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Martina Sigmundová

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Sanora Babb and the Dust Bowl
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Martina

Sigmundová

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ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE (projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: **Martina Sigmundová**
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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná bakalářská práce na pomezí literárních a kulturních studií se bude věnovat méně známému obrazu tzv. prachových bouří v díle americké autorky Sanory Babb(ové). Studentka nejprve v úvodu práce s použitím relevantní sekundární literatury nastíní historický kontext: a vysvětlí hlavní pojmy (např. Great Depression, Dust Bowl, migrant workers, apod.). Poté představí zvolenou autorku a zařadí ji do širšího kontextu. Pojedná také stručně o tzv. literatuře (sociálního) protestu a kriticky zreflektuje vnímání Babb(ové) jako levicové, případně regionální, spisovatelky.

Jádrem práce bude analýza zvoleného díla. Studentka může nastínit i jeho zajímavý osud (velký odstup mezi dobou vzniku a vydáním, souvislosti s tvorbou Johna Steinbecka. V analýzách se studentka soustředí na zobrazení středozápadu a Kalifornie, motivy odcizení, vyvlastnění, formování protestů, včetně použitých literárních postupů a prostředků, ap. Své vývody bude studentka opírat o sekundární zdroje a analýzy vhodně ilustrovat ukázkami z díla.

Závěrem své analýzy přehledně shrne a zhodnotí, jak je krize v uvedeném díle zobrazena.

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Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **doc. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.**
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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doc. Mgr. Jiří Kubeš, Ph.D.
děkan

Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

Prohlašuji:

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ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vyobrazením prašných bouří v díle americké autorky Sanory Babb. Prvotně tato práce vyobrazuje kulturní pozadí Spojených Států Amerických v třicátých letech 20. století, a uvádí do tohoto kontextu Sanoru Babb. Následující kapitoly se zabývají analýzou samotného díla *Whose Names Are Unknown*, kde se tato práce zaměřuje na vymezení regionálních motivů Středozápadu a Kalifornie, motivů vyvlastnění a odcizení a formování protestů.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Dust Bowl, farmáři, migrující pracovníci, izolace, regiony

TITLE

Sanora Babb and the Dust Bowl

ANNOTATION

This Bachelor thesis is concerned with depicting the topic of dust storms in the work of the American writer Sanora Babb. The beginning of this thesis outlines the cultural background of the United States of America in the 1930s, and puts Sanora Babb into the context. The following chapters analyze the novel *Whose Names Are Unknown* which analyzes the regionalist motives of Midwest and California, particularly the motives of estrangement and displacement and the forming of protests.

KEYWORDS

Dust Bowl, farmers, migrant workers, isolation, regions

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Introduction

The dust Bowl was a natural disaster that influenced a great number of lives in the 1930s era in the USA. During that decade, the Dust Bowl was combined with the impact of the Great Depression, which produced mass migration predominately of farmers. Because the 1930s were so greatly affected by an economic recession and natural disasters, literature naturally had to reflect these grave events. One of these authors who depicted the decade was Sanora Babb who focuses on the farmers' lives during this time, mainly in the novel *Whose Names Are Unknown*.

The first chapter of this thesis focuses on the historical aspects of the age and introduces Sanora Babb and her writing. The 1930s were impacted by the Great Depression as it caused unemployment and influenced the United States' economy. Furthermore, during that age, inadequate farming techniques contributed to the devastating dust storms. Moreover, both of these calamities contributed to mass migration. This migration, Dust Bowl, and the Great depression simultaneously contributed to the passing of new legislations which aimed to lessen the consequences of the disasters and at helping the general public and the migrants in migrant camps.

In addition, numerous authors depicted the age and its difficulties, as did Sanora Babb. In her writing, Babb highlights the people's lives and draws from her own experience and political viewpoints. Thus, she focuses on depicting the farmers' experience and workers hit by the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression.

The second chapter analyzes the regionalist and realistic aspects of Babb's work in the Midwest and California. In her novel, she covers the farmers' lives and points out the differences and similarities in both regions. She draws attention to the differences between Midwest and California communities as the farmers move from one region to the other. Furthermore, she represents the conflicts between the farmers and government and the issue of education. In addition, with the regional aspect of her novel, she depicts the various characteristics of climate in the Midwest and California. Douglas Wixson explains that Babb depicts the landscape, regions, and the people in her work and how they helped define their environment and how it in change defined them.¹ Describing the various aspects of the Midwest and California, Babb draws from her own experience in the regions, which causes

¹Douglas Wixson, "Sanora Babb and Ecological Disaster on the High Plains, 1900-1940," in *Regionalists on the Left: Radical Voices from the American West*, ed. Micheal C. Stenier (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 131.

her novel to feel remarkably realistic. Therefore, Babb depicts various aspects of the regions in *Whose Names Are unknown*.

The third chapter analyzes the motives of estrangement and displacement in the novel. Babb depicts the farmers' isolation on their farms during the disastrous dust storms; moreover, she characterizes the isolation of the farmers from the rest of the world. Additionally, she portrays the estrangement from the close communities as the characters migrate to California. She also illustrates the estrangement and displacement of the characters caused by their enforced change of lifestyle from settled farm owners to rootless migrant workers. Moreover, Abigail G. H. Manzella explains: "The environmental and economic disaster resulted in their loss of land ownership and their displacement to the West. As internally displaced persons, however, they were now subject to a precarious life as migrant labor."² Babb enhances the novel's atmosphere with various literary devices such as highlighting, foreshadowing, and the stream of consciousness. Furthermore, she supports the mood of isolation by inserting a journal. Thus, Babb depicts the motives of estrangement and displacement while focusing on the isolation of the characters.

The last chapter of the thesis analyzes the depiction of the forming of protests and their consequences in *Whose Names Are Unknown*. In depicting protests, Babb predominately focuses on the feeling of the characters: she concentrates on the depiction of the characters' inner perception of the protests and the gradual change in their awareness of the need for changes in the society. Additionally, she covers the issue of organizing the workers together for the strikes. Furthermore, Douglas Wixson adds: "The real revolution, she said must occur in the human hearth, not on the streets."³ This change of mind is what Babb illustrates in her novel as her characters undergo a development in their attitudes towards their own participation in the protest. Moreover, Babb supports the depiction of the characters' viewpoints and their gradual change by inserting letters into the novel. Therefore, Babb illustrates the forming of protests and their consequences with the aid of the change in the characters.

²Abigail G. H. Manzella, "The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown*," In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 70.

³ Douglas Wixson, "Sanora Babb and Ecological Disaster on the High Plains, 1900-1940," in *Regionalists on the Left: Radical Voices from the American West*, ed. Micheal C. Stenier (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 131.

1. Introduction to 1930s America and Sanora Babb

The period of the 1930s in the United States was a catastrophic period for millions of people. The decade saw the Great Depression and a period of severe dust storms, both of which led to mass migration. As a result, the country underwent profound political changes. The decade filled with suffering and hardship was depicted by many authors, one of which is Sanora Babb. She depicted the era in her journalistic writing and in her novel *Whose Names Are Unknown*, which was influenced by her own life experience.

The Great Depression was a period of economic downfall which lasted roughly from 1929 to 1939. It affected countries worldwide but its impact on individual countries varied. The Great Depression was predominantly influenced by the stock market crash in 1929. Britannica article *Great Depression* says: “While the Great Crash of the stock market and the Great Depression are two quite separate events, the decline in stock prices was one factor contributing to declines in production and employment in the United States.”⁴ As similarly depicted by Hamilton Cravens.⁵ The crash contributed to the rise in unemployment and the standard of living also dropped. The Great Depression brought an economic crisis that gave rise to new policies, and it was also weighted by new upcoming war. William H. and Nancy K. Young in *The Great Depression in America: A Cultural Encyclopedia* says that during the 1937-1938 recession, a threat of world war arises, and the US isolated itself until the destruction of Pearl Harbor in 1941.⁶ This isolation therefore led the US to turn towards a political engagement and a rise in cultural expressions.

The 1930s in the United States were not only influenced by The Great Depression but also by immerse drought in the Great Plains, which lead to devastating dust storms. The droughts and dust storms were predominately caused by mismanagement and over-cultivation of the soil in The Great Plains, mainly in Oklahoma, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, and Kansas. Donald Woster in *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* adds that the catastrophe of the Dust Bowl was inescapable consequence that set itself towards exploiting the land for all of its resources.⁷ The failure to adequately manage the soil was aggravated by new dry farming techniques applied in the 1920s, which further damaged the soil by its cultivation into the farming fields. Thus, the soil damaged by the inadequate farming

⁴ “Great Depression”, economics and economic system, Britannica, last modified September 10, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Depression/additional-info#history>.

⁵ Hamilton Cravens, *Great Depression: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2009).

⁶ William H. Young and Nancy K. Young, *The Great Depression in America: A Cultural Encyclopedia*. 2nd vol. (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 29.

⁷ Donald Woster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 4-5.

techniques and the droughts caused by the lack of rainfall led to the catastrophe. Donald Woster depicts the storms as:

On 9 May, brown earth from Montana and Wyoming swirled up from the ground, was captured by extremely high-level winds, and was blown eastward towards the Dakotas. More dirt was sucked into the airstream until 350 million tons were riding toward urban America. By late afternoon the storm had reached Dubuque and Madison, and by evening 12 million pounds of dust were falling like snow over Chicago – 4 pounds for each person in the city. Midday at Buffalo on 10 May was darkened by dust, and the advancing gloom stretched south from there over several states, moving as fast as 100 miles an hour.⁸

This excerpt provides a glimpse into the magnitude of the storms. The storm caused numerous casualties and contributed to deterioration of the living conditions, and to sicknesses such as dust pneumonia. Harry C. McDean in *Dust Bowl Histography* says that historians vary in their viewpoints whether the natural catastrophe was purely caused by human hand or whether it was caused by a set of conditions – human and natural.⁹ Therefore, the dust storms in the 1930s influenced numerous lives.

The Great Depression and the dust storms both contributed to vast migration. As the dust storms were damaging farmland and the farmers were being influenced by the Great depression, an abundant number of farmers started to relocate. James N. Gregory in *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* explains: “Between 1910 and 1930 the number of farmers and agricultural workers in the Southwest declined by 341,000. That was followed by the loss of at least 800,000 more in the next two decades.”¹⁰ As the farmers migrated looking for employment they became the migrant workers who took on any job available. As this mass migration primarily to California proceeded, it caused various social issues. One of these issues was the label “Okie.” *The Dust Bowl* Britannica article says that this label was used regardless of where the farmers originated and whether they are from Oklahoma or not.¹¹ Indeed, Robin A. Fanslow from the collection *Voices from the Dust Bowl* specifies that roughly only 20 percent of the farmers were from Oklahoma.¹² The label “Okie” reflected the discriminatory tension between the migrant workers and the rest of the population. Another issue that raised from the migration

⁸ Donald Woster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 13.

⁹ Harry C McDean, *Dust Bowl Histography*, (University of Nebraska, 1986) 119.

¹⁰ James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 7.

¹¹ “Dust Bowl,” Historical places, Britannica, Last modified Apr 02, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Dust-Bowl>.

¹² “The Migrant Experience,” *Voices of the Dust Bowl*, Library of Congress, Last modified April 6, 1998, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/todd-and-sonkin-migrant-workers-from-1940-to-1941/articles-and-essays/the-migrant-experience/>.

was the government camps set up for the migrants to reside in while they worked either in the towns or plantations. Although these camps provided a safe space for the migrant workers, they also provided issues, such as higher rent than their wages. The farmers, due to the new laws had to live in proper accommodations but at the same time they could face a disadvantage.

The mass migration, The Great Depression, and the dust storms together gave rise to new policies. One of them was the New Deal, which was carried out between 1933 and 1939 to relieve the agriculture, labor, housing, and financial industry. The Britannica *New Deal* article explains that: “The New Deal generally embraced the concept of a government-regulated economy aimed at achieving a balance between conflicting economic interests.”¹³ The New Deal aimed at solving unemployment and the financial hierarchy to prevent another stock market crash. Apart from that, Richard H Pells says that the 1930s era gave rise to Marxist ideas, yet the decade’s impact was mainly conservative.¹⁴ The new policies were passed to help the population and to mitigate the impact of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression. Although the policies were issued for support, they could also be exploited. Abigail G. H. Manzella, in *The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl*, specifies that the corporate owners exploited their land and housing power by shifting their power over the migrant workers.¹⁵ Thus, the new policies brought relief to the workers but at the same time could be exploited.

The age of the 1930s with its catastrophe of the Dust Bowl and the economic crisis gave rise to numerous authors depicting the age - one of them being Sanora Babb. Babb was born in Red Rock in the Oklahoma territory and was raised in the Otoe culture; later, she worked in the Farm Security Administration in California. It is understandable that her upbringing and personal experiences heavily influenced her work. Pamela J. Annas explains that: “Babb’s love and intimate knowledge of the land and the people of the plains make for compelling reading, and she shows us how the dignity and independence of the people of the plains segue into the beginnings of a migrant movement.”¹⁶ Babb’s first-hand experience aided her in depicting the lives of people during the 1930s. For instance, in her novel *An Owl on Every*

¹³ “New Deal,” United States History, Britannica, last modified January 11, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/New-Deal>.

¹⁴ “Great Depression”, economics and economic system, Britannica, last modified September 10, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Depression/additional-info#history>.

¹⁵ Abigail G. H. Manzella, “The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb’s Whose Names Are Unknown,” In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 97.

¹⁶ Pamela J. Annas, “Unknown No More,” review of Whose Names Are Unknown, by Sanora Babb, *Women’s Review of Books* 21, no. 10/11, July, 2004.

Post, she writes about her life with her grandfather in Colorado; her first published book, *The Lost Traveler* is based on her relationship with her father and *Whose Names Are Unknown* depict the lives of the farmers and migrant workers from Oklahoma to California, and more. She also worked as a journalist in California and the Imperial Valleys together with Thomas Collin. Linda D. Wilson adds that Collin gave Babb's notes from the FSA camps to John Steinbeck, who used the notes for the *Grapes of Wrath*.¹⁷ As a consequence, the *Grapes of Wrath* gained quick popularity and Babb's novel *Whose Names Are Unknown* was silenced. Although her work was restrained, she managed to continue and publish the above mentioned literature.

Furthermore, due to her upbringing and life in Midwest and California, her work was influenced by leftist ideas and regionalism. Linda D. Wilson explains that growing up in the Otoe community and their communal living standards influenced her towards socialism.¹⁸ Moreover, her grandfather has also participated in socialist and populist ideas and the local Socialist Party. Furthermore, Babb herself was a member of the Communist Party. Douglas Wixson in *Regionalist on the Left: Radical Voices from the American West* adds:

Babb's engagement with CPUSA had been a matter of the heart more than of reason, of contingency rather than of principle. Her relation to the party had always been on her own terms, her purpose was not "art as a weapon" for any political aim, but rather writing that gave voice to the marginalized, those who do not write. When that no longer seemed possible within the party, she severed her connection.¹⁹

It can be seen that Babb used the ideas of political parties predominately to give attention to those that were hit by the crisis. Moreover, she blends her political ideas with regionalist aspects in her work, focusing on her writing on different regionalist aspects. For instance, as in *Whose Names Are Unknown*, which Scott Saul in *Protest Lit 101* represents as "Fatalistically vigilant Dust Bowl novel."²⁰ Which correlates with viewpoint of Margaret Flanagan.²¹ Thus, as Babb tries to bring attention to the people hit by Dust Bowl and Great Depression in her Work, she uses her ideas and regionalism to her advantage.

¹⁷ "Babb, Sanora Louise (1907-2005)," Publications, Oklahoma Historical Society, last visited March 31, 2021, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=BA041>.

¹⁸ "Babb, Sanora Louise (1907-2005)," Publications, Oklahoma Historical Society, last visited March 31, 2021, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=BA041>.

¹⁹ Douglas Wixson, "Sanora Babb and Ecological Disaster on the High Plains, 1900-1940," in *Regionalists on the Left: Radical Voices from the American West*, ed. Micheal C. Stenier (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 123.

²⁰ Scott Saul, "Protest Lit 101," *American Literary History* 21, no. 2 (2009): 414.

²¹ Margaret Flanagan, "Whose Names Are Unknown (Book)." *Booklist* 100, no. 16 (April 15, 2004): 1422.

In conclusion, the 1930s was an era hit by numerous misfortunes, particularly The Great Depression that impacted the economy of the USA adversely and caused unemployment. Additionally, the Midwest droughts combined with human exploitation of the soil generated dust storms that destroyed many farms. These disasters combined and led to a mass migration of farmers who became migrant workers and predominantly migrated to California. As the migration gained strength, the workers encountered enmity in the form of discrimination, for example when they were derogatorily termed as “Okies.” As the crisis deepened, the government issued numerous policies such as New Deal that were nevertheless also often exploited by corporate companies. Moreover, the 1930s gave rise to authors depicting the age, such as Sanora Babb. Her upbringing and life in the areas hit by the crisis heavily influenced her work, writing style and political ideas. She depicted the 1930s crisis and drew attention to the poor people of the era— notably in *Whose Names Are Unknown*.

2. Portrayal of Midwest and California

Sanora Babb does not only write about the lives of the farmers and follows their stories in her work, but she also portrays the different conditions in Midwest and California. The novel *Whose Names Are Unknown* paints a vivid picture of those two parts of the United States of America. The novel does not only depict the scenery and weather conditions, but more than that, it illustrates the local communities, conflicts with the government, gender differences, and education issues in the two parts of the USA during the Dust Bowl era.

One of the Midwestern issues in Babb's work is the conflict between the government and the farmers. This conflict was present in Midwest long before the Dust storms hit the area. Which could be primarily a consequence of taxes that the farmers struggled to pay. Babb portrays this issue in the novel *Whose names Are unknown* as one of the struggles the farmer families have to face. Furthermore, she introduces this matter right at the beginning of the novel: "Taxes were a yearlong ogre and, more often than not, the crop did not yield enough to keep them paid up."²² It is evident right from the opening that taxes were something that the farmers had been struggling with for years. Abigail G. H. Manzella, in her *Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl*, explains that Babb's novel points out that the policies encouraged by the government affected the farmers in Midwest and their inability to sustain themselves.²³ Therefore, as a consequence of the tax issues, the relationship between the farmers and the government was at a low ebb.

The taxes were not the only issue that Babb assigns to the clash of the two sides in the Midwest. Together with the Loan companies, the banks did not contribute to better conditions for the farmers, as the novel shows. Babb points this out in a scene in the novel, where the bank clerk asks for a payment from a newly widowed woman otherwise the bank will confiscate most of her property:

"You've disturbed my peace for years," she said, gathering calm as he grew more excited." You don't understand," he said, aware of the patrons once more and speaking in his modulated public voice. "We meant no harm. It's simply business."²⁴

As shown in this extract, Babb highlighted that for the companies and banks, the issue of not being able to pay the loans properly was not on a personal level but the exact opposite – it was just a business. Babb does not explore this viewpoint only in this part of the novel. She draws upon this picture of business behavior towards the farmers in a scene where the loan

²² Sanora Babb, *Whose Names are Unknown* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 3.

²³ Abigail G. H. Manzella "The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl" (2018) 70.

²⁴ Babb, *Whose Names*, 112.

companies became friendly with the farmers as soon as their crop was steadily growing.²⁵ Almost as if she was insinuating that with this behavior, the companies tried to ensure that the farmers would pay off their debt or take a new loan. Holleman Hannah draws upon this issue in her book *Dust Bowls of Empire*, where she explains that this sort of inequality is caused by capitalistic development that is either supported actively or passively.²⁶ Therefore, because of companies' different approaches towards farmers, depending on whether the farmers were doing well or not, the conflict in the Midwest described by Babb was slowly deteriorating, but it does not escalate.

In the Novel, Babb does not only focus on the conflict between the farmers and government in Midwest but also in California. She points out that in California, the farmers struggled to get a job, not only because the numbers of unemployed people were vast but also because once the work was done, they had to move on. Babb depicts difficulties in finding employment when the Dunne family is looking for a job at a new squatter camp:

“Looking for work?” he asked, smiling as if it were a stale joke among them. They relaxed. “That’s it,” Milt said. “How is it here?” Not so bad, not too good. “What’s that mean?” asked Mrs. Starwood. “People who came for the fall peas are still here waiting for the spring crop. Fall peas froze and they had nothing to move on, nothing to stay on. Starving, so we set up government camp to tide them through.”²⁷

The migrant workers struggled with finding work, but their lives depended on their jobs. As shown in the example, if the crop failed, the ones who were the most affected were the workers. Moreover, once there was no need for these migrant workers, they were issued to move on. Babb discusses this topic in her *Filed Notes* in the publication *On the Dirty Plate Trail*. She explains that the camps were torn down as soon as the work was over, and the workers were driven off.²⁸ In her work, Babb powerfully illustrates the attitude with which these migrant workers were looked upon: not as human beings struggling to make a living in hope of supporting their families and avoid starvation, but as a tool that is meant to work and once they were no longer needed they can be disposed of.

Not only does Babb show how the farmers were used for work in California, but how they were also exploited by the companies of plantation owners. Moreover, she focuses on the farmers’ perception of this issue. In most instances, the companies created rules for camps that exploited the workers in order for them to get more profit from the migrants. In the novel,

²⁵ Babb, *Whose Names*, 66.

²⁶ Hannah Holleman, *Dust Bowl of Empire: Imperialism, Environmental Politics, and the justice Of Green Capitalism* (Yale University Press, 2019), 109.

²⁷ Babb, *Whose Names*, 136.

²⁸ Babb, *On the Dirty Plate Trail: Remembering the Dust Bowl Refugee Camps*, (Austin: University of Texas press, 2007), 63.

Babb depicts this when the families arrive at the new camp, and they are not allowed to set up a tent. Instead, they are forced to live in a shack for which they need to pay a fee, and on top of that they need to pay for the lights. Furthermore, the pay they received from their work was directly related to how much did they pick in the fields, and it was not sufficient for the workers to pay the fees and for their necessities.²⁹ The novel describes the frustration the workers felt when they were being taken advantage of. And at the same time, Babb shows how miserable they felt in this situation because they did not have any other option. Babb also mentions this issue of exploitation by landowners in her *Field Notes*, where she says: “Their greed obscures their vision. Alternatively, if they see it, they believe in the might of their power to beat and choke the impulse of every man and woman to live a decent life.”³⁰ She draws upon the issue of self-improvement being more critical than the struggling communities. This issue is not only touched upon Babb’s work. Hannah Holleman, in her publication, explains that “some landowners wanted to keep their workers near starvation so they could be induced to continue laboring under inhumane conditions.”³¹ She points out the fact that the government supported these companies with self-sufficiency, local and private assistance support. Babb tries to show the clash of the two sides realistically, but at the same time, she depicts the feelings the farmers held during those times.

Throughout the novel, Babb continuously draws attention of the reader to the feelings of frustrations and shame which the farmers felt and which led them into numerous strikes and protests. In chapter forty-two, Babb describes the strikes and their consequences; many farmers were arrested or beaten for “disrupting the peace.”³² In this chapter, she draws the reader’s attention to the workers’ feelings of helplessness and even the loss of faith due to the cycle of strikes and work they were stuck in. Therefore, it is evident that the farmers were dissatisfied with their position and were able to recognize that they were being used to expand someone else’s wealth. It is likely that Babb depicted the feelings and emotion of the farmers so well thanks to her own experience, described in her *Field Notes*:

“The conflict between growers and workers turned into warfare. As the strike spread to nearby fields, understaffed UCAPAWA organizers rushed from field to field attempting to direct the protests toward the goals they had set. As they had done in the 1933-1934 Imperial Valley strike, the growers sent their ‘deputies’ - hired thugs

²⁹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 170.

³⁰ Babb, *On the Dirty Plate Trail*, 62.

³¹ Hannah Holleman, *Dust Bowl of Empire: Imperialism, Environmental Politics, and the justice Of Green Capitalism* (Yale University Press, 2019), 118.

³² Babb, *Whose Names*, 204.

– together with the local sheriff’s men into the squatters camps – the FSA camps were left alone – and to the picket lines with tire chains and pick handles.”³³

Babb draws upon the fact that the strikes were primarily met with violence. Moreover, in her *Field Notes*, she describes the behavior and discrimination of employers towards the migrant workers. However, in her novel, she mainly draws upon the feelings the workers had to experience, and she shows how the characters organized during these times.

The portrayal of the Midwest and California in Sanora Babb’s work does not only lie in the issues between the government and the farmers but also in the climate itself. The climate in Midwest was of utmost importance for farmers as they greatly depend on it. Babb describes the weather in Midwest as gusty springs, dry, hot summers, and cold winters.³⁴ The novel illustrates the dependence of the farmers on the weather and shows how sensitively they reacted to every change of the weather. When the farmers saw rain, they immediately felt happy. The rain became a symbol of hope for them. On the other hand, hot winds were a source of dread and fear for the farmers. The issue of climate in the Midwest is addressed not only in the novel *Whose Names Are Unknown*, but also in Babb’s memoir *An Owl on Every Post*, where she writes about her encounters with the harsh climate: “Now while the days were crisp and the sun kinder than in summer, we had to prepare, for the winter lasted long, and we were soon to learn how ferocious its storms, how bitter its cold, how inhumanely isolated our lives.”³⁵ Perhaps it was her own experience with the Midwest climate that enabled her characters to be so conscious of the weather. And it may be her experience again that helped her to depict the weather conditions in Midwest so accurately and credibly.

A vast part of the Midwest’s climate portrayal also relies on depicting the Dust storms of the 1930s. In Babb’s novel, the storm’s first spotting is described by the characters as “a terrible mountainous wave. It was an evil monster coming on in mysterious, footless silence.”³⁶ The fact that Babb called the storm “an evil monster” illustrates how much the farmers feared the storm as the word “monster” is commonly associated with something immensely dangerous and threatening. Additionally, Babb describes this monster as something that arrives in silence, which helps to install an atmosphere of the dread which the characters probably felt in that instance. In fact, she describes the storm by evoking the content of the phrase “It was quiet before the storm” without using the phrase itself and thus makes an impact on the reader. Furthermore, Babb describes the storm in the novel so vividly

³³ Babb, *On the Dirty Plate Trail*, 80.

³⁴ Babb, *Whose Names*, 7.

³⁵ Sanora Babb, *An Owl on Every Post* (Lightning Source Inc., 2012), 12.

³⁶ Babb, *Whose names*, 77, 79.

that it almost appears as something imaginary or fictitious rather than something that in reality happened and affected thousands of people. Besides, Babb enhances the feeling of reality by including journal writing made by one of the main characters. Moreover, Nicolas Coles and Paul Lauter describe in *American Working-Class Literature* that the natural conditions in Dust Bowl literature are seen as something that can provide livelihood but at the same time can be the farmers' enemy.³⁷ This illustrates that Dust Storms are seen as a calamity or misfortune and can be associated in literature as an evil monster or a farmer's enemy. In both cases, the storm, which is inanimate, is associated with powerful animate beings.

Babb does not only depict the weather conditions in Midwest but also in California. While in Midwest, she stresses the extreme changing of seasons; in California, she points out almost the calmness of the weather. Babb explains that the seasons in California went by without any natural sign or change. Additionally, she points out that thanks to the weather conditions, the plantation owners were able to plant trees and orchards, which allowed the breeze to carry the smell of oranges.³⁸ She depicts the effect of the mild weather on growing trees and different types of crops which enabled the landowners to gather enormous wealth over time. Moreover, by writing about the gentle breeze and the smell of oranges, Babb elicits the sense of calmness and freshness, which are in sharp contrast to the suffocating smell of dust in the Midwest.

While climate is important in Babb's description of the farmers' lives, she also points out the importance of community in Midwest and its changes while the characters migrate to California. One of the most common and reoccurring themes in the novel is the selflessness and generosity the farmers held towards each other in Midwest. This aspect is shown in many parts of the novel; for instance, the Dunne family would offer dinner to visitors even though they did not have enough food for themselves most of the time.³⁹ The community aspect was so important that they even were even willing to sacrifice the bare minimum they had. This shows how much they valued company and human contact as they were valuable in their solitary farm life. Furthermore, the community aspect is not seen only between the farmers but also between the farmers and the people from the city who witnessed the harsh conditions that the farmers lived in. For instance, when the local doctor was feeling frustrated with the situation and refused to let them pay for his services:

³⁷ Nicholas Coles and Paul Lauter, *American Working-Class Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 218.

³⁸ Babb, *Whose Names*, 184.

³⁹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 16, 17.

He felt suddenly impatient, not with the woman before him, but with the whole business of watching people live and die and being able to give them very little more than a half-measure of help in either. If he questioned this woman about her diet, he knew what he would find out. It was the same with all of them. No use to ask, when he could not help. He could give them his time, his knowledge, his skill, but he could not give them what they needed. They could not afford to pay him, and the ones who could put him off.⁴⁰

In this instance, Babb shows that the doctor wants to help as much as possible but cannot change the farmers' situation - which resulted in his feelings of frustration. The doctor was not the only one who sacrificed his income in order to help the farmers. It was also the store owner, who could not make it through the harsh conditions anymore and committed suicide. But even then, he still thought of the farmers and burned their unpaid bills.⁴¹ This suggests that Babb chose to show suicide perhaps as a selfish act or as an act of mercy through which she illustrates the tightness of the community, and the store owner is portrayed as someone who thought of the farmers even in his darkest time. The novel illustrates the community's strength and shows how much people in Midwest were willing to sacrifice for one other.

However, once the characters migrated to California, the sense of community changed. Although still relatively close, the communities were more divided and the families started to rely more and more on themselves. In her *Field Notes*, Babb explains that it was not only the Midwest farmers who migrated and who were later described as 'Okies,' but many other nationalities did so as well, which is why the camps saw mixtures of races, nationalities, beliefs, and customs.⁴² Although the Midwest farmers shared the same fate and still wanted to help each other, they could no longer offer as much as they could in Midwest. And they all had to focus on sustaining their own family. Furthermore, as they began to experience the cultural differences, their mindset started to change. A good example of it is the scene when Milt works in the field side by side with an African American worker:

“We`re both picking cotton for the same hand-to-mouth wages. I`m no better`n he is, he`s no worse”. The memory of being called a white nigger in Imperial Valley lay in his mind unforgotten, sore, like an exposed nerve. Milt looked at him. Garrison looked back, his eyes straight, and there was no difference. “Man, don`t be talking too much `round here. I worked here for three years. I know `em.” “You are not in camp?” Milt asked. “No-o.” Garrison said smiling in a way that Milt did not understand. “We got a camp of our own three miles away.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Babb, *Whose Names*, 26.

⁴¹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 115, 116.

⁴² Babb, *On the Dirty Plate Trail*, 92.

⁴³ Babb, *Whose Names*, 185.

Babb powerfully depicts the shift of mind which the migrants' workers underwent. As seen in the extract, the 'Okies' understood the discrimination and the struggles that the other minorities had to face because they experienced the same hardship. Babb portrays the workers' feelings of shame which most of them felt, and the mutual understanding they held for each other.

Although the sense of community in the Midwest was strong, Babb also illustrates the gender differences in Midwest. The most common aspect of gender differences in the Midwest that Babb represents is the difference in working space of men and women. Throughout the story, the men are working outside in the fields, taking care of the crops, while the women are working in the kitchen, cleaning up, taking care of the fire, and other household chores. Similarly, it can be seen when Julia is sick after miscarriage, and the other women stayed in the house keeping her company or helping to clean up, while the men either went to the town or helped with other odd jobs.⁴⁴ This is the most reoccurring difference between men and women shown in Babb's work - labor division between the genders. The difference in gender roles is not only shown in the workspace but also in the minor aspects of behavior such as walking: "Milt met Julia on the way and turned back with her, walking always a half-step ahead of her so she had to run a little sometimes to keep up with him."⁴⁵ Even by walking ahead of his wife Milt is trying to assert his standing above her. Although these events might have been written without any particular purpose in terms of gender roles, they powerfully testify to the gender differences in the Midwest as described by Babb.

Babb also shows this difference in the novel *Whose Names Are Unknown* and in *An Owl On Every Post*. When the family was traveling to their new home, the mother suggested that they take a break from the traveling, but the father refused and said they would go on, and no one dared to oppose him because "Papa's word was law."⁴⁶ In this passage, the difference is clearly shown; the genders are unequal. Gender inequality is shown in many passages of Babb's work, but hardly any action is taken against it; instead, gender inequality is accepted as the status quo.

However, once the characters start to work in California, Babb depicts the change it had on gender inequality. In the novel, she presents the gradual change that is happening between the characters and how their differences are slowly diminishing in California. She shows how the characters had to adjust to the high fees and lack of jobs; therefore, the women no longer

⁴⁴ Babb, *Whose Names*, 49.

⁴⁵ Babb, *Whose Names*, 27.

⁴⁶ Babb, *An owl on Every Post*, 6.

worked inside the house, but they had to join picking in the fields. Although Milt Dunne at the beginning refused to allow his wife to join them, even with the harsh conditions, saying that cotton-picking would be too hard for her. She gradually started to work in the fields, starting with pea picking, since there was no other way how to keep the family sustained.⁴⁷ Babb shows the process through which the gender differences are becoming smaller and smaller. Not only did the differences diminish due to both of the genders working in the same workplace, but also during the protests and gatherings, the women were starting to engage more and more in the conversations. While in Midwest, Babb depicts how the men mostly kept to themselves, in California, she depicts how both of the sides initiated discussion and sat together: “I tell you, he feels mighty good. He don’t want trouble.” “When a man’s got clear conscience, he don’t carry a gun,” Julia said quietly. Milt looked at her and she felt somehow warmed and pleased.”⁴⁸ Babb portrays the change in gender differences and how the characters themselves felt during this change. Not only was Julia able to contribute to the conversation, but she also knew that her husband was proud of her speaking her mind, which made her feel happy. Although they were speaking about their unfortunate situation, she could still feel the sense of achievement. Therefore, Babb significantly depicts gradual changes between the two genders in California and underlines them with the portrayal of the characters’ feelings.

In addition to all the harsh conditions, the low-income families in the Midwest also struggled with not getting schooling for their children. Babb shows the struggle of the children not being able to go to school. And the parents struggling to get an education for their children in any way possible. In the novel, the grandfather was teaching the children all he knew, and they were reading from the newspaper that the walls were covered with:

“You girls like to go to school?” They looked down in agony, and their throats quivered with the effort to reply. “They’re taking private lessons from old professor Dunne,” the old man said, wanting to help them, giving them a wink. “That’s why we’ve got all this reading matter on the walls,” Milt said, waving at the newspapers.⁴⁹

The struggle of not going to school did not impact only the parents but also the children who felt ashamed of not having proper education but instead having to learn from their grandfather. It is clear that Babb continuously draws the reader’s attention to the characters’ feelings, such as the children’s agony and feeling of shame. Even when a district school was

⁴⁷ Babb, *Whose Names*, 172, 173.

⁴⁸ Babb, *Whose Names*, 221.

⁴⁹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 13.

opened in the town, the children still struggled to attend the school. Especially during harsh weather conditions. For instance during winter, the children had to walk two miles along roads covered in the snow. Another problem the families faced was the school's closing because of the harsh weather conditions, be it winter blizzards or dust storms.⁵⁰ Babb draws this aspect of poor conditions of education in the Midwest from her own experience, which she describes in *Owl On Every Post*. There, she depicted the despair the children felt due to their lack of education very realistically. For instance, she talks about her being taught by her grandfather and reading from the newspaper on the walls because of the lack of books and overall materials for the education they had.⁵¹ She was able to depict the poor living conditions of people in the Midwest, whether they be adults or children.

To conclude everything stated above, Babb depicts multiple aspects of the Midwest and California in her work. She focuses on various aspects of each area and the gradual changes the migration from one area to the other inflicted. Additionally, throughout the novel, Babb continuously draws the reader's attention to the characters' emotions and perspectives while still trying to be realistic and drawing from her own experience. She presents the conflict between the farmers and the government, which is shown in both regions. She points out the issue of companies dealing with farmers in the sense of business. Furthermore, Babb demonstrates how the characters view climate and Dust storms, which they associate with a monster. In the novel, she also illustrates the different communities farmers develop in Midwest and California and the changing gender inequalities. Additionally, she draws upon the issue of the inability to get proper schooling for the children. Consequently, Babb depicts numerous conditions in Midwest and California in the novel *Whose Names Are Unknown*.

⁵⁰ Babb, *Whose Names*, 14.

⁵¹ Babb, *An Owl on Every Post*, 30.

3. Motives of estrangement and displacement

Since *Whose Names Are Unknown* follows the story of the farmer families hit by dust storms and later their migration to California, the reader comes across numerous motives of estrangements and displacement. To begin with there is the isolation on their farms in the Midwest, an isolation from the outside world. This aspect of the farmers' former way of life sets off the difference between the migrant workers and the plantation owners later in the story. Babb aids this mood of estrangement and displacement with a stream of consciousness, foreshadowing, and even highlighting.

The first motive of estrangement in the story comes in the form of a letter sent to one of the farmers and their reaction to it. This letter contains the story of the sister of one of the characters in the novel; it describes how they struggled on their farm and later migrated in the hope of finding a better life. Nevertheless, it is the reaction of Julia to this letter that fully shows the estrangement between the farmers although they shared the same fate: "To Julia, this was from another world where the bitter struggle to live and the rich excitement of many things growing in a beautiful setting contradicted so sharply."⁵² Babb points out that it was something from 'another world,' which implies that although their situation is similar, Julia does not see it as such. Furthermore, in Julia's short inner monologue which follows as her reaction to the letter, she comments: "It is pitiful the way people have to fight nowadays to make a bare living, roaming around over the country like a pack of wolves hunting something to eat."⁵³ This demonstrates that although she terms them as people, she compares them to a pack of hungry wolves. This suggests that she sees the migrants as being in a different situation compared to her own - as she is still living on her farm, thus separating herself from the migrant farmers. Babb uses this letter as a means of showing the fact that the farmers were disconnecting themselves from other farmers who started to migrate.

Babb does not only use this letter as a means of evoking reactions from the characters but also as a means of foreshadowing what is going to happen later to the main characters in the story. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the letter tells a story of a farmer family who had to give up their land and travel to California looking for jobs, and their struggle to find a good job to earn enough money.⁵⁴ Although neither the reader nor the characters are aware at that time that a similar fate will soon befall them, too. The letter foreshadows their own struggles, which they will have to encounter later on in the story, such as traveling for

⁵² Babb, *Whose Names*, 56.

⁵³ Babb, *Whose Names*, 56.

⁵⁴ Babb, *Whose Names*, 54-56.

jobs, picking on plantations, and not earning enough money to sustain the whole family. In this case, Babb could have been inspired by epistolary novels, which were written in the form of letters, and the author of the Britannica article *Epistolary novel* states that the usage of letters helps to add a different view to the story.⁵⁵ This can also be applied to the letter which Babb used as it introduces new characters who appear only briefly in the story, only in this letter. As Babb foreshadows the main characters' story in the letter, the characters are unaware of this hinting at their future fate when they too will decide to migrate and suffer from the same fate.

The letter is not the only instrument Babb uses to foreshadow future events or to show the estrangement of the characters from the world. Babb also writes about the characters reading the newspapers and not seeing the situation described in the newspaper as their own: "Now I read a paper year in year out, but of late the truth is stranger than fiction, as the old saying goes. A man needs to know what is back of things or he'll dang near give up the ghost."⁵⁶ Although the newspapers describe the character's situations to a certain degree, they say that the truth is stranger to them more than a fiction. This scene illustrates that instead of seeing their truth (only slightly different from their own situation), they describe it as fiction. This shows that the characters may not see their reality as part of the world's reality. Furthermore, later in the story, the characters themselves admit to seeing the rest of the world as outside: "They had come now to think of the rest of the world as the outside because they had lost all the things that connected them with other people."⁵⁷ This demonstrates that the characters no longer perceive themselves as a part of the world. And as mentioned in the extract, they lost everything that connected them with others. Babb chooses to first show the farmers' estrangement by means of the newspaper and later in the story shows the direct impact of the estrangement.

The characters' estrangement is illustrated with the help of the newspapers but also with the characters' actions. One of those actions can be seen during the dust storms when the characters board up the windows: "Dad boarded up the windows this morning as the dust was still blowing, looking like it would never stop."⁵⁸ With this action, the characters are isolating themselves from the outside world and the close community between the farmers described in the previous chapter. Also, Abigail G. H. Manzella in *The Environmental Displacement of the*

⁵⁵ ⁵⁵ "Epistolary novel," Literature, Britannica, last modified February 21, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/art/epistolary-novel>.

⁵⁶ Babb, *Whose Names*, 99.

⁵⁷ Babb, *Whose Names*, 201.

⁵⁸ Babb, *Whose Names*, 90.

Dust Bowl, says that the limits of the character's world are taken to the extreme when they board up the windows and doors and thus trapping themselves "inside their own coffins."⁵⁹ She terms the characters' actions as trapping themselves in their coffin, which illustrates that they isolated themselves from the outside world. Babb shows in her work that the characters were distancing themselves actively from the outside even with their actions.

What adds to the sense of isolation in Babb's novel is the journal Julia is keeping during the storms. This journal is shown throughout chapter 17, and although it lasts only a chapter, it shows the period of the storms and the characters' perceptions of these storms. For instance, the worse the day of the storm was, the shorter the entry in the journal would be and vice versa – the better the day was, the longer the entry is:

April 4. A fierce dirty day. Just able to get here and there for things we have to do. It is awful to live in a dark house with the windows boarded up and no air coming in anywhere. Everything is covered and filled with dust.

April 5. Today is a terror.

April 6. Let up a little. We can see the fence but can't see any of the neighbors' houses yet. No trip down today. Funny how you learn to get along even in this dust.⁶⁰

This illustrates that the entry in Julia's record is shorter and simpler on the bad days. In their simplicity, the entries further support the sense of isolation and terror the characters felt during the storms. Abigail G. H. Manzella argues that the shift to the entries in Julia's journal and simultaneously the shift to one voice speaking about the storms creates a sense of isolation, repetition, and disjointedness.⁶¹ This illustrates that including entries of the journal in the novel adds strongly to the atmosphere of estrangement and isolation.

Not only does the journal help the sense of isolation with its content but also with its ending. The records are kept until April 30th, and this end does not equal the end of the dust storms. Instead, the ending of the journal shows the desperation Julia probably felt in her isolation:

April 30. Mr. Starwood died. Mailman just told me. We all feel bad. Mailman said he had carried life insurance for years and had to let it drop last few years when things got so bad. What a world! Dust is still blowing, sometimes light, sometimes dark. No use to keep on writing dust, dust, dust. Seems it will outlast us.⁶²

The last entry in the journal demonstrates that Julia no longer felt the need to continue writing. She no longer saw the storms as something that will pass, with the constant repetition

⁵⁹ Abigail G. H. Manzella, "The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb's Whose Names Are Unknown," In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 86.

⁶⁰ Babb, *Whose Names*, 90.

⁶¹ Abigail G. H. Manzella, "The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb's Whose Names Are Unknown," In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 86-87.

⁶² Babb, *Whose Names*, 95.

of the storms. Pamela J. Annas in *Unknown no more* adds: “The journal establishes Julia’s voice and the need of Babb’s characters to write and speak their reality, to be more than ‘whose names are unknown.’”⁶³ This illustrates that the journal is used as a means of showing the individual character’s feelings and her perspective of the isolation, which can be seen best in the ending, where Julia says that there is no longer a point in continuing writing.

Furthermore, as the storms continue, Babb shows the forced displacement the farmers had to face. Babb shows how more and more farmers had to move from their farms because they could no longer sustain themselves. Writing about them, she again focuses on the feelings of the characters leaving involuntarily the places they called their homes:

Their thoughts were too close to the homes they were leaving. They were going out of the country, to the *outside* with a hostile hope in their hearts. They went out together and alone, like animals moving with their backs to the storm, moving to shelter they knew was nowhere, yet they could no longer stand still in their stricken lives.⁶⁴

Babb has written the word ‘outside’ in italics, probably to highlight the fact that the characters saw the world outside Oklahoma as a place they do not belong in. Interestingly, Babb also writes that they are moving with ‘hostile hope’. Both words contradicting each other since ‘hope’ carries a positive connotation while ‘hostile’ an extremely negative one. This oxymoron could have been used to highlight the fact that the characters did not feel joyful when moving but rather saw the step only as a prevention of starvation, as an action unwanted but necessary in order to survive. Moreover, Babb compares them to animals moving together yet alone, which could imply that each of them was alone in their individual feelings of loss and sorrow, but they still longed for to keep the old sense of closeness and community as described in the previous chapter. Abigail G. H. Manzella puts it as follows: “The environment pushes them toward an individualistic approach represented in the myth of possession, but the farmers continue to fight for a more collective sense of identity.”⁶⁵ This quote illustrates that although the farmers were being pushed out of their homes, they still wanted to be part of a community. As Babb writes – together and alone.

What Babb also hints upon in the novel concerning the displacement of the characters is the continuous movement supported by propaganda and its impact. During the storms, before the Dunne family moves to California, they discuss the ads they see in the papers and how

⁶³ Pamela J. Annas, “Unknown No More,” review of *Whose Names Are Unknown*, by Sanora Babb, *Women’s Review of Books* 21, no. 10/11, July, 2004.

⁶⁴ Babb, *Whose Names*, 120.

⁶⁵ Abigail G. H. Manzella, “The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb’s *Whose Names Are Unknown*,” In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 87.

good it looks while simultaneously joking about the movement: “‘Danged if I know what we’ll do when we `Mericans run out of west to move on to, ` old Dunne said. `Guess we’ll go to sea. ’”⁶⁶ Old Dunne talks about moving west and hints upon the problem of what will happen once Americans run out of space and at the same time makes the joke about them moving into the sea. Also, Abigail G. H. Manzella adds:

Following the logic of expansion, while Americans were impelled to move to the center of the country and then to move again to the West Coast in search of fulfilling the promised ideology of the yeoman myth, which equated landownership with prosperity. The behavior and conditions of the farmers prior to their migration to the West helps to reveal the full extent of the bare life.⁶⁷

This illustrates that the movement was supported by propoganda during the dust storms and in the past. In addition, Babb also shows the impact of this movement on the farmers in Oklahoma: “A faint gray was coming up over the sky. In this ethereal light, the prairie became vast, more immense, the whole plain seemed unpeopled and deserted.”⁶⁸ Babb points out that the prairie was becoming unpeopled and deserted due to the storms and the migration. She also describes the light as ethereal, which adds to the atmosphere of seclusion and perhaps even something unreal. In conclusion, the movement of people promoted by propoganda in Babb’s novel aided in the displacement of the character and its impact on them.

In addition to the impact of the migration Babb also depicts the estrangement between the workers and officials. Throughout the whole novel, the reader knows the farmers’ names. The reader either knows their name, or if the farmers talk with each other, they address each other by names. On the other hand, the reader never knows the names of the officials or the government people. And when the characters address them, they do so in a non-personal manner, such as The Banker, officials, or businesspeople.⁶⁹ The non-personal way of addressing them adds to the feeling of distance between the farmers and the officials. Furthermore, the characters could have been aware of this distance to some degree. For instance, during one of the stays in a migrant camp, the characters help during the birth of a child. They discuss the fact that are unqualified to help during childbirth when one of them notes: “None of these `fficial men *would* do it either.”⁷⁰ This utterance illustrates that the characters thought that perhaps the officials in the camps would not offer the same help as the

⁶⁶ Babb, *Whose Names*, 102.

⁶⁷ Abigail G. H. Manzella, “The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb’s Whose Names Are Unknown,” In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 88.

⁶⁸ Babb, *Whose Names*, 128.

⁶⁹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 144.

⁷⁰ Babb, *Whose Names*, 144.

workers. In addition, Babb chose to write the word 'would' in italics, which highlights the character's feelings. Therefore, the distance between the workers and officials is an important aspect of the novel.

The distance between the farmers and their new environment can be further seen in the relationship between the migrant workers and the plantation owners. Throughout the characters' stay in California, they repeatedly mention that they do not know who the owners are. One of these instances is when a girl steals from the plantation and wonders why they should be afraid of the owners and who they even are:

Who were they? There weren't any big houses around where They lived. The fields were just there by themselves as if they were growing for everybody. She knew nothing like that ever happened, but where were They, those mysterious people whom everyone was afraid of? *She* was not afraid. But she would have to find out who They were before she could defy Them.⁷¹

This demonstrates that the character was not aware of the identity of the owners, even though her family worked for them. Additionally, Babb chose to write the pronoun 'They' with a capital letter, indicating the distance between the workers and bosses. The distance between the characters is also emphasized by Babb writing the pronoun 'she' in italics. Doing so, Babb highlights the character but at the same time highlights the distance between the girl and the plantation owners. Moreover, the owners are described as mysterious people, which adds to their obscure identity in the novel. Abigail G. H. Manzella adds: "Above all, the owners' physical absence from most of the text demonstrates that true power is disembodied. Their omnipresent absence gives them godlike, immaterial status in opposition to the physicality of their workers."⁷² It can be seen that the absence of the owners adds to their mysteriousness. Therefore, the distance between the characters and the owners can be seen in their relations.

Furthermore, the estrangement of the characters is deepened by the omnipresence of the plantation owners. As mentioned above, the owners are not physically present in the novel, which is why the characters see them as mysterious beings. Moreover, the characters see them as a beings which can be nowhere but everywhere at once:

"Where are the owners?" Tessie asked.

"Say you are full of questions tonight," he said. "Why, some around here in town, but mostly it's a big concern called Hayes and Berkeley, it ain't nowhere and it's ever'where at once."

"Oh," she said, feeling confused.⁷³

⁷¹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 151.

⁷² Abigail G. H. Manzella, "The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb's *Whose Names Are Unknown*," In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 98.

⁷³ Babb, *Whose Names*, 153.

This illustrates that although the characters knew the company's name, they still did not know who precisely the plantation owners were. Additionally, the character describes them as someone who can be nowhere but at the same time everywhere, which indicates the owners' omnipresence over the workers. Sam Cowling and D. Cray say in *How to Be Omnipresent* that omnipresent entities depend on their divine attributes and their existence in indefinite regions.⁷⁴ This illustrates that omnipresent equals godlike and that there was a divine aura around the plantation owners. As the plantation owners have this presence in the novel, it aids the perception of distance and dissociation between them and the migrant workers.

Not only is the distance evident between the workers and the owners, but also the workers themselves withdraw from the migrant communities. Babb depicts this inner isolation when the workers are concerned about the spies that are in the camps and fields. This suspicion draws them away from the communities. For instance, even in their rented houses, they had to be careful about what they said among themselves: "The children's eyes grew big and dark with fright. In the silence, their breathing sounded loud in the room and they tried to take long quiet breaths. What had they been saying? They all tried to remember the words in the brief moment they were waiting, suspended."⁷⁵ Here, Babb depicts the tension the characters felt when thinking they were being listened to. She also draws attention to the children who also felt this tension. Additionally, she also points out the tensions and distrust on the fields: "Everyone was afraid to trust anyone. Everyone worked solemnly now as if he had nothing to say at all to anyone else. There was a great silence in the fields."⁷⁶ Babb depicts the feelings between the workers and their distancing themselves created by the spies by focusing on the silence among them. Abigail G. H. Manzella adds that the spies created distrust between the neighbors which led to an atmosphere of anxiety.⁷⁷ As a result, the workers were isolating and distancing themselves.

In addition to the workers' distancing themselves from others and the distance between the workers and the owners, Babb also illustrates the distance between the workers and the general Californian public. This distance is best illustrated by the offensive name of 'okies,' which the public used to refer to all migrant workers collectively. Babb shows this

⁷⁴ Sam Cowling and Wesley D. Cray, "HOW TO BE OMNIPRESENT," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2017): 223-34.

⁷⁵ Babb, *Whose Names*, 174.

⁷⁶ Babb, *Whose Names*, 202.

⁷⁷ Abigail G. H. Manzella, "The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb's Whose Names Are Unknown," In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 96.

particularly in the second part of the novel, where they are regarded as the Okies and differentiated from the public. For instance, during a conflict in one of the migrant camps, the workers are called Okies and “White niggers.”⁷⁸ Which establishes the differentiation between the figures in the novel. Additionally, Babb also shows the perspective of a child towards this issue in an inner monologue:

*“Okie.” Okie? Okie! An Okie. Something Bad? An Okie is me. Why does it hurt? It is only a little word, as a little as my littlest toe. Why does it make me feel all by myself? And sad? “Okie” is a funny word, and an okie is me. Someone different. Someone not as good.*⁷⁹

The child’s perspective in this inner monologue is set off by the author from rest of the text by the use of italics. Babb draws the reader’s attention towards the child’s feeling of inequality, sadness and confusion which comes with it. Abigail G. H. Manzella further says: “These internally displaced people, rather than receiving aid and protection, are subject to anti-migrant attitudes that mark them as “foreign” and as racial others.”⁸⁰ She points out that the people who were forced out of their land in order to provide living for themselves were met with attitudes of the public which only deepened their estrangement. Babb mostly shows the distance between the workers and public with the help of the characters’ perceptions.

Babb does not only show estrangement and displacement by means of inner monologue but also by the stream of consciousness. Babb uses it in the scene where Milt, the father of the family, is going through the camp and thinks of what he sees, needs to do, his family and more:

*Lonnie sleeping Friday weeds carrots three feet wide a woman screaming quarter of a mile tomorrow surplus commodities walking music water running forgetting forty cents a day sleeping forgetting forty cents floating like air clear water running sparkling through the brain surplus brain commodities sleeping a feather of music tickling this is my tent sitting down like a cloud floating music faces fluffy sound in my ears flying away.*⁸¹

This excerpt illustrates that Babb uses the stream of consciousness to show the character’s train of thoughts. She differentiates the stream from the rest of the text by italics, and she also divides the individual thoughts with two spaces instead of one. Furthermore, Babb shows the different things and emotions that the character thinks of. Britannica article *Stream of consciousness* says that the stream can show the full richness, speed, and subtlety of the mind

⁷⁸ Babb, *Whose Names*, 154.

⁷⁹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 164.

⁸⁰ Abigail G. H. Manzella, “The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb’s *Whose Names Are Unknown*,” In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 98.

⁸¹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 174.

at work, and the writer can show the individual awareness.⁸² Therefore, through the stream of consciousness, readers can get a glimpse of the characters' minds. In Milt's case, the reader could see the community's estrangement as he thinks of a woman screaming, which does not indicate closeness with the community as they are only described as faces with no names. The reader can also see the impact of displacement in Milt's stream; for instance, he thinks of his tent or commodities sleeping, which indicates that perhaps he no longer has a place to call his home. As has been shown, Babb conveys the characters' feelings of estrangement and displacement also by the stream of consciousness.

Furthermore, Babb shows the displacement of the characters by their own reminiscence of the past and the old farm in Oklahoma through the help of letters. In chapter forty-four Babb shows the Dune family reading letters from the grandfather and how the life is back on the farm in Oklahoma. As they read the grandfathers letters, they reminisce of the past and at the same time they learn about the situation back in Oklahoma. And as soon as they stop reading, they have to go back to their reality:

The little girls listened while Julia read. She put the letter away for Milt, and Lonnie and Myra wrote the old man and gave the letters to Julia to keep until they could buy a stamp.

"I'm tired of pepper tea," said Lonnie, who had been sleeping and was lying down again, feeling drowsy with the monotonous sound of the tent roof flapping tautly as if it would jerk free.⁸³

This illustrates that once the characters stopped reading and writing their letters, they are reminded of their situation by the sound of the tent. Its flapping, noisy roof reminds them of the fact that even the roof over their head is not stable - just as their place in the migrant camp. Additionally, the remainder of the farm in Oklahoma shows the different situations that the displaced characters have to face each time they move camp. Pamela J. Annas adds that the letter from Grandfather Babb gives him dignity as he was able to keep living on Oklahoma's farm.⁸⁴ The letter also enables the grandfather to speak again as his voice was silent until then throughout the chapters set in California. The return of his voice has a tangible impact on the characters and through them on the reader, as it exposes the difference in the living conditions in the two regions. Letters, therefore, serve the author as a mighty means of revealing the characters' displacement.

⁸² "Stream of consciousness," Literature, Britannica, last modified February 28, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/stream-of-consciousness>.

⁸³ Babb, *Whose Names*, 212.

⁸⁴ Pamela J. Annas, "Unknown No More," review of *Whose Names Are Unknown*, by Sanora Babb, *Women's Review of Books* 21, no. 10/11, July, 2004.

To conclude what has been stated so far, Babb shows many aspects of displacement and estrangement throughout the novel. She depicts the motives of isolation of the characters, such as isolating themselves in their own home or isolating themselves from their community. Babb supports this sense of isolation with Julia's record, which conveys the feelings of loneliness and terror. This isolation and dissociation can also be seen between the migrant workers and the officials or even the plantation owners. In their case, the distance between them and the workers is aggravated by their perceived omnipresence. Babb shows that by moving to California to sustain themselves, the farmers were being displaced from their homes. Babb depicts the motives of isolation, estrangement and displacement by means of foreshadowing, letters, propaganda, inner monologues, and the stream of consciousness.

4. Forming of protests

Sanora Babb depicts the issue of forming of protests and their consequences in *Whose Names Are Unknown*. She uses various literary devices which help to set the mood and illustrates the feelings of the farmers. Babb covers predominantly the issue of gathering the workers together and the impact of the strikes.

Before the protests began in the novel, Babb foreshadows them and their problematic organization even before the characters move to California. The first sign of the characters talking about a protest is during a memorial of Mr. Starwood, who died during the dust storm, when all the men talked about their situation. They spoke about farmers in the East and how they always have milk strikes and say that it must be because of something powerful for the farmers to get all together.⁸⁵ In this instance, Babb foreshadows a similar situation the characters will be in once they move to California. As they will also start protesting because of the poor conditions they work under, such as starvation. And many of the characters also faced the issue of starvation although they said that they were different from the farmers in East and did not see any parallels the situations. Furthermore, Babb foreshadows the troubles of organizing the farmers together: “Even the prairie dogs got sense enough to get together but us farmers ain’t got a sense for anything but to work hard. It takes a strong back and a weak mind to be a farmer.”⁸⁶ Here, the farmers themselves thought that they would not be able to do anything else than work. In this case Babb foreshadows the difficulties in organizing all the farmers together as many of them were worried about their livelihood and continued working instead of joining the strikes. Moreover, one of the farmers notes: “We can’t strike against dust,”⁸⁷ which indicates that the characters probably saw nature as the chief cause of their problems. It feels obvious for the reader that nature, or more specifically dust storms, could not be protested against. Therefore, while the characters still reside in Oklahoma, Babb foreshadows the strikes - unlike the characters who do not realize the similarities.

Furthermore, Babb depicts how the officials who were helping in the migrant camps also tried to stop the farmers from organizing and protesting. After one quarrel in the city, one of the officials working in the camp spoke to the farmers:

“Don’t let them provoke you into trouble. Remember that. This is the toughest valley in the state. If you get through here, you’ll be ready for anything you’re likely to meet

⁸⁵ Babb, *Whose Names*, 101.

⁸⁶ Babb, *Whose Names*, 101-102.

⁸⁷ Babb, *Whose Names*, 101.

elsewhere. I'm not speaking to you officially, I'm speaking to you man to man. Don't let them provoke you." "That's easy to say," someone shouted from the crowd.⁸⁸

This extract demonstrates that although probably with good intentions, Babb shows how the official tried to stop the farmers from retailing back against the hired people and not to get provoked. Additionally, after the speech Babb shows the perspective of the farmers towards the hired people: "Where do you think you'll get with these big growers going round like bunch of goddamn zombies?"⁸⁹ The comparison to zombies may indicate that the farmers saw the people as someone different, almost not alive, such as zombies. The speech of the official and the farmers' reaction to it shows clearly that even though the official was on the farmers' side, he still tried to stop the farmers from protesting.

Babb goes on to show that before the strikes started, the farmers realized that protests in order to achieve change were needed, yet they did not take any action. Babb shows that they saw the graveness of their situation - yet they were afraid to act: "Maybe something to what he says." "May *be*, but we ain't wanting any more trouble right now." The man said nothing more and was lost among the others as they turned toward their tents or stood in small groups talking."⁹⁰ Babb highlights their understanding by setting off the word 'be' in italics, which can imply that they perhaps even agree that something needs to be done, yet they do not want to inflict more trouble by taking action. Babb also shows the reasons for their passivity:

Throughout the fields, unionization still moved slowly, without funds, wrestling with the complex design of vast and shifting population: great ragged armies of hunger-driven people, fighting a phantom enemy for the security of one day at a time. A man with too little in his stomach cannot afford to think beyond it.⁹¹

This demonstrates that the farmers at that time were probably not able to organize themselves for the simple reason of being too hungry to think about organizing any protests. In addition, Babb points out that they were fighting against a phantom enemy: this indicates that at that time they were not aware of who exactly their enemy was. Narendra Mohan in *Protest and Literature* adds that: "Mere negation of a situation does not constitute protest, though it influences nature of protest to some extent."⁹² This utterance illustrates that although the situation of the farmers was negative, it still may not necessarily have led them into taking action. Therefore, although the farmers were aware of their bleak situation, not many of them at this point in the novel wished to take any action towards a change.

⁸⁸ Babb, *Whose Names*, 157-158.

⁸⁹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 158.

⁹⁰ Babb, *Whose Names*, 158.

⁹¹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 160.

⁹² Narendra. Mohan, "Protest and Literature." *Indian Literature* 18, no. 1 (1975): 92-93.

In her novel, Babb shows that one way of trying to organize the farmers into resistance was by trying to spread information to the farmers. In one scene, Babb illustrates how the people tried to spread information to the farmers by sliding small green leaflets under the doors at night. The leaflets contained information about the workers legal rights and called for action:

“Better hours, better wages, better living conditions. All hours we can see, wages not enough to eat decent on, and two families in one shack! We got a *right* it says, made by the government. The govamint knows about us.” She beamed with her knew knowledge. Then she took the sheet from Milt and looked it all over carefully, suspicion moving down her face. “You don’t reckon it’s some kind of trap?” Frieda and Milt laughed.⁹³

Babb draws attention of the reader to the emotions of the characters once they find out the information in the leaflet, such as when she depicts how Freida beamed which implies her feelings of joy. Additionally, Babb highlights the word ‘right’ in italics, which could indicate the understanding of the characters that they can improve their situation. Narendra Mohan says: “The foundation of protest is laid when man becomes conscious of his rights.” This demonstrates that once the characters have learnt their rights, they were able to start taking action. Babb illustrates the spread of information in *Whose Names* with the help of highlighting the information and draws attention to the emotion of the characters.

Furthermore, Babb shows the changes in the characters once they learn their rights. This is when the characters realize that they can no longer ignore the dire situation:

“People take such chances.” “It’s the law,” he said. “You know the law here,” she said scornfully. “Somebody will get in trouble for this.” “Well,” Milt said impatiently, “we’ve got to do something sometime. People are getting desperate. If we don’t stand up for ourselves, now, it’ll be worse.” “It couldn’t be much worse.” “That’s what we said before, but you see for yourself.”⁹⁴

This extract shows that the character in the novel no longer saw a point in tolerating his harsh situation. He realized that if they do not change anything, their situation will remain the same. In addition, as Babb depicts in the dialogue, the characters might be coming to realization that they need to stand with other farmers together, as they use words as ‘we’ and ‘people’ which have communal sense to them. Narendra Mohan adds to this that this awareness rises protest from individualistic level to a social level.⁹⁵ This is what Babb shows: the shift from individualistic approach of the farmers, when they are concerned only about their families, to

⁹³ Babb, *Whose Names*, 174-175.

⁹⁴ Babb, *Whose Names*, 176.

⁹⁵ Narendra. Mohan, "Protest and Literature." *Indian Literature* 18, no. 1 (1975): 92.

a social approach in which they are concerned about the general wellbeing of all the migrant farmers. This shift came about by the farmers acquiring knowledge about their rights.

However, one of the first instances in the novel where the characters try to organize themselves is met with violence. During one of the stays in a migratory camp, when the Dunne family goes to a shop, they encounter a fight between a worker and people hired by a company to scare off the farmers from organizing themselves: “See how they beat up a man for trying to organize us into the CIO union?”⁹⁶ Babb depicts how the companies in the novel initially tried to scare off the farmers. Furthermore, she focuses on the methods the companies used in order to scare off the farmers: during one night, for example, the deputies tried to enter the camp and arrest the people involved in the fight: “Milt and Julia were awakened out of the sound sleep of their physical weariness by loud, angry voices coming from the direction of the camp entrance.”⁹⁷ By depicting the conflict during the night, Babb shows the deputies’ methods of intimidation: they used the light to their advantage as the deputies do not come back during the day. Abigail G. H. Manzella adds that keeping the workers subservient is a means to keep the corporations’ profit.⁹⁸ This illustrates that perhaps the companies tried to keep the farmers in the novel working - using various methods such as violence or even the effect of light. Thus, the first signs of organizing the farmers together were met with various obstacles.

Furthermore, once the characters decide to take action, Babb focuses on the issue of organizing the rest of the farmers by highlighting their worries of responsibilities. As the farmers pick on the fields they talk about their upcoming strike and about the worries of organizing all the workers:

“How many will do it when the time comes?” Milt asked. “Ain’t a man here satisfied with being robbed of his labor,” Garrison said. “But most of `em’ll be afraid, and you can’t blame `em. Got to be *somebody* responsible. These poor men and women ain’t gonna foller a lot of wind.”⁹⁹

Babb highlights the word ‘somebody’ by writing it in italics, which may underline the feeling of uncertainty as the word itself is not definite. The word can also point towards the disorganization of the farmers as they were not aware of who was organizing them and they all feared that they could end up in further difficulties. Dalton, Van Sickle and Weldon in *The*

⁹⁶ Babb, *Whose Names*, 158.

⁹⁷ Babb, *Whose Names*, 156.

⁹⁸ Abigail G. H. Manzella, “The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb’s *Whose Names Are Unknown*,” In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 92.

⁹⁹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 186.

Individual Institutional Nexus of Protest Behavior say that public and citizens engaging in action can lead to collective action of protest but at the same time community with low resources may not be as affective in organizing¹⁰⁰ This can also be applied to the disorganization of the farmers in Babb's novel. As the characters fear the consequences of the protests and do not know how many will join the strike, their resources are low because they may not have the numbers of people needed. Thus, as Babb highlights the uncertainty of the characters, their organizing proved to be difficult.

In addition, Babb also points out the unwillingness of the farmers to protest as they feared of the loss of their work and living space. Babb refers to this issue once the workers went to a meeting with the organizers of the protests, where they talked about getting some land in order to provide living spaces to the farmers. This could solve their fear of getting evicted and becoming homeless. They mentioned that if they have a place to go, they would be less afraid to join.¹⁰¹ Here, Babb shows the perspective of the organizers of the protests and their struggles to keep all the men together and trying to diminish their fears and the consequences of participating in the strikes. Abigail G. H. Manzella adds that:

Several of local governmental acts represented in Babb's novel return to this problem of vagrancy via the spaces the migrants can inhabit. Because Babb's characters do not have a home, the corporations' overarching control mechanism is the management of housing and with it space and movement.¹⁰²

As Manzella says, the corporations in the novel held the workers in check: they owned their housing premises and were able to evict them any time. The organizers of protests try to solve the problem by getting their own land. Therefore, Babb shows the issue of organizing the protests with the help of the perspective from the organizers.

Babb further depicts the issue of living space and identity during the protests by including an actual eviction letter. The eviction notice is given to the characters during one of the strikes. And issues the characters to move from the company's property within three days,¹⁰³ which illustrates that the land the characters lived on was not permanent; therefore, the lack of permanency in living added to the complication of protesting. Furthermore, this letter correlates with the novel's name as it is addressed as: "To John Doe and Mary Doe,

¹⁰⁰ Russel Dalton, Alix Van Sickle, and Steven Weldon, "The Individual-Institutional Nexus of Protest Behavior," *British Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 1 (2010): 54-55.

¹⁰¹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 192.

¹⁰² Abigail G. H. Manzella, "The Environmental Displacement of the Dust Bowl: From the Yeoman Myth to Collective Respect and Babb's Whose Names Are Unknown," In *Migrating Fictions: Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, 67-108 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 94.

¹⁰³ Babb, *Whose Names*, 220.

whose true names are unknown.”¹⁰⁴ This could indicate that Babb is trying throughout this novel to give a name to the anonymous migrant farmers. As Nicolas Coles and Paul *Lauter in American Working-Class literature* explain: the novel tries to give the anonymous disposed people of the period identity and make them known and named. However, unfortunately, the novel was silenced and not published until 2004 because Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* gained quick popularity. And another novel about the same topic would be anticlimactic according to the publishers and editors.¹⁰⁵ This demonstrates that although Babb might have tried to use the letter in pointing out the unknown identities of the farmers and further reveal the issue of land ownership, the whole novel was unfortunately silenced for many years.

Furthermore, Babb also includes a letter from the farmers to a committee member, which demonstrated that the characters were no longer willing to tolerate the harsh treatment. This letter is included right after the eviction notice, and it shows the contrast between farmers’ losing their living space and their new attitude towards their situation. As they wrote in the letter that they were just getting started and were only practicing.¹⁰⁶ Although they lost their living space with the eviction notice, their letter to the committee bears a positive message, which shows the change in the farmers’ attitude. Also, the farmers all signed the letter as “Mary Doe” and “John Doe.”¹⁰⁷ This implies a form of protest as they were addressed in the eviction letter anonymously; therefore, they also signed a personal letter with anonymous signatures. Both of these letters further contrast in their message, as the company’s notice has a negative message while the letter from the farmers has a positive message. Pamela J. Annas adds that “*Whose Names Are Unknown* has its powerful interpolations in the form of actual documents integrated into the text.”¹⁰⁸ Babb included the letters in the novel to support the mood and also to show the changes in the characters.

Additionally, Babb also includes an analysis of the protests from the characters themselves. After the strike was broken and the farmers were assigned to leave the camp they got together and talked about what had happened so far. And how they have changed and how they would continue with the strikes. Furthermore, the characters analyze how they have changed in the communities and how they were returning back to the close communities: “‘Gee, it’s a good feeling to be together. It’s sure good to feel the love of one another.’ The

¹⁰⁴ Babb, *Whose Names*, 220.

¹⁰⁵ Nicholas Coles and Paul Lauter, *American Working-Class Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 218.

¹⁰⁶ Babb, *Whose Names*, 220.

¹⁰⁷ Babb, *Whose Names*, 220.

¹⁰⁸ Pamela J. Annas, “Unknown No More,” review of *Whose Names Are Unknown*, by Sanora Babb, *Women’s Review of Books* 21, no. 10/11, July, 2004.

word *love* lay in the in the warm air of the little tent for each of them to feel in the unashamed and simple truth of his knowing.”¹⁰⁹ It is evident that the characters realized that standing together for the strikes brought them feeling of delight as Babb describes that they were unashamed. Moreover, Babb highlights ‘love’ in italics, which emphasizes the mood of almost peace of mind and further she describes it as lying in ‘warm air’ which supports the perception of perhaps even calmness. Narendra Mohan says that “It takes birth when a man decides to get a rid of the slave mentality.”¹¹⁰ Which could indicate that once the attitude of the farmers in the novel changed so did their perspective on their current situation. Thus, as the characters analyze their situation their feelings and perspective shift.

In conclusion, in the novel Babb shows the issue of forming the protests and handling the strikes. She foreshadows the protests before the characters move to California. However, due to the characters' mind frame, they are not able to see the issue yet. Additionally, due to the mind frame and lack of organization, the gathering of all the farmers together for the strikes was met with obstacles. Moreover, Babb integrates an eviction notice and a letter in one of the chapters. As she places them after one another, she contrasts the negative message with the positive one. Furthermore, once the mind frame of the characters shifts, they can analyze their situation. Therefore, Babb focuses on many issues of protests in *Whose Names Are Unknown*.

¹⁰⁹ Babb, *Whose Names*, 221.

¹¹⁰ Narendra. Mohan, "Protest and Literature." *Indian Literature* 18, no. 1 (1975): 92.

Conclusion

This Bachelor thesis analyzes Sanora Babb's work in regard to the 1930s era, namely the Dust Bowl, its aspect and impact. The thesis concentrates on the novel *Whose Names Are Unknown* and its regional features, motives of estrangement, displacement, and the forming of protests, while also analyzing the literary devices used in the novel.

The 1930s was a decade determined by the Dust Bowl's catastrophe, the Great Depression, and consequent mass migration. The Great Depression was an economic disaster predominately caused by the stock market crash, which influenced the standard of living and caused large-scale unemployment. This economic situation was later aggravated by devastating dust storms caused by improper cultivating of soil and by the climate in the Midwest. The dust storms later named Dust Bowl caused the rise of the farmland soils, which devastated the region and destroyed the crops. It also lowered people's living standard, causing illnesses like dust pneumonia, and further causing casualties in lives. Once the Great Depression combined with the Dust Storm, the two phenomena gave rise to mass migration. Vast majority of the farmers migrated to California, where they became migrant workers. These workers inhabited migrant camps which were built for them by either the government or the corporate companies. As the people migrated, they had to face numerous difficulties such as discrimination, like being included in the group of "Okies" regardless of their origin. As the crisis progressed, it gave rise to a new policy such as the New deal, which tried to lessen the catastrophes' impact and aid the people. Therefore, the 1930s was an extremely difficult time for multitudes of Americans, whose lives was often irreversibly affected by the decade's events.

The decade and its difficulties were depicted by numerous authors, one of them being Sanora Babb. In her work, Babb draws from her own experience, from growing up in Midwest as well as working in California migrant camps. Her intimate knowledge of the regions and of the struggles that people had to go through during the 1930s aided her in writing novels and journals depicting the era, such as *Whose Names Are Unknown*. Furthermore, her upbringing and lifestyle led her to leftist ideas and to the regional features in her work. Although she was a member of the communist party for a period of time, she did not use her work to promote her political views. Her aim was to depict the suffering which people had to endure in the decade, particularly in *Whose Names Are Unknown*. Here, she used her own experience to bring to light the lives of ordinary people while depicting the catastrophe of the Dust Bowl of the Great Depression

Drawing from her own experience, Babb also illustrates the Midwestern and Californian regional aspect in *Whose Names Are Unknown*. She depicts the scenery and climatic conditions of the two regions in her novel. Moreover, she focuses on the lives of the farmers and various aspects of the regions that influenced their lives. The characters are set in the Midwestern state of Oklahoma where the climate affects them to a considerable degree, predominantly the Dust Bowl itself, which Babb depicts using personification. Another regional aspect which Babb depicts is the conflict between the farmers and government, mainly the issue of taxes in the Midwest and the exploitation of the farmers by the banking companies. While Babb focuses on the conflict between the farmers and officials, she simultaneously brings the reader's attention to the two regions' communities. In her depiction of the Midwest, she focuses on the closeness of the communities, while in California, she depicts the change in the closeness and the mind frame of the characters. Furthermore, the difference between Midwest and California is not seen only in the difference in the communities but also in gender differences. In the Midwest, the women stay inside the houses while the men work in the fields; however, in California, the women join the men. Besides, Babb also points out the issue of education in the regions. Thus, Babb gives her readers a deep insight into all the varied aspects of the two regions of the time and into their differences.

The third chapter analyzes Babb's depiction of estrangement and displacement in the novel. Babb predominantly focuses on illustrating the feeling of isolation in the novel. She powerfully shows the characters' isolation during the dust storms: by inserting Julia's journal, a single voice reflects the difficult time: by letting this single voice speak in the journal, the feeling of isolation is conveyed and the terror experienced during the catastrophe is made tangible. The estrangement and isolation are not depicted only in Julia's record, but Babb also shows the farmers' perception of the rest of the world, which feels foreign to them. In addition, Babb also highlights how the characters distance themselves from the officials and the public. Furthermore, she foreshadows the characters' fate of estrangement and displacement by including a letter from one of the farmers: a letter with a story similar to one of the main characters. Additionally, Babb depicts the displacement of the characters through the stream of consciousness, in which she hints upon that the characters no longer have a home of their own once they migrate to California. This is further deepened by their reminiscing of their past lives in Oklahoma. Therefore, throughout the novel, Babb depicts various motives of estrangement and displacement's while using highlighting, foreshadowing, stream of consciousness, and inserting Julia's journal.

The last chapter analyzes the forming of protests and their consequences in the novel. Babb foreshadows the protests even before the characters migrate to California as she hints upon the idea of forming protests. However, due to the characters' mind-frame at that point in the novel, they did not take any action. As the characters move to California, they continue to hold the viewpoint of not retailing against the harsh condition and instead continue to work. Here, Babb depicts the difficulty of forming the protests. Not only did the mind-frame of the workers in the novel caused hindered the organizing of protests, but so did the employing companies, which actively tried to break any attempt at their organization. Furthermore, Babb uses comparison and light to create the mood in the novel. Additionally, Babb depicts the change in the character once they realize that change is needed. She highlights the feelings and perhaps even relief the characters felt once they gained a goal in changing their situation. Moreover, she contrasts the change of the characters regarding the protests in two letters. One of them having negative implication as they were issued to leave the camp, and the other having a positive context as they write to a member of the association that they will not concede. Thus, Sanora Babb depicts the forming of protests and their challenges, while simultaneously showing their impact on the characters' attitudes.

To conclude, Sanora Babb illustrates numerous aspects of the Dust Bowl and the 1930s in *Whose Names Are Unknown*. She depicts various regional features of Midwest and California, raging from the climate to the communities. Furthermore, she draws attention to motives of estrangement and displacement while focusing on the feeling of isolation. In addition, she illustrates the problem of forming protests and the changes in people it causes. While focusing on these topics, she draws from her experience, uses highlighting, comparison, stream of consciousness, and inserts various literary forms such as a journal and letters. With their help, she depicts the fate of thousands of migrant farmers, and thus the spirit of the 1930s, a time of enormous challenges caused by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu díla *Whose Names Are Unknown* od americké autorky Sanory Babb. Toto dílo zobrazuje život farmářů v třicátých letech dvacátého století, konkrétně během prašných bouří, tzv. Dust Bowl, a dopad tohoto jevu na životy farmářů. Analyzuje také regionální motivy středozápadu a Kalifornie, motivy vyvlastnění a odcizení, ale také problematiku formování protestů.

Nedílnou součástí této bakalářské práce je teoretická část, která se zabývá historickým pozadím třicátých let 20. století. V této době Spojené Státy Americké čelily mnoha katastrofám, jedním, z nichž byla Velká hospodářská krize. Tato krize byla následkem pádu Americké burzy a způsobila celosvětovou krizi, jež měla velmi závažné důsledky, a to především obrovskou nezaměstnanost. V USA se k tomuto problému navíc připojila i tzv. Dust Bowl, což byla série prašných bouří, které zasáhly region středozápadu a způsobily zkázu mnoha farem, ale i životů. Samotná „Dust Bowl“ je historicky pojata několika pohledy, neboť někteří historici na ni nahlízejí jako na zkázu způsobenou čistě lidským faktorem, ale jiní ji ovšem vnímají jako kombinaci nevhodného způsobu obdělávání půdy společně s přírodním faktorem. Neboť tento region byl ve 30. letech zasáhnut dlouholetými suchy. Série prašných bouří a Velká hospodářská krize vyústily v hromadnou migraci, během které převážná většina farmářů migrovala ze středozápadu do Kalifornie. Tato migrace propojena s ekonomickým postihem a prašných bouří dala také vznik novým zákonům, které měli snížit dopady obou krizí.

Teoretická kapitola této bakalářské práce také stručně nastiňuje Sanoru Babb jako levicovou a regionální autorku. Naznačuje její život jak ve Středozápadu, kde vyrůstala, tak i v Kalifornii kde později v migrantských táborech žila i pracovala. Její životní zkušenosti ovlivnily její politické přesvědčení společně s její tvorbou, která pro ni ale byla mnohem více prostorem k zobrazení pohnutých lidských osudů než místem ke hlásání levicových přesvědčení. Některé z těchto děl jsou například: *The Lost Traveler*, *An Owl On Every Post* a také *Whose Names Are Unknown*. Babb je tedy jednou z autorů pohlížející na vyobrazení Ameriky v tomto desetiletí.

Druhá kapitola se zabývá analýzou díla *Whose Names Are Unknown* z regionálního úhlu pohledu, a soustředí se na oblasti Středozápadu a Kalifornie. Rozebírá aspekty obou regionů jako je například jejich podnebí, kde se soustředí na vnímání rozdílů v podnebí v těchto regionech postavami románu, a vyobrazení samotné prašné bouře. Tato kapitola se

nedívá pouze na podnebí, ale také na samotné komunity farmářů a jejich rozdíl mezi Kalifornií a středozápadem. Navíc je v této kapitole ukázáno, jak autorka nastiňuje konflikt mezi farmáři a podnikateli, úředníky či vlastníky plantáží, kde na problematiku nahlíží převážně z perspektivy farmářů, ale někdy i z pohled úředníků. Dalším rozdílem mezi Kalifornií a Středozápadem, kterým se tato kapitola zabývá, je rozdíl mezi rolemi a úkoly pohlaví v těchto regionech. Navíc také nastiňuje problematiku vzdělávání dětí z farmářských rodin v obou regionech, kde nahlíží na různé faktory ovlivňující možnost vzdělání. Na všechna témata v této kapitole je nahlíženo z hlediska literárního a kulturního: práce se soustředí na způsob, jakým Babb vystihuje problematiku těchto témat, ale zároveň i na zdroj, z kterého čerpá, což je z velké části její vlastní zkušenost.

Následující kapitola se zabývá vyobrazením motivům vyvlastnění a odcizení v románu. Sanora Babb vyobrazuje tyto motivy s důrazem na motiv izolace, který je velice zřetelný v období prašných bouří. Autorka ilustruje tuto izolaci doslovně, což jde vidět v činnostech postav, jako je například zablokování oken a dveří proti prachu. Tímto činem se farmáři ovšem neizolují pouze od všepronikajícího prachu, ale i od samotné komunity farmářů, navíc také i od okolního světa. Sanora Babb rovněž využívá ilustraci této izolace v abstraktním pojetí, která jde nejlépe vidět v deníku který si Julia píše během těchto bouří. Navíc Babb ztvárňuje izolaci nejen v průběhu prašných bouří ale také mezi samotnými farmáři a zbytkem populace ve Spojených státech ale i zbytkem celého světa. Sanora Babb rovněž ilustruje tuto izolaci na deníku, který si postava jménem Julia píše během bouří. Babb také tímto deníkem dává hlas jedné postavě, díky níž se zaměřuje na motivy izolace. Důsledkem prašných bouří nebyla pouze vnitřní a vnější izolace, ale v posledku vyvlastnění farmářů z jejich pozemků a jejich migraci do Kalifornie, na západ. Při tomto vyvlastnění Babb navíc popisuje pomyslnou všudypřítomnost vlastníků plantáží, kteří jsou tak vnímáni přesto, že vlastníci plantáží fyzicky nikdy přítomni nejsou. Babb navíc nepřímou celým osudem postav a tím pádem i jejich odcizením a vyvlastněním v románu předem nastíní, a to jak čtenáři, tak i samotným postavám. Babb tedy v převážné části románu ilustruje různé motivy vyvlastnění a odcizení, a to za pomoci deníku nepsaným jedné z postav, a také zvýrazněním a naznačením budoucího děje.

Poslední kapitola se soustředí na vyobrazení formování protestů a jejich vlivu na postavy. Babb ukazuje, jak nelehké bylo organizovat shromažďování a sjednocování farmářů. Faktor, který ztěžuje formování protestů v románu, je snaha vlastníků plantáží a jejich zaměstnanců aktivně rozehnat jakékoliv náznaky vytváření nějaké organizace. Vlastníci plantáží se snažili rozehnat organizování farmářů například vložением špehů do polí, či zaměstnáním lidí, kteří měli za úkol rozehnat či vyprovokovat farmáře. Autorka se v románu

především zaměřuje na perspektivu a pocity farmářů a jejich postupnou proměnu. Důležitým činitelem, který změní toto vnitřní nastavení a hodnoty farmářů, je to, že si uvědomí svá práva. Ke konci románu autorka zobrazuje nově nabyté odhodlání postav vzdorovat nespravedlivému zacházení pomocí dopisu, který farmářům oznamuje vystěhování z tábora, a dalšího dopisu, v kterém farmáři odpovídají. Autorka navíc tyto dopisy vložila hned za sebe, kde dává do kontrastu negativní a pozitivní správu. V dopise od farmářů autorka také ukazuje jistou formu protestu, kdy se farmáři nepodepisují vlastními jmény, ale jmény „Jane Doe“ a „John Doe“, které slouží jako anonymní podpisy, které jim byli často přidělovány vlastníky plantáží. Formování protestů, a především změna postoje farmářů k nim, jsou tedy klíčovým aspektem románu.

Souhrnem, tato Bakalářská práce nastiňuje, jak dílo *Whose Names Are Unknown* od Sanory Babb vyobrazuje rozličné faktory života farmářů ze Středozápadu zasáhnutého tzv. Dust Bowl a jejich migraci do Kalifornie ve třicátých letech dvacátého století. Navíc analyzuje dílo a způsob jakým autorka nastiňuje danou problematiku z hlediska jak literárního, tak i kulturního.

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