



HYBRIDITY, MIMICRY: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF IDENTITY AND DISPLACEMENT IN SHORT FICTION

Anisa Bibi

Research scholar COMSATS University Islamabad

Email: anisagul64@gmail.com

Dr. Sadia Siddiq

Assistant Professor, COMSATS University Islamabad

Email: sadia_siddiq@comsats.edu.pk

Zia Ur Rehman

Research scholar COMSATS University Islamabad

Email: zia391046@gmail.com

Abstract

*A piece of literature can deal with issues of characters being displaced, and transnational or cultural identity being conflicted and negotiated. These postcolonial experiences are shown in short stories demonstrating the living conditions of individuals between cultures and locations. Although there is an increased interest in post-colonial narratives, limited research exists on the comparative application of post-colonial themes to short story collections from distinct cultural contexts. The current study thereby aimed to explore the comparative representation of post-colonial themes in the English short stories of Sefi Atta's *News from Home* and Julian Barnes's *The Lemon Table*. The findings of the study revealed the existence of post-colonial themes of hybridity, mimicry in both the selected texts. Hybridity is found emerging through cultural dislocation and double consciousness in both texts, where characters remain torn between abandoned and adopted worlds. Mimicry is found to operate as a survival strategy, as characters imitate dominant cultural behaviors and voices to mask insecurity and marginalization. The third space is found originating through migration, transitional locations, emotional in-betweenness, and symbolic settings where identity remains suspended rather than resolved.*

Keywords hybridity, postcolonialism, short fiction, mimicry, hybridity, identity crisis

Introduction

Elaborating on these notions, Homi K. Bhabha (1994) restructured the postcolonial theory by coming up with a series of collocated concepts hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and the Third Space that explain how colonial identities are negotiated but not imposed. His theory goes past the binary oppositions of colonizer and colonized highlighting the fluid in-between spaces where cultures come to meet, resist and reform one another. The Location of Culture (1994) by Homi K. Bhabha is a paradigm shift in the study of postcolonialism, and it provides a post structural and psychoanalytic perspective on the various colonial and postcolonial encounters. Bhabha, according to Umar and Lawan (2024), in his work leaves the totalizing assumptions of earlier theorists and provides emphasis on the changing views and contradictions of the colonial power structures (p. 16). His main issue is that of identity, not as an inborn nature but as a performative and ambivalent identity that is produced in the platforms of cultural contact.

The idea of hybridity by Bhabha is one of the most powerful and controversial concepts in modern literary theory. In his case, hybridity is the Third Space of enunciation or a translation and negotiations in which the colonizer and colonized cultural elements collide to form new and hybrid



identities. This activity weakens the concept of cultural purity and disrupts colonial power to demonstrate that power is never absolute but constantly negotiated (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38). According to Umar and Lawan (2024), hybridity is not that of harmonious union but a state of tension, an intersection that retains the cultural force and sense of domination and resistance (p. 17). Hybridity is closely associated with the concept of mimicry by Bhabha that he popularly describes as being nearly similar, yet not quite similar (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). Mimicry refers to the effort of the colonized subject to copy the language, manners, or values of the colonizer, also in a bid to survive, or to be accepted. Nevertheless, this parody is not perfect, and thus subversive; it reveals the instability of the colonial rule even making the image of the colonizer a mockery. According to Philip (2014), the essays by Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man" and Signs Taken for Wonders, reveal that imitation is a process of resistance that reorganizes the power/identity relationship (p. 19).

However, the most generative of all ideas that Bhabha has regarding it is the Third Space – the conceptual field where new meanings, identities and cultural expressions are generated. Third Space is resistant to binary categories like East/West, colonizer/colonized, instead providing a liminal place where translation, hybridity and negotiation take place. According to Bhabha (1994), this space represents the discursive conditions of enunciation that presuppose that there is neither any primordial unity nor fixity of the meaning and symbols of culture (p. 55). Consequently, the Third Space gives the postcolonial subject an opportunity to manifest new ways of belonging and cultural cognition that are usually characterized by displacement, ambivalence, and fluidity. Although the theoretical vocabulary used by Bhabha is not simple, his concepts have had a tremendous impact on the study of literature, film, and culture. His method transcends the story of resistance to emphasize the imaginative potential in cultural mixing, displacement and fragmentation of identity. The postcolonial theory proposed by Bhabha, in this respect, gives a much-needed theoretical solution to the analysis of the ways in which characters in modern fiction maneuver between traditions and global modernities inherited.

The News from Home by Sefi Atta (2010) portrays characters in Nigeria that are facing the issues of migration, exile and cultural alienation. Her stories show the way postcolonial identities are created due to the conflict between the old values and modernity in the west. On the same note, aging, alienation and nostalgia are depicted in the Lemon Table (2010) by Julian Barnes within the setting of the post imperial British society where the characters are exposed to the legacies of the empire and global travel. These groups of works, when examined in relation to each other, demonstrate how both postcolonial and post-imperial subjects occupy the space of in-betweenness, which is nothing less than the territory of Bhabha Third Space. Identity is not portrayed as an identity in both collections; instead, it is a place of conflict, compromise, and change. The confusion in the identity of the characters is a kind of testimony to their efforts to unite the opposing loyalties, languages, and social norms. Mimicry results in psychological and cultural practice and the Third Space is a condition of being both inside and outside cultural barriers at the same time.

In the study of the characters that inhabit these hybrid spaces, this paper applies Murphy Model of Characterization, which is a characterization model presented by Murphy (1972) in Understanding Unseen's. Murphy highlights nine methods in which authors unveil their characters, and they are personal description, the character as perceived by others, speech, past life, conversation of others,



reactions, direct comment, thoughts and mannerism. These methods give an understanding of how it is possible to create the idea of identity by means of external actions and inner awareness. This study explores the ways in which characterization can be used as an aesthetic to express postcolonial subjectivity by using both the framework of Murphy and Bhabha and their theoretical models. As an example, using speech and mannerism a character can imitate cultural codes of the colonizer, as this is the psychological aspect of mimicry. Equally, the behaviors and minds of characters reveal the contradiction of hybrid identities between assimilation and resistance. The model by Murphy therefore allows one to closely examine the way many authors such as Atta and Barnes craft the identity of their characters using subtle psychological and linguistic indications. Murphy addresses internal and external characterization especially in postcolonial terms in which identity is performative and fragmented. According to Bhabha, the postcolonial subjects are in between cultures, as they are in constant negotiation of meaning and identity. The methodology offered by Murphy enables us to track these negotiations to the level of character behavior and consciousness and demonstrate the way literary characters have been practicing hybridity, amaticeness, and displacement in their lives.

The convergence of postcolonial theory of Bhabha and model of characterization as developed by Murphy is a new perspective that views identity and displacement in real short fiction today. Although past research has extensively used the postcolonial theory in novels and poetry, short story collections, especially those that compare the African and British experience, have not been studied enough. The given study bridges this gap by providing a comparative analysis of *News from Home* and *The Lemon Table* that will help to shed light on how hybridity and mimicry can be realized in a specific, yet interconnected, cultural context. The work adds to the general discourse of transnationalism and globalization within literature by establishing how short fiction summarizes the emotional and psychological aspects of migration, aging, and belonging. This study extends the knowledge on postcolonial subjectivity by integrating the theoretical orientation of Bhabha on cultural negotiation and character construction by Murphy, ties up theoretical and narrative analysis. Finally, it highlights the potential of literature to mirror and comment on the hybridity's of a postcolonial society – a place of identities in constant flux, where the Third Space is a place of loss and imaginative potential.

Research objectives

To explore the role of hybridity in the identity struggles of the characters in the selected texts.

To explore the role of mimicry in identity struggles of the characters in the selected texts.

Research questions

What is the role of hybridity in the identity struggles of the characters in the selected texts?

What is the role of mimicry in the identity struggles of the characters in the selected texts?

Literature review

In his work *The Lemon Table*, Holmes (2025) discusses how various stories styles are employed in the book to reflect on death, aging, and the evolving sense of self. He describes the stories that Barnes writes as conversations between characters, between Barnes and writers of the past, and indirectly with the readers. Barnes does not depict old age as a tranquil place but rather as a place of confusion, loneliness and emotional torment. According to Holmes (2025), love and art do not bring permanent comfort, even great artists, in the book, are subjected to decline and uncertainty. The issue of memory is probably among the most essential ones, when characters lose their



memory or get dementia, the concept of identity being constant, is debated. Despite being serious and bleak in many cases, Holmes notes that the writing of Barnes is nonetheless sharp, empathetic, and humorously quiet. Overall, the article indicates that Barnes employs complicated but significant narrative methods to challenge the reader to consider the weakness and strictness of human beings and the truth of death.

The article examines how Julian Barnes uses memory, imagination, and the inevitability of death to shape the narrative worlds of *Cross Channel* and *The Lemon Table*. The author explains that Barnes treats memory not as a reliable record but as something “retrospectively imagined,” where past events are constantly rewritten by the mind (Retrospectively imagined memorials, 2010). In *Cross Channel*, stories are linked through an aging writer who reflects history, loss, and the uncertainty of remembering. In *The Lemon Table*, Barnes turns more directly toward old age and mortality, showing how characters confront the decline of the body, the fading of identity, and the limits of rational control. The article highlights how Barnes connects themes across texts such as the fragility of selfhood, the tension between truth and imagination, and the emotional weight of forgetting. Through these stories, Barnes suggests that while memory is unstable and death unavoidable, storytelling becomes a way to explore meaning, preserve fragments of experience, and reflect honestly on human vulnerability.

In the *Lemon Table*, the aging process is complicated where wisdom is not necessarily given but gradually determined through experience, loss, and introspection. Rather than portraying old age as calm or stable, Barnes demonstrates the way older characters are bargaining with desire, vulnerability, regret, and meaning search. The article uses literary gerontology to suggest that Barnes considers the power of narrative to the elderly, to enable them to narrate their own stories of wisdom through the ordinary aspects of life such as letters, conversations, or memories. According to Oro-Piqueras (2020), the collection reminds us of age-related stereotypes by showing that identities are still alive in later life and that there are still feelings of love, longing, and frustration. Whereas relationships and need provide some characters with a sense of continuity, others must reconstruct fragmented life stories following severe losses. In all these portraits, wisdom does not stand out as an act of cold indifference but is rather a greater insight into the contradictions of life and the bold willingness to confront death. The paper summarizes the findings that Barnes applies storytelling to draw attention to the vulnerability and possibilities of old age.

Childs (2011) examines the way in which *The Lemon Table* (2004) by Julian Barnes and *Cross Channel* (1995) merge themes of memory, mortality and artistic truth. He says that Barnes reinvented aging as a form of rebellion and not resignation by using fiction to turn death into reflection and irony. It is the conflict between the memory and imagination in which story telling becomes survival and rebellion through the aging figures of Sibelius and Turgenev that Barnes displays. To Childs, the lemon table is a symbol of a creative room where the face of death is declared life, which implies that art may not be capable of overcoming death, but it may redeem the human soul with the memory and storytelling.

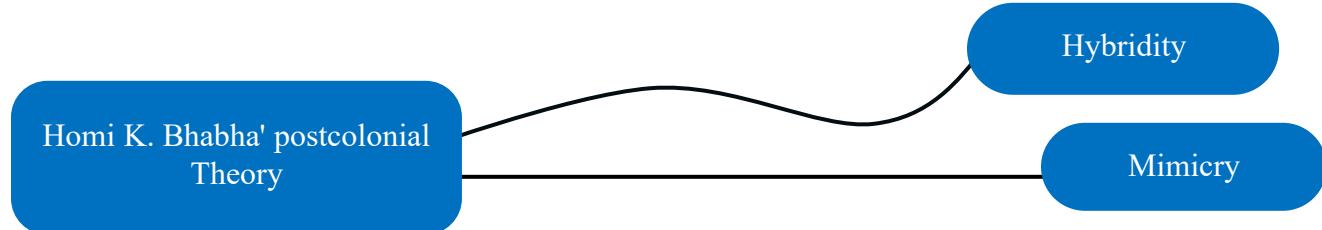
Research gap

Extensive research is available on both short fiction from different theoretical perspectives how ever there is still gap in the literature thereby the current study aim to investigate to investigate identity struggle because of hybirdity and mimicry.



Theoretical framework

The study is grounded in Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory, and the text is analyzed from the two perspectives of the theory Hybridity and mimicry.



Hybridity

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is central to his postcolonial theory, as it challenges the colonial framework that relies on strict distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized. According to Bhabha (1994), hybridity is not merely a mixing of cultures but an ongoing negotiation that results in new cultural forms and identities that transcend the binaries of colonial thought. Hybridity occurs when cultures come into contact, creating new meanings, practices, and identities that emerge out of the intersection of different cultural narratives. This process is fluid, dynamic, and never fully stable. For Bhabha (1994, p. 4), hybridity "disturbs the purity of colonial representations" by creating a new, mixed cultural form that challenges colonial ideologies.

Bhabha stresses that hybridity is a productive space where identities are not fixed but are constantly in flux. In colonial encounters, the colonized subject both absorbs and resists colonial culture, leading to the creation of a hybridized identity that can never be fully assimilated into the colonizer's culture. The colonized subject is neither simply a victim nor a passive receptor of colonial authority, but rather an active participant in creating a new identity that disrupts the colonial narrative. As Bhabha (1994, p. 37) notes, hybridity takes place in third space, a site where cultural differences are redefined and new identities are produced.

Hybridity is not about cultural fusion in a harmonious or neat sense, but a process of contradiction, tension, and transformation. The hybrid identity that emerges in this space is always incomplete, marked by conflict, contradiction, and ambivalence. Bhabha (1994, p. 4) writes that hybridity is a "third space of enunciation" that allows for new forms of expression and meaning to emerge. This third space is where colonial and postcolonial identities meet, clash, and interact, creating new cultural forms that challenge the fixed categories of the colonizer and colonized. Through hybridity, colonial authority is subverted, as the colonized subject redefines their identity through a complex interplay of power and resistance.

Bhabha's understanding of hybridity also involves a rejection of the colonial desire to maintain cultural purity and order. By embracing hybrid identities, postcolonial subjects create a form of cultural resistance that undermines colonial structures of power and authority. The hybrid identity is both a form of survival and a means of resistance, as it questions the very categories through which colonialism defines and controls cultural life. In this sense, hybridity offers a new way of understanding identity that is neither fixed nor static but is always evolving through negotiation and transformation.



Mimicry

Another key concept in Bhabha's theory is mimicry, which refers to the process by which the colonized subject imitates the behaviors, language, and practices of the colonizer. However, as Bhabha (1994, p. 122) argues, this mimicry is not a perfect imitation, but a distorted and ambivalent one. The colonized subject does not simply replicate the colonizer's identity but adapts and transforms it, introducing subtle differences that undermine the authority of the colonizer. Mimicry, in this sense, is a strategy of resistance that allows the colonized subject to destabilize colonial power through imitation.

Bhabha (1994, p. 122) describes mimicry as the process by which the colonized subject "almost the same, but not quite" mimics the colonizer. This slight difference that remains in the mimicry exposes the incompleteness of colonial authority. While the colonizer seeks to impose a unified, coherent identity on the colonized, mimicry creates a gap, an unsettling moment that calls into question the stability of colonial power. Mimicry operates as a form of subversion because it makes the colonizer's authority appear artificial and tenuous, revealing the contradictions and fragility inherent in the colonial system.

Bhabha explains that mimicry works in two ways: it both replicates and distorts colonial identity. This distortion does not simply reject or resist the colonizer's culture but introduces an ambivalence that undermines the very authority of colonialism. By adopting colonial practices, the colonized subject inhabits colonial identity, but at the same time, they subvert it by revealing its contradictions. As Bhabha (1994, p. 128) writes, mimicry becomes a "disguised form of resistance," where the colonized subject uses the colonizer's tools of power to subvert and destabilize colonial control.

The ambivalence of mimicry is critical in understanding how colonial power operates. It highlights the tensions between the colonizer and the colonized and shows how power is never absolute but always in flux. Mimicry, therefore, becomes a tool of resistance because it challenges the idea that colonial power is stable, unified, and uncontested. Instead, mimicry makes visible the instability of colonial authority, offering a means for the colonized to resist, reconfigure, and transform their identities.

The Model of Characterization by Murphy

This is a systematic and comprehensive model of characterization in literature in which Murray (1972) explains how characters are built up in the narrative literature. Murphy also believes that fictional identity is not disclosed by direct description but by a variety of narrative means, where a range of devices are applied, such as internal thinking, outward behavior, socialization, emotional patterns, and commentary on the author. The characters thus become perceived to be dynamic psychological characters whose personalities and identities evolve over time through narrative hints.

This model is specifically useful in the present research since, in text, postcolonial identity, especially, hybridity and diasporic consciousness rarely manifest itself in any straightforward statement. Rather, identity is created using tone, hesitation, memory, nostalgia, imitation, body language, cultural signs, and emotional conflict. As an example, the kind of language used by a character, their ability to remain silent in a culturally awkward situation, or their emotional response to identity and alienation can be an indication of underlying psychological fragmentation



or cultural conflict. These nuances in the text can be critically examined through the approach taken by Murphy.

Murphy points out that characterization is done in nine indirect and direct ways, personal physical description, thoughts, speech, past experiences, emotional reactions, comments by the narrator, their perception of other characters, about the characters, and their mannerism or habits. Both methods act as a narrative prism exposing a new aspect of identity. These techniques within the framework of postcolonial and diasporic stories shed light on how the characters of the stories navigate between hybrid identity, internal tension and cultural duality - providing a viewpoint on the way identity is enacted, negotiated and emotionally digested in the transitional space.

The model by Murphy therefore concurs well with the Bhabha postcolonial theory in that it offers practical textual mechanisms in the identification and interpretation of identity processes. Where Bhabha is offering the theoretical terms to comprehend how hybridity, mimicry and third space identity formation work, Murphy is offering the analytical framework to analyze how these processes are enacted in the characters behavior and the formation of the narrative. The model thus makes this research explanatory as it enables identification of in-depth analysis of both internal and external manifestations of identity in all the chosen text.

Analysis and discussion

The Temporary Position by Sefi Atta revolves around the life of a Nigerian woman residing in the United States who works in a succession of low-status and unstable jobs despite her education and career. The narrative emphasizes the theme of cultural alienation, financial instability, and identity crisis as an immigrant living in a new social and professional setting. The story reveals the contradiction between her qualifications and the few opportunities she has at the workplace and through her interior thoughts. The story reflects the emotional tension of existing in an unstable and impermanent condition, where one cannot feel at home, or at work, or even as a person.

The narrator in A Temporary Position is not based on what she looks like, but on what is happening. She is a Nigerian woman, who attended one of the best universities, the London School of Economics but is currently in London in an illegal engagement of having temporary jobs, low-paying and menial in nature. This is a paradox: her education makes her one of the British elites, whereas her status of an immigrant makes her go to the fringes. The first indication of hybridity is this contradiction. She exists between two worlds that have a high level of education yet is seen as a worker to be disposed.

This confusion shows her struggle of identity. She fails to identify herself with success, although she has done what many Nigerians can just imagine. Simultaneously, she is not a part of the English professionals she emulates at her workplace. This clash between the fact she is a privileged person and vulnerable is a way that hybridity makes her identity wavering. She is not Nigerian anymore and she is not accepted as English as well.”

Hybridity is even greater in her speech. This quote reveals: So, ‘*I was talking in my fake English accent, phonetics, as we would say of the Nigerians, to see who really English was*’ (Atta, 2010, p. 124). However, she refers to it as fake at the same time, she is fully aware that it is not natural. When she puts in quotation marks as we Nigerians would say it, she is reminding herself that she remains a Nigerian.

Hybridity is visible in speech because it is a blend of two voices. She communicates using the English language of the locals to enable her to survive in London, yet she does not forget her



Nigerian language of talking. The outcome is a struggle of identity: her natural voice is covered by an accent that is not hers. Each word uttered by her makes her realize that she is torn between the Nigerian authenticity and English imitation. The identity discussed in her speech feels fragmented and disturbed by hybridity.

The agony of hybridity is also reflected in her inner thoughts. It is rubbish here she says about London... *I do not believe that I will be able to work here longer than three years* (Atta, 2010, p. 132). But when she has thoughts of Nigeria, she recalls that she had no other options than to live with my parents, live in a hotel or find a sugar daddy.

These reflections are indicative of being caught in-between, and that is hybridity. No, she cannot feel at home in London, where she is exploited and neglected, but she cannot feel at home in Nigeria either, where women such as herself have few opportunities in life. Hybridity in this case makes her identity crisis very clear: she does not belong to either world. Her thoughts are divided between renouncing London and renouncing Nigeria, and it has created no harmless place where she can create her identity.

Another evidence of hybridity is her daily actions and shopping. She says that she went “*shopping like a zombie... That was London's fault.*” (Atta, 2010, p. 131) This implies that she had imitated the consumer lifestyle among Londoners and purchased items simply to pose as a part of the group. The fact that she identifies herself as a zombie proves that this was not her identity, it was simply a mask that she was wearing.

This action demonstrates the way in which the hybridity ends up depleting her identity. She is not happy about shopping, she is mechanical, dead. Imitating the habits of the consumers in London does not make her feel to be part of the consumer society; it only serves to remind her that she is copying the culture of the other person. In this case, it is the concept of hybridity which drives her into the identity crisis since it believes her agency- she is a shadow of what a Londoner is supposed to be.

Among the best examples of mimicry in the story is the speech of the character. She confesses it all: “*so I was using my fake English accent, phonetics, as we Nigerians would have called it, to see who English was and who was not*” (Atta, 2010, p. 124). This demonstrates that she consciously alters her voice to sound English. The term fake shows that she is not trying to regard this as her voice; it is acting. Simultaneously, she expresses her dual consciousness by stating as we would say it, as a Nigerian, although she attempts to sound English, she remains rooted in Nigerian words. This is the classical definition of mimicry according to Homi Bhabha “nearly the same, but not altogether”. Her accent can be heard as English one, which is not entirely natural. This necessity to imitate the English speech forms an identity crisis to her. She is not allowed to talk as freely as she does since, she is afraid of being rejected, but when she imitates, she feels fake. The result is alienation: she is split in between her Nigerian and English performance. Mimicry in this case does not make her stronger, it destroys her identity by compelling her to play the role all the time.

She is also mimetic in her behavior. She narrates the way she would go shopping in London as a zombie... *That was London's fault.*” This demonstrates that she was imitating Londoner lifestyle of consumers. She purchased items because that is what others around her did and not because she wanted them. She demonstrates that this kind of behavior was not a choice as she blames London” *That was London fault*”.



Such an imitation brings in another dimension of identity crisis. She does not derive pleasure in embracing the lifestyles of London, instead she is mechanical, dead, like a zombie. Shopping is therefore a way of fitting in as opposed to integration. This imitation kills off her personality and makes her crisis worse. She is no longer doing with her personal wishes but imitating the behavior of others to be able to survive socially. Her actions reveal the way imitation may result in nothingness and a feeling of losing yourself.

A vivid example of **imitation** can be seen in the fact that the narrator consciously tries to represent himself at work. She says, I did not inform Cath that I had a degree in economics. *I had put in my CV that I had five O levels and one A level rather than ten and three, and that way she would not find me overqualified to hold the job position (Atta, 2004, p. 124)*. This hiding behavior is a sign of mimicry as postcolonial theory suggests that the subject adjusts her identity so as to fit the requirements of the dominant structure. The narrator deliberately undermines her credentials by portraying herself as a stereotypical profile of a subordinate worker who is acceptable and complies with the situation, not her sincere identity. Using the model by Murphy, this scene is an expression of characterization in terms of thought and self-presentation that reveals the negotiation within the confines of outward conformity.

She also mimics her reactions towards people around her. At her place of work, she does not mind being underrated and being regarded as a disposable worker. Her response is made by working harder to become a part of adjusting her accent, imitating ways of the English, and acting as though she belongs. This response appears as reaction but subconsciously, she is bitter and frustrated.

And this is one more reason why mimicry enriches her identity conflict. Her responses are invariably split she presents one side of herself to the world (English accent, civilized worker) and conceals another one inside (angry, alienated Nigerian self). The outcome is that her responses are never real. They are shows that enable her to survive yet she is empty. Mimicry, in this case, is not the solution to her problems, but rather it weakens her identity since each reaction will serve to remind her that she is not behaving like a person but mimicking other people.

This narration demonstrates that mimicry determines her identity crisis. She struggles to see herself since her life is constructed out of temporary imitations- artificial accents, borrowed behaviors, and temporary jobs. It is not that she describes a person with a solid and unified identity, but that of a person attempting to maintain appearance. Mimicry at this point demonstrates that her whole life in London is a show and performance makes a fragmented and split identity.

With the steps of Murphy, we can observe that mimicry brings out the identity struggle of the narrator in A Temporary Position. She has an artificial accent of English in her speech. She goes shopping like a zombie in her manner. She becomes a rejecter of London in her mind and behaves like English. In her responses, she does conformity and conceals frustration. Even in her description, she is only in a transition as temporary and unstable as her identity.

The story “GREEN” is about a nine-year-old Nigerian American girl as she and her parents visit an immigration office in New Orleans where they want to be granted their green card. The parents go through bureaucratic processes, but the child goes through thoughts of the multicultural atmosphere of the waiting room and the need to get back to Mississippi to play soccer. The story is abundant in cultural allusions, such as Mardi Gras, Yoruba culture, American sports, and interwoven with the idea of green, the legal status of a person and the cultural blend. The story,



through the eyes of the child, deals with the themes of belonging, cultural negotiation and formation of identity in a diasporic setting.

The story “*GREEN*” (Atta, 2010, p. 241). is about a nine-year-old Nigerian American girl as she and her parents visit an immigration office in New Orleans where they want to be granted their green card. The parents go through bureaucratic processes, but the child goes through thoughts of the multicultural atmosphere of the waiting room and the need to get back to Mississippi to play soccer. The story is abundant in cultural allusions, such as Mardi Gras, Yoruba culture, American sports, and interwoven with the idea of green, the legal status of a person and the cultural blend. The story, through the eyes of the child, deals with the themes of belonging, cultural negotiation and formation of identity in a diasporic setting.

“*I'm American. How do you expect me to feel?*” (Atta, 2010, p. 245) This is one of the examples of how Murphy used the technique of Speech as the words of a character express personality and inner struggle. In a moment of frustration, the narrator claims to be an American and it shows that she sought a sense of identity that is not easily fluctuating in the world where she must negotiate her belonging continuously. Here we can see the idea of Hybridity introduced by Bhabha: the child is neither an American nor a Nigerian but a blend, created in the in-between zone of intercultural communication. Her demands to be American emphasizes the conflict between the traditions inherited and the norms of her social world, which shows the empowerment and disturbance of hybridity.

Chinese is not Thai!” I said (Atta, 2010, p. 241). Such forceful correction proves that Murphy Speech is a means of mimicry. The character takes up the language of other cultural that is common in the American classrooms, where she is subjected to an ironic learned cosmopolitanism that she is almost similar yet not the same as the Bhabha described it. Her imitation gives her authority as being learned in an American setting, but its hyperbolic voice is the way that it undermines its artificiality. This scene shows the ambivalence of mimicry: it allows one to attain social mobility at the expense of the instability of the identity that it strives to obtain.

In *The Lemon Table*, Julian Barnes subjects his characters to identities that are negotiated through subtle plays of with language, behavior and social expectation. Rather than explicit utterances of identity conflict, the stories often present characters in an in-between position, and hybridity and mimicry take shape in the everyday actions and speech. These struggles can be seen in the ways that characters express themselves linguistically, respond to authority and adapt their behavior under social and cultural frameworks.

In *Knowing French*, the story centers on a lady in old age who stays in old age homes and is recollecting the language, reading and communication in the form of letter writing. The language is a foregrounded central identification and belonging marker in the story. The phenomenon of linguistic hybridity is manifested in the use of French phrases in an English story, which implies that identity is explained by the use of various cultural levels. This can be observed as the narrator uses a French saying at one point of emotional contemplation: *Le vin est tire--Il faut le Boire* (Barnes, 2010, p. 90). The decision to use a foreign language to announce resignation implies that a mediated meaning has been adopted via a borrowed cultural code. This mixing is further supported by the rhetorical question posed by the narrator with regard to language itself: *Wouldn't you think language was to distinguish communication?* Barnes, 2010, p. 125). The question shows



that there is an understanding of linguistic restriction and displacement in which language has ceased to be a fixed sign of belonging.

Another instance of linguistic and cultural hybridity is given in *The Silence*, a narrative that revolves around a composer who is getting old and who is looking back towards art and recognition and death. The identity of the composer has been formed with transnational experiences and international recognition. He remembers a situation when the connection is formed by just basic, non-native language: we spoke French, the only language we had in common besides the music (Barnes, 2010, p. 186). Such dependence on a middle language put assisted character in a situational linguistic position, whereby identity is negotiated beyond the boundaries of native cultural positions. Foreign recognition also defines his identity, as he remarks, they took me to some new music in Germany, on my eightieth birthday, (Barnes, 2010, p. 185) and later, comments how other people identify him with symbolic markers: "On my eightieth birthday my face was put on a postage stamp (Barnes, 2010, p. 185). These instances demonstrate an identity that is built by means of external, transnational confirmation instead of intimately defined self-determination, which supports the issue of hybridity as a state of fragmented identities.

Mimicry becomes particularly visible in *A Short History of Hairdressing*, which traces a man's lifelong encounters with barbers and hairdressers. The story highlights conformity, routine, and submission to institutional authority. The protagonist repeatedly imitates socially approved behavior, shaping his identity through compliance. His habitual responses reveal this learned mimicry: "He would smile and nod, and seeing the nod reproduced in canted glass, would verbalize it into 'Very nice' or 'Much neater' or 'Just the job'" (Barnes, 2010, p. 29). These phrases indicate automatic imitation rather than genuine approval. His compliance is further emphasized by his reflection that "in forty years and more of going to the barber's... he had always assented meekly" (Barnes, 2010, p. 29), underscoring how mimicry becomes ingrained over time.

The extremity of this mimicry is captured through exaggeration, as the narrator remarks, "If they had clipped a swastika into his nape he would probably have pretended to approve" (Barnes, 2010, p. 29). This statement exposes mimicry as a mechanism of self-erasure, where identity is suppressed in favor of social survival. A moment of resistance appears when the protagonist finally says "No" to seeing the back of his head in the mirror (Barnes, 2010, p. 29), yet even this gesture is described as timid and fleeting, suggesting how deeply mimicry has shaped his sense of self.

Language also serves in mimicry in *The Things You Know*, where an old man is depicted as being consistently polite in appearance, yet internally collapsing. His words display a detached act of civility: You are a very nice man, he is a very nice man, you are a very nice man (Barnes, 2010, p. 153). This repetitive and mechanical utterance is a mimicry that is deprived of the emotional content. The narrator also mentions that guests walk away thinking that he was happy to have been visited (Barnes, 2010, p. 153), showing how well this performance covers inner decay. The identity, in this case, is preserved by imitating the societal norms instead of expressing one in a genuine way. Throughout all these narratives, hybridity and mimicry are not theoretical concepts existing on their own but living conditions. The concept of hybridity is created through language mixes, cultural displacement and transnational awareness, mimicry is achieved through repetition of politeness, habitual obedience and imitation of anticipated behavior. The characters in Barnes do not conflict with these conditions directly but find a way to negotiate privately in the form of adaptation. Their struggles indicate identities that are formed through performance, adaptation and



compromise and indicate that selfhood in *The Lemon Table* exists within the space of half membership and half-resistance.\

Findings

This analysis shows that the postcolonial ideas of hybridity and mimicry are focal to depicting identity struggles in the chosen short stories of Sefi Atta and Julian Barnes. In both *News from Home* and *The Lemon Table*, characters are shown to hold unsteady roles characterized by cultural loss, psychological struggle, and social outcasts. The main mode of hybridity arises in the contradictions between education and employment, language and accent, belonging and exclusion, and home and host cultures. The characters are constantly living between the worlds of the abandoned and the adopted, not being able to possess a stable or cohesive identity.

The *Temporary Position* also demonstrates hybridity in the divided nature of the narrator as an educated Nigerian woman who becomes temporary and menial worker in London. The daily performance and thoughts and the way she speaks demonstrate a constant movement between being Nigerian and being English. In the same way, hybridity in *Green* is represented by the mixed cultural awareness of the child where American and Nigerian identities do not resolve. These mixed identities are depicted as at cross purposes instead of being harmonious which results in anxiety, uncertainty and emotional disintegration.

The aspect of mimicry is observed to operate as a survival mechanism in the chosen texts. Characters are being aware of emulating the dominant cultural behaviors, accents and social norms to achieve acceptance or to escape being marginalized. Mimicry can be seen in Atta stories, through modified patterns of speech, consumption, and career management, which enable characters to operate within dominant formations at the same time disintegrating their authenticity. Mimicry in the stories of Barnes is manifested in the form of routine courtesy, obedience, and repetitive social manners, which hides inner opposition, frustration, and rottenness.

The use of the model of characterization created by Murphy proves that hybridity and mimicry are not pronounced by authorial utterances but by speech, thoughts, replies, and mannerisms. The identity that is shown by these narrative techniques is performative, fragmented, and perpetually negotiated. In general, the results verify that hybridity and mimicry are factors that lead to identity crisis instead of identity resolution, placing the characters in a state of never-ending betweenness.

Conclusion

This paper has concluded that hybridity and mimicry are determinant factors that influence the identity dilemma of characters in *News from Home* and *The Lemon Table*. The analysis, using a postcolonial perspective based on the theory of Bhabha and applied in the model of characterization given by Murphy, presents results that indicate that identity in these short stories is neither fixed nor finished. Rather, it is built through a process of constant negotiation, acting, and adapting in culturally and socially restricted environments.

The issue of hybridity comes about as a state of tension, with characters being between cultures, languages, and values systems, not belonging quite to either their home or their new world. Mimicry along with allowing temporary survival and social functioning escalates identity fragmentation because it enforces the characters to abandon their true selves in the interest of a socially accepted performance. Instead of making the characters stronger, mimicry strengthens their marginality and emotional distance.



This comparative analysis of African and British short fiction reveals that the problem of identity struggles with postcolonial identity is not exclusive to former colonies but is also prevalent in post-imperial settings. A combination of Bhabas postcolonial ideas and the characterization model developed by Murphy gives a subtle insight on how identity, displacement, and cultural negotiation can be incorporated into character building. Finally, the research confirms that short fiction has been an effective literary genre to reflect the nuanced, psychological aspects of postcolonial subjectivity, in which identity is mobile, disputed, and unstable.

References

- unseen: An introduction to English poetry and the English novel. George Allen & Unwin.
- Atta, S. (2000). News from home. Interlink Books.
- Barnes, J. (2004). The lemon table. Jonathan Cape.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). The location of culture. Routledge.
- Childs, P. (2011). Retrospectively imagined memorials: Cross Channel and The Lemon Table. In Julian Barnes (pp. 126–137). Manchester University Press.
- Holmes, F. M. (2009). Conversations about death: Julian Barnes's The Lemon Table. American, British and Canadian Studies, 102–135.
- Murphy, M. J. (1972). Understanding unseen: An introduction to English poetry and the English novel. George Allen & Unwin.
- Oró-Piqueras, M. (2020). The multiple faces of aging into wisdom in Julian Barnes's The Lemon Table. The Gerontologist, 60(5), 851–858. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnz089>