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ARTICLE

Hybridity, Mimicry, and Ambivalence: Re-Evaluation of Colonial Identity in Nadine Gordimer's Selected Short Stories

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Abstract

This research investigates the notion of identity in Gordimer's short stories through Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial theory and his conception of hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence. Bhabha's concept of hybridity gained currency in defining the postcolonial vision that cultural systems interact and cannot be separated. Hybridity usually happens when people leave their own home country or experience cross-cultural marriages and other forms of cultural and ethnic encounters. Mimicry is an increasingly important term in Postcolonial theory which describes the ambivalent relationship between the colonizers and colonized, described as the combination of attraction and repulsion, resulting in ambivalence. By rejecting the exoticism of cultural diversity, Bhabha advocates the significance of hybridity by which cultural differences may operate. Through the analysis of Gordimer's short stories in the light of Homi Bhabha's theory, the researchers shed light on how the colonizer and the colonized interact. Moreover, it is concluded that the characters who cannot experience hybridity would lead a life of wandering and non-belonging, which results in their inability to articulate their cultural agency.

Key words: Gordimer, Identity, Postcolonialism, Bhabha, Hybridity, Mimicry, Ambivalence.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Nadine Gordimer was born in Springs, Transvaal, an East Rand mining town outside Johannesburg, in 1923. Her father, Isidore Gordimer, was a Jewish jeweler originally from Latvia and her mother, Nan Myers, was of British descent. From her early childhood, Gordimer witnessed how the White minority increasingly weakened the few rights of the Black majority. She is a South African novelist and short-story writer whose central theme is exile and alienation. Her wide reading informed her about the world on the other side of apartheid - the official South African policy of racial segregation - and that discovery in time developed into solid political opposition to apartheid.

Gordimer's involvement in most of her works has been the effect of apartheid on the lives of South Africans and the moral and psychological tensions of life in a racially divided country. She was an ardent opponent of apartheid and refused to accommodate the system, despite growing up in a community that accepted it as the normal system. Her first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953), was mainly based on her own life and set in her hometown. Her subsequent three novels, *A World of Strangers* (1958), *Occasion for Loving* (1963), which focuses on an illicit love affair between a black man and a white woman, and *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), deal with master-servant relations in South African life.

In 1974, her novel *The Conservationist* was a joint

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winner of the Booker Prize for Fiction. Also, in 1991, one of the highlights in Gordimer's career came when she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. She was the first South African to win the award and the first woman to win in 25 years. Her works were serially banned by the Apartheid regime from July's People onwards, but that only made her more famous. After the Nobel prize, and after apartheid ended and a new era began, Gordimer's sentences began to lose some of their Proustian length and twisting nuance and to become, instead, fractured and note-like. This paper will focus on some of her short stories including "Not for Publication," "Which New Era Would That Be," "Through Time and Distance," "Homage," and "Open House" to find the subject of identity within a Postcolonial view.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HOMI BHABHA'S POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Bhabha is an Indian scholar and theorist in English literature and cultural studies. He is considered as one of the most significant figures in contemporary Postcolonial studies. Bhabha "provides Postcolonial discourses with important ideas and thoughts included in many writings" (Asadi Amjad and Albusalih, 2020, pp. 1223-4). The principal subject of his theory is the hybridity of colonial identity, which, as a cultural form, made the colonial masters ambivalent and, as such, altered the authority; as such, Bhabha's arguments are important to the conceptual discussion of hybridity. "Bhabha's anti-essentialist attitude toward culture paves the way for his theories of mimicry, hybridity and the Third Space, which are all tightly related to each other" (Jamshidian and Pourgiv, 2019, p. 99). The main concepts of Bhabha's theory will be discussed below.

2.1 | Hybridity

Hybridity is one of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in Postcolonial theory, commonly referring to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. In Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, a hybrid is defined as a "person whose background is a blend of two diverse cultures or traditions" (2003). As it can be noticed, a hybrid person is the product of at least two or diverse cultures. The term refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, 'hybrid' species. According to Bhabha's theory, some factors like cross-cultural marriages and migration create in-between or third space identities and cultural diversity in the current era of globalization. Bhabha believes that "the postcolonial world should valorize spaces of mixing because these spaces of hybridity offer the most profound challenge to colonialism." For him, "hybridity represents the triumph of the Postcolonial or the subaltern over Western hegemony. Hybridity subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures" (Tano, 2019, p. 171).

Hybridity demonstrates how cultures come to be represented by processes of repetition and translation through which their meanings are vicariously addressed to an Other. Generally speaking, it can be said that "Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial theory involves analysis of nationality, ethnicity, and politics with poststructuralist ideas of identity and indeterminacy, defining Postcolonial identities as shifting, hybrid constructions" (Guerin et al., 2010, p. 364). In his definition, hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. … For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory – or, in my mixed metaphor, negative transparency. (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 159- 60)

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha is concerned with the liminal, interstitial locations between and beyond borders. This is the space where different cultures confront each other and issues of unjust power relations, imperialism, assimilation, and oppression arise. For him,

the colonial situation is not one of the straightforward oppression of the colonized by the colonizer, but a period of cultural contact and interaction between the colonizer and the colonized; or by extension, between advanced countries and developing countries in the age of globalization. Thus, by introducing hybridity, he emphasizes the agency of colo-

nized people and how they resist the colonial power, which is usually regarded as complete and stable. Therefore, hybridity in cultural globalization suggests interaction between cultures and rejects the idea of fixed and stable identities in favor of more fluid and plural ones. (Jamshidian and Pourgiv, 2019, p. 99)

By using this term, Bhabha considers some binary oppositions like dominant/subaltern, collaboration/resistance, settler/native that the concept of hybridity makes it possible to see the several elements of the colonial situation that are lost under them. However, these binaries may play a pivotal role in the organization of and reaction to colonial power. With the concept of hybridity, Bhabha attempts "to create a theoretical space that is not a reproduction of the purity of colonial resistance ideology nor colonial domination ideology; purity itself is recognized as ideological rather than historical or social" (Marshall, 2008, p. 164). Therefore, hybridity transforms both the colonized and colonizer. Hybridity allows the colonized to find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty.

2.2 | Mimicry

Colonial mimicry comes from the colonist's desire for a reformed, recognizable Other. Bhabha defines mimicry "as the way in which colonized people sometimes address their oppressors, adopting their language, clothes, religions, etc., but in their mimicry, Bhabha describes their ambivalence; their performance alienates the colonizers from their essence, thus destabilizing colonialism" (Guerin et al., 2010, p. 364). Bhabha does not interpret mimicry as a narcissistic identification of the colonizer in which the colonized stops being a person without the colonizer present in his identity. He sees mimicry as a

double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object. The figures of a doubling, the part-objects of a metonymy of colonial desire, alienate the modality and normality of those dominant discourses in which they emerge as inappropriate colonial subjects (1984, p. 126).

He describes colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence" (1984, p. 126). So "mimicry deconstructs the certainty of colonial dominance and creates an uncertainty in the behavior of the colonized" (Mostafaee, 2016, p. 165). In addition, mimicry appears when members of a colonized society imitate and take on the colonizers' culture. So mimicry "arises from the colonized individuals' imitations of the colonizers accompanied by a feeling of inferiority" (Yousef, 2019, p. 75).

As Bhabha argues, mimicry should be understood as a colonial custom focused not only on changing the colonized's conduct but also on rebuilding their identity. As part of their historical and institutional justification for their rule over colonies and their mission to civilize the non-Western Other, the colonizers try to canonize in their colonies texts and practices that they identify with their cultural superiority and force colonial subjects to imitate their Western model. Bhabha's theory, which deals with both the colonizers' efforts to impose their culture and the reaction of the colonized to these efforts, "focuses on the process of cultural dissemination as a mechanism of control." The strategy of mimicry is a dual one. The attempt to force the colonized to mimic and act like the colonizer implies a certain similarity between the two and is an attempt to make the unfamiliar familiar, thereby controlling it" (Frenkel, 2008, p. 926).

2.3 | Ambivalence

Ambivalence is a term first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and its opposite. Adapted into colonial discourse theory by Homi Bhabha, it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and the colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never wholly opposed to the colonizer. So it should be considered that there is a close relationship between mimicry and ambivalence. Mimicry puts the people in an ambivalent situation. Although the colonized does

not want to be dominated by colonizers, it appreciates some of their behavior and imitates them.

Based on Postcolonialism, the colonized acquires ambivalent feelings toward the colonizer after a long relationship with the colonizer: "It includes binary and contradictory feelings of desire, infatuation, and repulsion. Bhabha contends that this ambivalence turns the identity of the colonized to a hybrid position" (Ghandeharion and Sheikh Farshi, 2017, p. 495). Bhabha defines the identity of diaspora people as an ambivalent state of mind where "there is no longer a specific place or home but mixed feelings over the fact that nothing is stable anymore or is the way we expect things to be" (Arabian and Rahiminezhad, 2016, p. 3050).

Ambivalence is situated in the confrontation between the colonizer and colonized: "If the former is rendered paranoiac because of his desire to be loved by one whom he ought to despise, and cannot ever be sure that such love is forthcoming or real or authentic, the colonized goes through a related process of ambivalence in his relations with the colonizer." (Krishna, 2009, p. 90). Hence, in his conception of ambivalence and his understanding of both colonizer and colonized in terms of the impossible desire that prompts them, "Bhabha locates value as emanating from thwarted desire. For the former, it is the desire to finally and fully know the native that is thwarted, which leads to a question mark over one's self-worth; for the latter, it is the (impossible) desire to replace the colonizer but remain the avenging native that splits any sense of selfhood" (2009, p. 92). The concept is related to hybridity because, "just as ambivalence 'decenters' authority from its position of power, so that authority may also become hybridized when placed in a colonial context in which it finds itself dealing with, and often inflected by, other cultures" (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p. 11). For Bhabha, the colonial discourse is forced to be ambivalent because for colonizers, it would be too threatening that the colonized be the exact model of them.

3 | DISCUSSION: HYBRIDITY, MIMICRY, AND AMBIVALENCE IN GORDIMER'S SHORT STORIES

3.1 | Mimicry and Imitation in Gordimer's Fiction

In "Not for Publication," Adelaide Graham-Grigg is an efficient English woman working in British territory. She is convinced that the future must lie with Africans developing their own tribal democracy rather than accepting a Western pattern. Purely by chance, she comes across a young street boy named Praise:

Miss Graham-Grigg was not looking for Praise Basetse. She was in Johannesburg on one of her visits from a British Protectorate, seeing friends, pulling strings, and pursuing, on the side, her private study of following up the fate of those people of the tribe who had crossed the border and lost themselves, sometimes over several generations, in the city. (Gordimer, 2011, p. 88)

Working with a blind beggar, Praise shows unusual ability, and Miss Graham-Grigg is intrigued, especially as the boy comes from the area where she works. She decides that he is a promising candidate for schooling, preparing him to become a tribal leader. During the years, the boy can find his new identity through mimicry and he goes on until he could be the country's prime minister. In fact, through the years, he could catch his third space and his dual consciousness. An excellent example of mimicry is shown in this story when Praise wants to imitate the gangs of boys:

She asked him what he thought he would have done when he got older, if he had had to keep on walking with his uncle, and he said that he had wanted to belong to one of the gangs of boys, some little older than himself, who were very good at making money. They got money from white people's pockets and handbags without them even knowing it, and if the police came they began to play their penny whistles and sing. (89-90)

"Which New Era Would That Be" is a short story by Nadine Gordimer in which this concept can be found very well. The story is a vignette of a visit made under the apartheid regime by two white liber-

als, Alister Halford and Jennifer Tetzel, to the Johannesburg printing shop of Jake Alexander, who is of a mixed-race background. After getting introduced to each other, the group starts talking about the social and political climate of South Africa. As the story progresses, one is given a clear picture of the hostility between the world of oppressors and the oppressed. One is also told about the effects of racial suppression on the psyche and the emotional reactions of the blacks. Gradually one comes to know that the so-called liberal, intellectual, dark-haired Jennifer refuses to believe an anecdote about a black being the victim of whites' hypocrisy. Gordimer ends the story with a positive note as she has the feeling that a time will come when both blacks and whites will forget the social division and begin to live together.

In a part of the story, the concept of mimicry is shown in the new lifestyle of colored and black characters who imitate the whites:

There was a moment of silence; the two colored men and the big black man standing back against the wall watched anxiously, as if some sort of signal might be expected, possibly from Jake Alexander, their boss, the man who, like themselves, was not white, yet who owned his own business, and had a car, and money, and strange friends – sometimes even white people, such as these. The three of them were dressed in the ill-matched cast-off clothing that all humble workpeople who are not white wear in Johannesburg, and they had not lost the ability of primitives and children to stare, unembarrassed and unembarrassing. (59)

They try to behave and wear like whites. Moreover, in another part, mimicry is described in this way: "They could all make themselves free of Jake's pocket, and his printing shop, and his room with a radio in the lower end of the town, where the building had fallen below the standard of white people but was far superior to the kind of thing most colored and blacks were accustomed to" (60). They try to Westernize themselves by imitating white people.

The reason for this imitation is that "the soul always sees perfection in the person who is superior to it and to whom it is subservient". It considers him perfect, "either because it is impressed by the respect, it has for him or because it erroneously assumes that his subservience is not due to the nature of defeat but to the perfection of the victor." If that "erroneous assumption fixes itself in the soul, it becomes a firm belief. The soul, then, adopts all the manners of the victor and assimilates itself to him. This, then, is imitation" (Khaldūn as cited in Omran, 2021, p. 98). But the results of the mimicry are entirely different from the main goals of the colonizer.

3.2 | Gordimer's Characters Living in Ambivalence

In "Which New Era Would That Be," explained before, an excellent example of ambivalence is shown when Jake Alexander did not like to have any companion with whites but, on the other hand, tried to behave like them, especially in his lifestyle. This ambivalence is shown in another part of this story when the black man sees the white woman for the first time:

Here was the black hair of a determined woman. The big, lively, handsome eyes, dramatically painted, that would look into yours with such intelligent, eager honesty – eager to mirror what Jake Alexander, a big, fat slob of a colored man interested in women, money, brandy and boxing, was feeling. She was wearing a wide black skirt, a white cotton blouse baring a good deal of her breasts, and earrings that seemed to have been made by a blacksmith out of bits of scrap iron. On her feet, she had sandals whose narrow thongs wound between her toes, and the nails of the toes were painted plum color. By contrast, her hands were neglected-looking – sallow, unmanicured – and on one thin finger there swiveled a huge gold seal ring. She was beautiful, he supposed with disgust. (Gordimer, 2011, p. 56)

He praised her beauty but with disgust. She was a white woman, and however he was interested in women, her whiteness and the fact that she knew herself as equal to the blacks was disgusting for him. So it puts him in an ambivalent situation; although he does not want the white woman to look at him from a higher position, he appreciates her, especially her beauty.

Furthermore, in "Open House," when the black man talks about their situation during apartheid in South Africa, and then gives an example of a black who wears like whites and tries to speak in English, he describes the ambivalent situation in which some

blacks find themselves. They do not want the whites to have any power over them, but they appreciate their behaviors.

As already mentioned, there is a close relationship between mimicry and ambivalence. Bhabha states that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Thus, the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence" (as cited in Omran, 2021, p. 95). It is the ambivalence of mimicry, the desire of the colonized to be similar but different, that "enables a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into grounds of intervention" (Bhabha, as cited in Choo, 2020, p. 6). However, as we have already seen, the process of colonial mimicry is both a product of and produces ambivalence and hybridity.

3.3 | Hybridity and the Concept of New Identity in Gordimer's Fiction

A good example of hybridity is shown in "Homage", where a homeless person, the main character of the story, wants to escape from his unhomely situation in his own country to find a sense of homeliness in another place. Thus, he is paid to kill a political figure. Paid only half of his promised fee, he is taken by those who hired him to another country while they erased his identity. He participates in this erasure:

We leave home because of governments overthrown, a conscript on the wrong side; no work, no bread or oil in the shops, and when we cross a border we're put over another border, and another. What is your final destination? We don't know; we don't know where we can stay, where we won't be sent on somewhere else, from one tent camp to another in a country where you can't get papers. (Gordimer, 2003, p. 85)

In his new place, he finds a new identity with new papers; he wants to escape from his previous identity: "they got me in here with papers and a name they gave me; I buried my name, no-one will ever dig it out of me" (85). But he cannot stand this new identity. He never experiences a sense of homeliness. He knows himself as 'nobody': "I am nobody; no country counts me in its census, the name they gave me does not exist: nobody did what was done" (85).

He never makes any relation with others. He escapes others. He does not want to be known by others: "I do not take up with anybody. Not even a woman. Those places I worked, I would get offers to do things, move stolen goods, handle drugs: people seemed to smell out somehow I had made myself available" (87). And finally, the killer pays homage to the killed, bringing roses to the slain man's memorial, putting it on the engraved stone of the man, where he buried his identity with him: "Today I bought a cheap bunch of red roses held by an elastic band wound tight between their crushed leaves and wet thorns, and laid it there, before the engraved stone, behind the low railing, where my name is buried with him" (88). He is in a wandering situation and cannot catch the third space. He could not adapt himself to his new situation. He even could not accept the new identity they gave him. So he could not find the sense of homeliness in his new place. He is an excellent example of those who cannot catch the hybrid identity.

"Through Time and Distance" is a story about a white truck driver and the black boy who works for him, and they had been on the road together for seven or eight years in South Africa. When blacks could not travel between cities without a permit, there was a movement in which blacks burned their licenses and passports. So when the boy refuses to set fire to his passport and is accused of collaborating with whites, problems arise for him and the truck driver.

'We are going to free you all of the pass,' Phillip found himself declaiming. Children, hanging about, gave the Congress raised-thumb salute. 'The white man won't bend our backs like yours, old man.' They could see for themselves how much he had already taken from the white man, wearing the same clothes as the white man, driving the white man's big car – an emissary from the knowledgeable, political world of the city, where black men were learning to be masters. Even Hirsch's cry, 'Phillip, get a move on there!', came as an insignificant interruption, a relic of the present almost become the past. (Gordimer, 2011, p. 109)

They can see that the black boy has already taken everything from the white man; even his clothes were the same as him. However, they did not want to be

the same as the whites. They want to have their own identity: "We are going to see that this is the end of the pass. The struggle for freedom – the white man will not stand on our backs" (109).

4 | CONCLUSION

This article pays attention to some selected short stories of Nadine Gordimer, as a leading figure in world literature against apartheid. She is considered as one of the most important African writers in the field of Postcolonial literature. Her stories are analyzed based on Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial theories. The most important element of his theory is what he calls hybridity, which refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. Mimicry and ambivalence are the other elements of his theory which are studied in analyzing Gordimer's short stories.

The main intention of the article is to examine the concept of identity among the characters of Gordimer's short stories. Gordimer's stories are reflecting the real situation of those people who are known as the low class of society in South Africa and some other African countries. The difference between the cultural behavior of colonizers and the colonized makes some challenges that is concluded in a kind of identity crisis. In Gordimer's short sto-ries, it can be concluded, some characters experi-ence the hybrid situations and some of them remain in ambivalence. On the other hand, those charac-ters who adopt themselves to new situation usually have to mimic the colonizers or upper class of soci-ety. Generally speaking, those characters who pass this process successfully can make a new acceptable identity for themselves.

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