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The Dynamics of Cultural Hybridity in Postcolonial Societies

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Abstract: This essay draws from The Location of Culture. The thing around your neck and The Lonely Londoners etc. It aims to analyze life in different literary contexts in the post-colonial environment, thus highlighting the main body (Hybridity)of this thesis. It will demonstrate The Dynamics of Cultural Hybridity in Postcolonial Societies through the stories Imitation and The Headstrong Historian in the novel *The Thing Around Your Neck* and The Boys in the *The Lonely Londoners*. Finally, this essay discovers the prevalence of hybridization in once colonized countries and its profound impact on people. This paper has broad universal and educational significance which can help people in the third world who are still suffering from the effects of colonialism can be encouraged spiritually. At the same time, they can be given different methods to change their circumstances and better adapt to life in the post-colonial environment.

Keywords: Hybridity, Post-colonial literature, The thing around your neck, The Location of Culture.

1. Introduction

"However, as the century progressed, literature departments increasingly found it necessary to account for the other traditions of writing in the English language, perhaps most notably the extensive and unavoidable oeuvre produced within the most globally significant former British colony of the United States.[1]" It affirms the importance of some post-colonial literature books, so this essay explores the theme of hybridity in the post-colonial context. Through the stories of Nkem, Grace, and Gboyega in *The Thing Around Your Neck* and tales of Bart, Moses, and Galahad in *The Lonely Londoners* they together explore the processes of cultural adaptation, resistance, and estrangement that individuals navigate within their native and foreign cultural landscapes. Individuals in different classes should take the initiative to adjust their hybrid roles by implementing various kinds of strategies. Most importantly, this essay highlights the complex interplay between cultures, and demonstrates that to establish a sense of belonging and self-understanding, individuals must balance their heritage with new cultural influences.

2. Perface

Nkem's relationship with her housegirl changes because of American egalitarianism and her loneliness, and Nkem's house can be seen as a space in between which American and Nigerian cultures are mixed to embody hybridity. Grace's assertive embrace of her cultural heritage amidst

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Western educational pressures represents hybridity as a form of empowerment. Lastly, Gboyega's estrangement from his African roots, prompted by his Western education, underscores the cultural dislocation. Collectively, their stories exemplify the theme of hybridity. Cap's addictions to cigarettes and women illustrate his evolution of cultural hybrid identity, blending Nigerian and British cultural identities. Cap is perceived as the kind of person of little value, yet he appears to lead a longer and happier life. Obviously, the contradictions are that although Cap is penniless, he still splashes out on cigarettes and alcohol pretending he is rich, and although he wears the same clothing from day to day, but ensures that it is always clean. The dramatic conflict in this character reveals his inclination to a hybrid identity in resisting foreign cultures. On the contrary, Bart's experience shows a totally different hybrid identity inclination. Bart fails to marry a white girl due to his skin color(alhough he is light-skinned) but he still loves this girl and tries to find her one day. This reveals his adaptation to living in a foreign culture. Galahad is a newcomer in London compared to Moses, who is the first batch of immigrants. Their differences highlight the alienation between people caused by hybridity.

The stories of Nkem, Bart, and Cap illustrate how individuals adapt to in-between environments. In "Imitation,[2]" Nkem grapples with the complexities of a transatlantic marriage to a wealthy Nigerian businessman, Obiora, who lives in Lagos while she and their children reside in the US. Her discovery of Obiora's infidelity through a friend, and the presence of his young mistress in their Lagos home, prompts a profound identity crisis for Nkem, leading her to question her role as the distant wife. In the process of adapting to American society, the hybridity demonstrated by Nkem highlights how individuals under a postcolonial context strive to adapt and forge new ways of living between different cultures. Nkem experienced a transition from the traditional social structures of Nigeria to the egalitarian culture of the United States. In Nigeria, there is usually a clear social status difference between employers and housegirls, which is significantly diminished in the United States. Nkem's gradual embrace of egalitarianism led her to increasingly perceive the housegirl as a friend with equal status, which is a manifestation of cultural hybridity at the personal relationship level. The change in this relationship is not only influenced by the American cultural environment, but also a response to personal feelings of loneliness and the search for a sense of belonging in a new cultural environment. Homi Bhabha demonstrates that "each objective is constructed on the trace of that perspective that it puts under erasure[3]."In order to fully adapt to British culture, Bart is advised to give up some of his inherent identities according to this theory. His heart is filled with self-doubt and denial as a result of his hybrid identity. Firstly, for the sake of his light skin, he always feels ashamed and uneasy when he is found in the company of the black boys and he refuses to admit he is one of them. That is interesting because, under the influence of hybridity, he resisted his original skin tone and had a tendency to be disgusted with his black fellow, even himself. Secondly, Bart was invited to the girl's home, and claimed he was a Latin-American, but finally was kicked out by the girl's father. The things that he can do is to go mourning with boys and look all around London for the girl. If he had claimed he was Latin-American, he might have been accepted by the girl's family.

3. Adaptation

Nkem's home serves as an embodiment of a hybrid space, illustrating the concept of hybrid identity within a cultural environment. This in-between zone is depicted through the physical setting of their residence—a modern house situated in the West, yet brimming with African antiques and reflecting a lifestyle that intertwines American style with Nigerian customs. The presence of the Benin mask in the living room, serving as a symbol of African heritage, alongside detailed descriptions of the Victoria Garden City neighborhood where their house is located, underscores the intentional creation of a space that incorporates both Western and African elements. This duality not only represents the physical manifestation of hybridity but also mirrors the complex identities of the characters who navigate these intertwined cultural realities. Homi Bhabha states that "mimicry represents an ironic

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compromise"[3] in a post-colonial context. Nkem volunteers for Pilates classes and bakes cookies for her children's classes. Obiora believes that Nkem's short haircut in order to imitate Western fashion trends is not only a superficial imitation of the American lifestyle, but more importantly, these actions reflect her deep interaction and integration with the American culture. This imitation is not only an effort to integrate into American society, but also a critical acceptance and reshaping of American culture, showing a cultural "ironic compromise". In Nkem's case, American culture "has grown on her and snaked its roots under her skin," symbolically indicating the process by which these cultural elements have become an intrinsic part of her and have fundamentally influenced her thoughts, behavior, and identity. Through this fusion, Nkem constructed her own hybrid identity in a cultural space that was neither entirely Nigerian nor entirely American. Money is depicted as an embodiment of a hybrid item, demonstrating the notion of hybrid identity within a cultural framework. Not only is money a necessity for Cap, but it also plays a crucial role in achieving his life goals, such as getting a woman and indulging in smoking Benson and Hedges. Cap has the commercial brain to earn 100 pounds and all his odd money is got from various kinds of girls, but the weirdest thing is that he always escapes to find a formal job and makes lots of excuses about it. His attitude toward money is revealed in between hybrid zone, he chooses to escape from it and give up resistance. In terms of money, it is the only placebo for him to survive in this lonely city. At the same time, his insatiable desire for money and women indicates that he has lost all his inherent identities and has become a beast without personality and moral consciousness.

4. Resistance

“In writing set in the early days of the newly independent nation, the struggle of the young protagonist is often linked with wider efforts at decolonizing and the difficulties of establishing the coordinates of a viable post-independence identity. This feature is shared with other forms of post-colonial writing and has been the subject of much critical debate in post-colonial criticism and theory.[4]”Here, the struggle for viable identity is the process of resistance. So resistance is another important notion in hybridity that few individuals follow as it demands courage and wisdom. Through the stories of Grace, Galahad, and Moses, their different ways of resistance can be accurately revealed. The story of *The Headstrong Historianrevolves* around the intergenerational struggle for identity and the impact of colonial influence. Ultimately, it celebratrs the return to indigenous roots through Nwamgba's granddaughter, Grace (Afamefuna), who embraces her heritage and becomes a historian, reclaiming and documenting the suppressed histories of her people. Within the tapestry of a multicultural society, the story of Grace showcases the challenges individuals face due to the amalgamation of diverse cultural influences in post-colonial contexts. Her grandmother embodies the rich cultural legacy of Nigeria's native traditions, striving to impart this legacy to the next generation through the medium of poetry. However, within the framework of Western-centric education, these ancestral practices are dismissed as "primitive" and "meaningless", mirroring the broader devaluation of African cultures. The education Grace receives underscores the supremacy and preferred status of Western cultural norms, notably when her educators fail to acknowledge the poetic value of the call-and-response techniques taught by her grandmother. As Abraham observes, education in such contexts has been leveraged to extol the virtues of colonial powers, disseminating their language and cultural practices while simultaneously deprecating indigenous ways of life[5]. This educational paradigm in post-colonial environments systematically elevates Western cultural standards, marginalizing native traditions and values, and promotes the erasure of African cultural markers in individuals like Grace, pushing them towards the assimilation of Western cultural norms. Grace's decision to become a historian and revert to her indigenous name represents a form of resistance and a struggle for power. For Bhabha, hybridity is a weapon for fighting against colonial power that hybrids create a space that is in between the fixed identities of the colonial and precolonial subjects, and reject the notion of a

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single sense of identity. There is a muscle within this rejection: “Hybridity is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” [3]. By doing so, Grace not only claims her cultural heritage but also enacts a form of resistance against the colonial imposition of identity, embracing Bhabha's concept of hybridity as a means to contest and renegotiate power dynamics.

Vanessa et al. state that “These ‘in-between’ people or hyphenated communities occupy a displaced position which can provoke a sense of fragmentation, dislocation, and discontinuity, both in terms of space and time[6].” *In Lonely Londoners*, the Boys, along with Cap, Harris, Bart, Galahad, and Moses would gather together on some Sunday mornings. They would discuss what they have experienced in the city, and Moses played the role of the listener for the most part.. They would exchange their own things, some sharing, some complaining, some confessing, as if they had entered inside a rift in another time and space, but the truth was: these in-between people merely coexist within the same city and party. The hybrid space brings these in-between people together, but it also separates them in space, like isolated islands. Additionally, when Sir Galahad initially sought employment, Moses warned him about the challenges of life in London, but he was unimpressed. Guided for the first time to leave Moses, he walked in the unfamiliar city, seeing things never before seen. As he watched a passerby pick up a newspaper and put money in the box, he was dazed. This plot highlights the sense of splitting space and time in the Galahad. Then he saw the swirling fog and the shape of the sun that he had never seen before. The fog exacerbates the discontinuity and dislocation of space for Galahad. However, Moses is the best representation of the ambiguity of space and time. For example, on the final page of the novel, Moses roams at the park, and keeps asking, “What happening man” and “How long you in Britain boy”. In the end, he seemed to realize something but felt powerless when facing fate. It reveals that in the in-between space Britain, Moses understands it is a hybrid that guides his destiny from beginning to end. But the sense of fragmentation and dislocation didn’t defeat him, as he’s not Cap. He finds his way to confront it by writing a book themed on hybridity, recording all his life experiences to enlighten in-between people.

Neumann states that “Together with other, largely male migrants, they struggle to cope with the material, social and affective complexities of diasporic life. We witness their at times desperate attempts at upholding a sense of dignity in the face of growing racism in post-war Britain[7].” To overcome the difficulties brought by racism and hybridity, these West Indian and African men take different paths. It is worth discussing the comparison between Galahad and Moses because they have completely distinct hybrid identities. “Now Galahad is a fella who is full of grand charge.”[8]In terms of Galahad, he is a newcomer, so he dares to break through and the spirit to resist. In his conversation with Moses, who has come to London the next day, he feels that Moses is frightening him by saying how terrible populating London is. It is not courage, but recklessness. This perspective from the opposite side allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the true essence of courage. When he greeted the child in the street with an old English accent, it was the child's tears and the sick smile of the child's mother. That is the courage to face racism, but this also makes us learn that black people are not popular in society. Self-doubt arises in his mind, leading him to believe that he must date a white girl in order to establish his identity within a hybrid space. His bravery is in other ways, such as delivering a speech in the park, highlighting the difficulty for black people to find a formal job. Then he catches pigeons in the park, is seen by a woman, nearly caught, and goes back to Moses, after all, in his hometown, eating pigeons is common. This reveals Galahad still keeps some old identities and not be fully accepted by a hybrid society. However, Moses says he is lucky enough not to be caught by the police. It shows that, as the first West Indian to come to London, Moses was experienced, discerning, and passive. Although so far he has lived in London for many years, his dream is to go back to his hometown as he realizes this city is a desolation hell for in-between people. That is what Moses says to Galahad, and it reveals his passive attitude to live in this city. There are several reasons. First of all, Moses lives in the dark mental world. When seeing the beautiful landscape in the park,

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Galahad expresses a heartfelt compliment to nature, but Moses says “who live life and see nothing at all in it and who frighten as the years go by wondering what it is all about.” This shows Moses tends to be negative. Secondly, Moses was as passionate about everything as Galahad, had an unforgettable relationship with a white girl, and was hopeful for the future of life, but finally became submissive in the white dominant society. However, in the final plot, he seems to find meaning in living in the hybrid space as a black person.

5. Estrangement

The last extreme form is alienation, manifested in Gboyaga. Gurung mentions that “While a person separates from his nation or homeland, he tries to adapt to the new setting, in that new land he becomes estranged from his own self. [8]" Gboyega's experience, as a Nigerian who received his education in London, echoes a similar sentiment. His aversion to incorporating African history into the academic syllabus highlights a profound estrangement from his own cultural roots, serving as a clear indication of the enduring impact of colonial history. This estrangement stems from his absorption of Western educational values and beliefs, which led him to perceive his own cultural heritage as lesser or not deserving of scholarly attention. This underscores the complexities encountered during cultural integration. As individuals navigate the blending of their indigenous culture with elements of a foreign one, they often confront challenges related to identity reshaping and reassessment.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this presentation highlights hybridity themes in a post-colonial context through the experiences of Nkem, Grace and Gboyega in *The Thing Around Your Neck* and the experiences of Cap, Moses, Galahad, and Bart in *The Lonely Londoners*. Nkem's adaptation to American society and the evolution of her relationship with the housegirl, alongside her home's physical representation of a hybrid space, serve as a compelling illustration of the personal dimension of cultural integration and the formation of a new hybrid identity. Grace's interactions with her educational environment and her assertive reclamation of her indigenous name highlight the tension between Western dominance and indigenous traditions, demonstrating the challenges of indigenous cultural preservation. The complete opposite hybrid identity inclination between Cap and Bart reveals how seriously in-between space can change and alienate individuals. Additionally, two different attitudes shown by Moses and Galahad highlight that it is personality and social class count when confronting the process of hybridity. Unlike these individuals, as a result of his Western education, Gboyega's alienation from African history highlights the deeper cultural estrangement and search for identity in post-colonial societies. AlTogether, these narratives highlight the complex dynamics of cultural mixing. “Post-colonial studies today have become a tool for either recovering, restoring, and recognizing muted voices or underlining the highly implicated condition of global subjectivity in matters of social inequity and injustice.[9]” Although the essay studies in these two books are mostly fictional, they still have profound practical significance in the context of post-colonialism which is still raging in the world today. It is recommended that Individuals live between their heritage and new cultural influences in order to create a sense of belonging and enhance self-understanding.

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