

HYBRIDITY AND MIGRANT IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SHORT STORIES 'ONE OUT OF MANY' AND 'THE THING AROUND YOUR NECK'

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Abstract

This research explores the representation of hybridity and migrant identity in two short stories: One Out of Many by V. S. Naipaul and The Thing Around Your Neck by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Using Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory, in this context is particularly the concepts of hybridity, third space, and ambivalence, this study investigates how the protagonists negotiate their fragmented identities while navigating cultural displacement. Through a descriptive qualitative method and close textual analysis, this research finds that both characters inhabit the in-between space between their culture of origin and the dominant culture of the host country. Santosh's adaptation is marked by silent compromise, while Akunna's experience reveals symbolic resistance against racialized stereotypes and unequal power structures. Despite their different social backgrounds and responses, both texts affirm that migrant identity is not fixed but constantly shaped by conflict, negotiation, and hybridity. This study contributes to postcolonial literary discourse by highlighting how literature can articulate complex migrant subjectivities beyond reductive narratives.

Keywords: *hybridity, migrant identity, postcolonial theory, short story, in-between space*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi hibriditas dan identitas migran dalam dua cerpen, yaitu *One Out of Many* karya V. S.

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Naipaul dan *The Thing Around Your Neck* karya Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Dengan menggunakan teori pascakolonial Homi K. Bhabha, khususnya konsep hibriditas, *third space* (ruang ketiga), dan ambivalensi, penelitian ini menelaah bagaimana para tokoh utama menegosiasikan identitas mereka yang terfragmentasi ketika menghadapi perpindahan budaya. Melalui metode deskriptif kualitatif dan analisis teks secara mendalam, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kedua tokoh berada dalam ruang antara (*in-between space*) yang mempertemukan budaya asal mereka dengan budaya dominan di negara tujuan. Adaptasi Santosh ditandai oleh kompromi yang bersifat diam-diam, sementara pengalaman Akunna menunjukkan bentuk perlawanan simbolik terhadap stereotip rasial dan struktur kekuasaan yang tidak setara. Meskipun berasal dari latar sosial dan respons yang berbeda, kedua teks menegaskan bahwa identitas migran tidak bersifat tetap, melainkan terus dibentuk melalui konflik, negosiasi, dan hibriditas. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian sastra pascakolonial dengan menyoroti bagaimana karya sastra mampu mengartikulasikan subjektivitas migran yang kompleks, melampaui narasi-narasi yang menyederhanakan.

Kata kunci: hibriditas, identitas migran, teori pascakolonial, cerpen, ruang antara (*in-between space*)

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of migration has been an important part of human history, and has evolved over time with different motives and impacts. Migration does not only involve physical movement from one place to another, but also involves deep psychological and cultural conditions. A national or cultural migration process is not just moving from one place to another but also influences in different ways the human identity of ten causing a crisis in this regard (Wagner, 2016). This highlights that migration is not merely a physical transition but a complex emotional and psychological experience, as the migrant constantly navigates between loss and longing, shaping their evolving sense of identity. *The migrant will seek in the host country*

what he was missing in his home country and will miss in the host country the things that he left in the country of origin (Vordermeyer, 2012, p. 48).

Individuals who live between two cultures often experience an identity crisis because they have to navigate differences in values, language, social systems and ways of life. This is what leads to the condition of hybridity, hybridity is understood as a process of cultural mixing that occurs in interstitial spaces, meaning intermediate spaces that are not fully on one side of a particular culture or the other.

Homi K. Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), states that “*Social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.*” (*The Location of Culture*, p. 2). This means that hybridity is not a simple matter, but rather a complex process that requires negotiation in response to shifting historical conditions, particularly within the context of power and colonialism. Anthias (2001) further explains that “*hybridity denotes an ‘in-between’ cultural configuration,*” which enables the emergence of new forms of collective identity through the encounter between dominant and marginalized cultures.

In this case, literature becomes one of the important mediums in recording and exploring the experience of migrant identity that is divided between ‘origin’ and ‘destination’. The role of art and literature in migrant representation reflects the dynamics of power, cultural affiliation, and alienation experienced by migrant subjects, as stated by Brownlie that “*literature plays a crucial role in articulating migrant identity beyond media simplifications*” (Brownlie, 2021).

In literary studies, postcolonial theory provides a strong analytical framework to understand these dynamics, especially through the concept of hybridity introduced by Homi K. Bhabha. The short stories *One Out of Many* and *The Thing Around Your Neck* are examples of literary works that share the same narrative of the concept of hybridity and migrant identity. The selection of short stories is not only because they have the same concept related to hybridity, but also based on the experiences brought by the author as a migrant who moves and settles. Although they come from different cultural backgrounds and geographical contexts, where V. S. Naipaul came from India to America and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie from Nigeria to America, they both write from an *in-between* position, a position that is not fully derived from the “center” of the dominant culture, but also not fully bound to their culture of origin.

Through their own migration experiences and personal observations, both authors present narratives of identity ambivalence, alienation, and the search for self-

meaning in a foreign culture. Both short stories showcase the characters' struggles as well as illustrate the process of adapting identity in a divided and negotiated situation, and reflect the current global postcolonial condition.

This study aims to analyze the representation of cultural hybridity experienced by the main character in the short stories *One Out of Many* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Through a postcolonial approach, this study aims to examine how the main character in each story responds to the dynamics of cultural mixing and undergoes a process of searching and negotiating identity in the midst of a new and unfamiliar environment, both socially and culturally. In addition, this research also aims to compare the narratives of the two stories in describing the dynamics, including identity crisis, alienation, and adaptation efforts undertaken by the characters. Therefore, this research is expected to be useful in providing knowledge about how migrant identities are constructed and negotiated in postcolonial-themed literary works.

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a postcolonial literary approach. *The characteristic of descriptive qualitative research lies in its attempt to create a systematic, accurate, and factual general description of the facts, characteristics, and relationships among the phenomena being studied* (Nazir, 2014). This approach allows the researcher to interpret the representation of migrant characters and narratives in depth within the framework of postcolonial theory. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity is used as the analytical foundation to examine the dynamics of migrant identity in both short stories. The analysis focuses on narrative elements such as setting, characterization, point of view, and internal conflict.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the analysis of two short stories, *One Out of Many* by V. S. Naipaul and *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, with a focus on the representation of hybridity and the main character's migrant identity. Each of the following subsections will discuss the representation of hybridity in each short story, followed by a comparison and theoretical reading that relates the findings to the postcolonial context.

Representation of Hybridity in *One Out of Many*

The short story *One Out of Many* by V. S. Naipaul represents the process of cultural hybridity experienced by the main character, Santosh, through his migration journey from Bombay (now Mumbai) to Washington. It is said that Santosh moved from India to America because he followed his employer, an important man from the

government, who was transferred from Bombay to Washington, D.C. for official duties. This move was not of his own free will, but rather due to circumstances and socio-economic pressures that forced him to go comply. After arriving in Washington, Santosh was no longer a servant who felt comfortable within the Indian social structure. But in America, he was no one either; he was illegal, alienated, and without a place of his own.

"I hadn't escaped; I had never been free. I had been abandoned. I was like nothing; I had made myself nothing." The short story quotes are in line with Bhabha's opinion in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) *"Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present'... caught so well in the French rendition of the words au-delà – here and there, on all sides, hither and thither, back and forth."* The following quotation from the short story is an example of existential confusion: a person who feels "never truly free" and "a nobody." This aligns with Homi Bhabha's concept of the *in-between*, where an individual exists between two worlds, neither fully returning to their origin nor being accepted by the dominant culture. In this threshold space, identity becomes an arena for negotiation and hybridization. Umar and Lawan (2024) state that the in-between space contains complex cultural burdens and meanings, because it is where hybrid identities are formed. Individuals living between two cultures are no longer bound to a single identity, but instead form fluid, reflective and interstitial subjectivities, opening up space for new meanings and power in postcolonial narratives.

Santosh was a servant back in India. Even though his life was poor, he felt respected: *"I was so happy in Bombay... I had a certain position."* However, the events that followed his arrival in America changed his way of thinking. One of them occurred when he became the center of attention and experienced rejection because of the way he behaved and dressed: *"I was in my ordinary Bombay clothes... I felt heads turning whenever I stood up."* This shows that the symbols of his native culture were not accepted in the new social space. Upon his arrival in Washington, Santosh experiences culture shock and feels alienated in his new place, which he describes as a prison: *"Below that imitation sky I felt like a prisoner."* His identity oscillated in the *"in-between space"* of India and America.

Furthermore, Santosh's experience illustrates how hybridity is not always harmonious, but is often filled with inner conflict. Shah (2016) emphasizes that within this in-between space, individuals experience *cultural hybridity* as a mixture and tension between two cultures that do not fully coexist in harmony. Although Santosh attempts to adapt to American culture such as watching movies, buying food from the

local community, and forming relationships with locals, he still feels neither fully accepting nor accepted. He experiences alienation and lacks a community he truly feels a part of: *"I was looking for a cafe or a tea stall where perhaps domestics congregated. But I saw no domestics."*

This process of cultural mixing results in fragmented identities. *"These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood... that initiate new signs of identity."* (Bhabha, 1994, p.1) Santosh cannot fully assimilate; although he adopts the new culture, he still cannot break away from his old culture. His act of deliberately hiding his identity from the authorities is a form of self-defense against the clash between the two cultures. This shows that hybridity is not a form of complete integration, but an ongoing state of negotiation.

Overall, *One Out of Many* depicts hybridity as a complex and ambivalent experience. The characters' identities develop not in a straight line, but through a process of negotiation in the spaces of unstable cultural boundaries. The story thus reflects Bhabha's idea that *"the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation."*

Representation of Migrant Hibridity in *The Thing Around Your Neck*

The short story *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie illustrates the complexity of the Nigerian female migrant experience in dealing with American social and cultural realities. The main character, Akunna, represents the voice of migrants who not only experience geographical displacement, but also an identity crisis that arises from the split between the culture of origin and the culture of destination. Referring to Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theoretical framework, Akunna's experience is in what is referred to as the *in-between* space, a boundary space that creates ambivalence in the process of identity formation, same with the short story *One Out of Many*.

Akunna, who came to America through the American Visa Lottery program, initially lived with her uncle's family. Akunna came to America with a hopeful imagination: *"Right after you won the American visa lottery, they told you: In a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house. But don't buy a gun like those Americans."*

At first her uncle was kind by giving Akunna a temporary place to stay, telling her how to apply to be a cashier at a gas station, and enrolling her in community college. However, it all came to naught when her uncle sexually abused her. Akunna

decided to leave, arrived in Connecticut, and worked illegally in a restaurant. It was there that she began to experience the upheaval of her identity as a migrant.

Akunna's identity is not only negotiated socially, but also culturally. She witnessed how the lives of the people in America she had just met were very different from what she had thought or experienced.

She also witnessed how the American society viewed her as *"the other"* making her an object of exoticism and stereotypes. For example, customers thought she was from Jamaica, students asked if she had ever seen a car before coming to America, or those who said they loved elephants and wanted to go on a safari to Africa.

This shows that migrants' identities are not only constructed by themselves, but also shaped by the way others perceive them through the exotic and racist lenses dominant in the host society. Silverstein (2005) also states that *"the structuring perception of immigrant otherness and the discursive construction of said identity... shows how migration is racialized through discourses of threat and difference."*

Akunna is at a point of intercultural mixing, as when she begins a relationship with a white American man. Although the relationship offers a space of intimacy, the narrative shows that the relationship remains in a confusion of meaning and understanding. When she tells him about her father's experiences in Nigeria, he says *"I understand how you feel,"* to which Akunna responds bitterly: *"There was nothing to understand, it was just the way it was."* This statement reflects her resistance to the simplification of the migration experience by outsiders, especially the dominant group (in this case her lover). Celikates (2022), in his article on epistemic resistance, states that *"dominant simplifications of migrant struggles often obscure their epistemic contributions."* This means that Akunna refuses to have her narrative reduced to something easily understood or responded to with superficial empathy.

The symbol *"the thing around your neck"* becomes a metaphor for the psychic pressure that chokes her existence. The sentence *"At night, something would wrap itself around your neck, something that very nearly choked you before you fell asleep."* is a concrete representation of the anxiety, alienation, and identity doubt that continue to weigh on the main character. This is in line with what Bhabha calls *"the unhomely"*, an experience where private space no longer provides a sense of security, and personal identity becomes the intersection of history, migration, and cultural shifts. *"To be unhomed is not to be homeless, not necessarily. It is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation. To be unhomed is to know that in this world there is no space that is not somehow*

striated by histories or cultures of displacement." (Bhabha, Introduction: "Unhomely Lives", hlm. 9–10)

Through the protagonist's experiences, Adichie shows how migrant identities are fluid and constantly negotiated. She keeps a gift from her boyfriend for her family in Nigeria, but does not send a letter for fear of not being able to meet her family's expectations if she 'only' sends a letter without perfume, bag, or money. This reflects Akunna's migrant experience as an ongoing process between resistance and adjustment, between "origin" and "destination."

In Akunna's ending, she finally chooses to return to Nigeria after knowing that her father is dead, and her relationship with the American man adds to her reasons for going back to Nigeria, and possibly not returning, after the trauma of being abused, the isolation of being a dark-skinned female migrant, and the racist stereotypes that have surrounded her.

"He held you while you cried, smoothed your hair, and offered to buy your ticket, to go with you to see your family. You said no, you needed to go alone. He asked if you would come back and you reminded him that you had a green card and you would lose it if you did not come back in one year. He said you knew what he meant, would you come back, come back?"

Therefore, *The Thing Around Your Neck* depicts migrant identity as fragmented and uncertain. This short story not only tells a personal experience, but also reflects the global postcolonial reality, where migration becomes an arena for identity struggles, not just a change of place.

A Comparative Representation of Hybridity and Migrant Identity in *One Out of Many* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*

Based on the explanation of how the two short stories, *One Out of Many* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*, represent migrant identity and the phenomenon of hybridity, it is known that they have fundamental similarities and differences based on the content of the story, which can be seen in the way the main character navigates cultural alienation, negotiates self-identity, and responds to social pressure in the new environment.

In terms of similarities, Santosh and Akunna both experience identity fragmentation due to cross-cultural displacement. Both try to adapt to new norms and values in order to survive. Although Santosh remains bound by the Indian values he carries and Akunna is also still much overshadowed by the differences between her and her lover who crashes into the dominant structure.

Both are also in what is called *the third space* based on Homi K. Bhabha's perspective, where the space between the culture of origin and the culture of destination, which gives rise to a new, unstable form of identity. In the short story *One Out of Many* "*I was a free man; I could do anything I wanted. But freedom meant I could also starve. It didn't matter what I did, because I was alone.*" Showing that Santosh feels free but constrained at the same time because of his migrant identity. Akunna, on the other hand, not only feels cultural pressure, but also experiences structural violence and unequal power relations as a black migrant woman, especially in her relationship with her white male boyfriend.

Meanwhile, in terms of differences in social background and gender, the characters greatly influence the way they respond to the migration experience. Santosh is an adult man, although he experiences alienation in his new environment, he as a man still has room to shape his ability to survive. Meanwhile, Akunna is a young woman from the black race, which positions her in a double layer of vulnerability.

Differences are also evident in the way the two characters deal with the new identity. Santosh tends to be compromising, not actively resisting but adjusting slowly. Meanwhile, Akunna shows a form of symbolic resistance. She does not accept the dominant narrative that tries to understand or simplify her experience as a migrant. Her action of not accepting gifts from her lover and choosing to keep them for her family. As stated in the following quote:

"... you asked him not to, you didn't want any presents at all. He bought them anyway and you kept them for your cousins and uncles and aunts, for when you would one day be able to visit home..."

One form of Akunna's resistance is not wanting the man to have material power over her or as a form of rejection of unequal relations and hidden exoticism.

In terms of narrative, *One Out of Many* emphasizes the internal reflection and psychological transformation of the characters, while *The Thing Around Your Neck* more explicitly shows the clash between cultural systems, racism, and gender experience. If in *One Out of Many* the character experiences a slow transition to a new form of life even without certainty, then in *The Thing Around Your Neck* the character remains in a crushed condition without a clear affirmation of identity resolution.

CONCLUSION

This research discusses the representation of hybridity and migrant identity in two short stories, *One Out of Many* by V. S. Naipaul and *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, through Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory approach. Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that both short stories present a picture of the complexity of the migrant experience in different cultural contexts, as well as the never-ending struggle for identity.

Both protagonists, Santosh and Akunna, experience split identities as a result of cultural displacement and social pressure in the destination country. Both are in an in-between space, a place where identity is shaped through negotiation and ambivalent cultural mixing. Santosh undergoes a silent transformation through careful compromise and adaptation, while Akunna expresses resistance to the dominance of Western narratives and the stereotypes attached to her. Factors such as social background, race and gender influence the way both characters respond to their migration experiences.

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