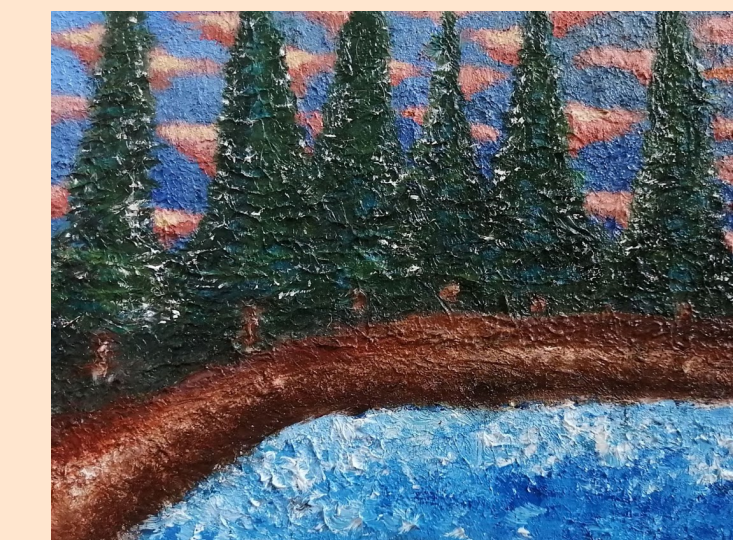
A PORTRAIT OF SYRIA- سوريا



Oil on canvas by Joudy Kusaibati created in May 2020

After residing in Canada for 6 months, I felt the urge and need to express my inner turmoil and sense of belonging in a painting of my creation.

SERENITY



Oil on canvas by Joudy Kusaibati created in August 2020.

The breath-taking natural sceneries in Canada, have impacted the way I perceive my surroundings in a positive way. Consequently, I felt the need to reflect this peaceful beauty in a painting.

Conclusion

• Acceptance (Recovery) Period

I feel now that I am moving from having a hyphenated Identity to having an integrating identity that fits within the cultural mosaic.
"Identity formation is a continuous process."
- Ghosh & Wang (2003)