

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN DOMINANT AND INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the struggle between dominant and indigenous identities in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. Drawing on postcolonial perspectives associated with Stuart Hall, Frantz Fanon, and Homi K. Bhabha, and using M. J. Murphy's methods of character analysis, the study qualitatively analyzes how Mustafa Sa'eed and Ifemelu negotiate cultural identity through strategic essentialism, nativism, and the third space. The analysis considers physical appearance, authorial description, speech, actions, thoughts, and the reactions of other characters. The findings indicate that both protagonists initially adopt selected features of dominant cultures in response to social and cultural pressures, later reclaim elements of their indigenous identities, and ultimately occupy a hybrid and ambivalent third space. The study demonstrates that postcolonial identity is neither fixed nor reducible to a simple opposition between indigenous and dominant cultures; rather, it is continuously negotiated through cultural adaptation, resistance, and hybridity. By bringing together strategic essentialism, nativism, and third-space theory, the study contributes to understanding identity formation in postcolonial literary contexts.

I. INTRODUCTION

The indigenous people under colonization are subjected to cultural transformation. The dominant cultural norms, such as Eurocentric codes of conduct, influence the native culture, leading to hybridity. There is a wide range of research papers in the postcolonial discourse, but inadequate scholarship address identity formation through strategic essentialism, nativism, and the third space. Thereby, utilizing Murphy's methods of character analysis along with postcolonial theory, the following study aims to qualitatively examine the identity struggle through strategic essentialism, nativism and third space in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah*. The present study's findings suggest strategic essentialism is a strategic choice for the protagonists to transform their identities consciously. However, the findings also demonstrate that the role of nativism in the identity struggle is significant, while countering the assimilative pressures and revaluing the native roots. However, the amalgamation of strategic essentialism and nativism places the protagonists in the third space, facing ambivalence and hybridity following their identity.

Recent scholarship also demonstrates the continuing relevance of postcolonial identity and decolonization in contemporary literary research. Bhandari (2022) revisits Bhabha's third-space theory and cultural identity, while Kumar and Singh (2022) emphasize the fluidity of identity, representation, and power relations in postcolonial societies. More recent studies extend these concerns to the selected novels and related contexts. Alkhawaldeh

(2024) examines rootedness, place, and identity in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, while Çulhaoğlu (2024) examines the construction of authentic and dignified identity in the same novel. Chen (2024) further shows that third-space dynamics and cultural ambivalence remain important in contemporary postcolonial narratives. In the Pakistani context, Shah et al. (2024) examine decolonizing identity and survival through cultural hybridity, providing a regional point of comparison for the present study. These recent contributions strengthen the rationale for examining identity as an ongoing negotiation between inherited cultural affiliations and dominant cultural pressures.

Problem statement

Postcolonial culture is formed through the blending of dominant cultural norms with indigenous traditions. Despite having far-reaching sociopolitical impacts, the literary reflection of this concern in *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie remains overlooked. Thereby, the present study aims to qualitatively examine the identity struggle through strategic essentialism, nativism and third space in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah*.

Aim of the Study

The present study aims to qualitatively examine the identity struggle through strategic essentialism, nativism and third space in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah*.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the protagonists' practice of strategic essentialism to assimilate the dominant culture in the selected texts.
2. To investigate the protagonists' use of nativism as a counter strategy against cultural assimilation in the selected texts.
3. To explore the role of the third space in the blending of the protagonists' identities in the selected texts.

Research Questions

1. How do the protagonists practice strategic essentialism to assimilate the dominant culture in the selected texts?
2. How do the protagonists use nativism as a counter strategy against cultural assimilation in the selected texts?
3. What is the role of the third space in the blending of the protagonists' identities in the selected texts?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the words of Quayson (2012), postcolonial culture is not a static inheritance but a dynamic site where colonial legacies and indigenous traditions are constantly negotiated. Because colonialism in developing countries still dominates people's thoughts and mindsets. Even though they have national awareness and an identity, they still do not overcome such domination. Quayson (2012) claims that though they negotiate their identity, that does not mean they are converting their sense of selves but being hybrid in a cultural sense. This is the hybridity which is similar to having "no identity at all". Postcolonial people experience these cultural crises. Ting-Toomy (2015) states that the negotiation of identity is the verbal and nonverbal communication. In fact, this is true because the identity is made up of language, beliefs, customs and ideologies. Ignoring these cultural characteristics and embracing the values of some superior cultures is called assimilation of identity. This is because the culture brought to the colonies by their masters has a significant impact on the continent, even after the independence of these former colonies, as Edu-Buandoh (2016) claims. They are still dominating in the modern world. In many former colonies, such as India, Nigeria, Sudan, and Pakistan, people are still in the process of adopting the colonial culture. With regard to Africa, Kabanda (2016) stresses, "Africa has been decolonized for now over 50 years, the African mindsets have continued to be eroded from recognizing their roots to construct systems and leadership grounded on their values, but continue to implement the same Western-based values across state structures".

But in postcolonial times, the states adopt a strategic approach to the cultural adaptation, and they view this as a process of development and modernity. This "strategic essentialism" of cultural adaptation underlines the inferiority complex of the colonized people. According to Weerasekara, Withanachchi and Ploeger (2018), "colonization is a violent process that fundamentally altered the ways of life of the colonized". But it should be remembered that the process of colonization has always been a contested phenomenon, as the colonized have been active in negotiations. This has not only been a political subordination, but a change in some established identities in the name of civilization. Of course, this brought a number of nations in a state of hybridity. While talking of post-colonial Africa, Bertolt (2018) asserts that "colonialism regulates all aspects of African societies: knowledge, culture, art, economy, including gender relations". These are simply the parts of the nation and its assimilation is the outright destruction of the nation. The author stresses that all these adoptions are an unconscious act, where locals are in a trance of modernisation. And assimilating certain activities is considered a civilising act by colonization. Indeed, Annus (2018) rightly defines, "from this colonised culture's point of view, colonialism is a political, economic and cultural domination of a territory by a foreign power".

Stuart Hall is a famous theorist in the field of postcolonial culture and identity; his contributions are immense. He has contributed to postcolonial identities and their transformations. John Clarke describes, "his way of thinking about social formations, his way of thinking about culture as the place where the ideological and the political is contested, also connected his work on diasporic identities, popular cultural forms and aesthetic/cultural practices". His cultural identity seems to be a blending of social reality. Using this illuminating concept, identity formations appear dynamic when social ideas merge to create identity. In this vein, Sharpe (2018) states that "Hall's cultural identity is the socio-cultural lens through which one can understand that culture and identity are not fixed but are in the process of being". They are produced in power relations.

Drabinski (2019) refers to "Fanon's evocation of a total break with the past in the conclusion confirms this pessimism and shows that his sense of liberation is tied to an apocalyptic revolutionary praxis". The cultural intellectuality of the colonized subjects is that praxis. The author (2019) adds that "the colonized intellectual is precisely what the term implies: an intermediary who translates the colonized to the colonizer, in the language of the colonizer and for the political, social and cultural ends of the colonizer". The colonized intellectual does not think about the oppressed native people. And this is the consciousness, Fanon believes, that the native should follow to liberate themselves from the shackles of colonialism. And this consciousness of the postcolonial native people can be called as "nativism". In Fanon's *On National Culture*, Bose (2019) suggests that "claiming a national and rooted culture is quintessential to achieving freedom from colonization". National identity among indigenous people forms against the colonialism. Likewise, Sajed and Seidel (2019) point out that, "national consciousness as a collective ownership of the goals of anticolonial struggle clarifies Fanon's vision of national liberation." National consciousness and internationalism sometimes do not coexist. This is because national consciousness is social and concerns pre-colonial culture and identity. Within national consciousness, Fanon explains the role of intellectuals in decolonizing the mind and the culture from the influence of the colonial era. Ndayisenga (2022) refers to the fact that Fanon's notion of decolonization plays an important role in decolonizing the minds that were colonized by the altering history of colonized. Similarly, Kumar and Singh (2022) reimagine the concept of hybridity in the postcolonial cultures and argue that identity is in flux in postcolonial cultures. They assert that representation and power relations play a crucial role in the creation of postcolonial subjects and how they perceive themselves and others.

The notion of identity formation in postcolonial society is also influenced by Homi Bhabha's hybridity and "the third space". Bhandari (2022) says, "negotiation is elemental to the cultural meaning when the colonizer and the colonized come together. This negotiation renders an ambivalent retention, which subverts essentialist identity and the domination of the colonizers over the colonized". And in the state of ambivalence, colonized people are really in an identity crisis. As they are living in the state of hybridity, which the author (2022) claims is the new cultural identity. Expanding on this, Wang (2023) explains, "The author believes the clash between the different cultures is not the total rejection of the colonial culture; it is a very complicated and ongoing negotiation process, which transforms and reproduces expressions of oppositions and contradictions". Likewise, Ahmed and Khan (2023) address Stuart Hall's cultural identity and diaspora, highlighting the fluidity and construction of cultural identity. They argue that the diaspora is in a continuous process of social and political construction. And

Mwangi (2023) discusses the relevance of Fanon's theory in contemporary postcolonial studies, emphasising decolonising the mind and resisting culture. The author suggests reclaiming indigenous identity is important for psychological and cultural decolonisation from colonialism.

Bhabha's concept is used by Ghamdi (2023) in Arab American Women's Narratives, stressing that hybridity renders people in a state of liminality. Indeed, Bhabha's theory is widely used in postcolonial studies to analyze the problem of postcolonial society. Arab (2023) states, "Ambivalence, mimicry, third space, and hybridity are not only central to postcolonial studies but have become influential for broader debates on contemporary issues like modernity, race, gender, globalization, human rights, and other political matters." In addition, Chen (2024) explores Bhabha's Third Space and cultural ambivalence in contemporary postcolonial stories, showcasing how characters navigate through the intersection of cultures. The research reveals that ambivalence and hybridity continue to be key to postcolonial subjectivity. In addition, Islam (2024) uses Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity on *Things Fall Apart* to examine characters in terms of their ambivalent attitude to colonial influences, through both rejection and acceptance. Ambivalence is expressed in characters' resistance and acceptance of colonial influences, which reflects the tensions of cultural identity under colonialism. In fact, "the third space" reveals the hybridity of colonized people. Alkhawaldeh in Bioregionalism in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*: a postcolonial study (2024) talks of the role of being rooted in one's land in identity formation. Moreover, he explores the characters' place and how this makes them have a fixed or fluid identity. Al-Zain (2024) describes how "the novel *A Season of Migration to the North* displays the writer's connection to his country, and his experience of emigration and his vast culture, enriched and deepened his experience." Culhaoglu (2024) examines the post-colonial creation of an authentic and dignified identity in Tayeb Salih's *classic Season of Migration to the North*. Nevertheless, Chouiten (2024) studies this novel from another point of view, as he argues that "colonial education in *Season of Migration to the North* empowers and limits the main character, Mustafa Sa'eed, simultaneously." He argues (2024) that this education enables the protagonist to achieve success and challenge colonialism. Lastly, Bradling (2024) analyses this novel from another perspective. He examines the novel from the perspective of Swedish students and how the novel helps them understand the world and view the novel from their own lenses.

Mutashar (2024) discusses *Americanah* as a representation of the identity of African immigrants in America. The author (2024) talks about racial issues in identity, as he argues that Adichie challenges the whites and forces the dramatic debates on selfhood as well as on discomforting and unpalatable issues of racism and colonialism. Abood (2025) examines the novel in relation to a Nigerian female student in America, and the use of code-switching in personal identity struggle as an African immigrant in America. He explains that language is linked to identity, and code-switching is an indication of the complex relationships between language and identity. But Abasi (2025), in discussing the protagonist from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis, differentiates the protagonist's perspective on identity. He mentions the protagonist, adding that "her musings allow her to unpack the issues of being Black in America while also bringing attention to her Nigerian identity as a woman, forging an intersectional identity." Similarly, Tieško (2025) discusses the role of globalization and diaspora in shaping the identity of immigrants. Conversely, Mirmotahari (2025) discusses the role of white progressivism in perpetuating racism. The author contends that *Americanah* depicts "Black inter subjectivities in the US and one of the experiences that characterizes the postcolonial condition in the African diaspora: the sometimes uneasy and even antipathy relationship between African, Afro-Caribbean, and Black American communities". Rodriguez and Patel (2025) investigate diasporic identities in twenty-first century global literature, stating that migration produces fractured but restless identities. They discuss the role of global circulation in the shaping of cultural identity and belonging in contemporary fiction.

Previous scholars have investigated the identities represented in the novels, *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah*, linearly. Their studies emphasized the most on identity, based on migration and racism. But there is a lack of study that approaches the novels from a postcolonial perspective, particularly the ideas of Hall, Fanon and Bhabha, to discuss the struggle of identity of the protagonists. Besides, the culture, which is an essential element of the novels and the most prominent element that defines the identity, is largely unexplored. Indeed, the protagonists of the under-explored texts seem to live between two cultures and are constantly struggling with their identities. Although cultural identity is a key element of both novels, it has been neglected in the framework

of postcolonial studies. Hence, this study bridges the gap by analyzing the identity conflicts of the protagonists in terms of cultural norms. This research also explores the role of the colonial legacy that is sustained in the postcolonial societies, incorporating the inherited cultural identities of the characters. Hence, the study adds to the postcolonial studies critically by understanding postcolonial identity and its formation in light of the colonial legacy.

III. METHOD

Research Design

This study utilizes qualitative research methodology, focusing on the analysis of the characters as a fundamental method of investigation. Character analysis is a prominent literary interpretive technique, emphasizing the essence of literary characters and their particular role in literary works. Using this analytical model along with a postcolonial lens, the study mainly focuses on characters' internal and external personalities in the context of identity and cultural conflict.

Participants

The data analyzed in this study were collected from the novels *A Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah*. Both novels present their protagonists amid struggles in the postcolonial arena between two different identities simultaneously. So, in this regard, the narrative structure of the novels presents their essential personality traits like speech, physical appearance, actions, thoughts, and, along with authorial descriptions and the reactions of other characters towards the protagonists, in the context of their particular struggle for identity formation. Focusing on these points, the study analyzed the protagonists through symbolic textual representation and linear reflection of their characters in the texts. All the gathered data associated with each of the aforementioned points is interpreted, focusing on the cultural conflict between the indigenous and dominant cultures in the postcolonial atmosphere. Identity in the postcolonial period became a dynamic phenomenon. Owing to multiple cultural dominances like that of colonizers and other popular cultures, the identity of the indigenous people is in an evolving process. In this context, theorists have largely contributed by presenting their theories and hypotheses, unleashing these very sociopolitical issues in the postcolonial discourse. Among those prominent and widely celebrated theorists, Stuart Hall, Franz Fanon, and Homi K. Bhabha have contributed to postcolonial studies prominently. Their insights are practical grounds for scholars to explore identity and culture in the postcolonial arena.

He proposed that identity is a non-static reality in the postcolonial arena. In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), Hall describes identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process. In fact, the term Strategic Essentialism is particularly used by Gayatri Spivak as a political concept. This is a strategy to achieve certain political goals. But in the case of this study, strategic essentialism is utilized to cover Hall's cultural identity and its transformation under the guise of postcolonial struggle to achieve a particular status in the colonial representation or dominant cultural framework. Colonization is an act of force, be it on culture, land, or ideology. This uses a power structure and representative framework to maintain dominance over indigenous roots. Since colonists constructed the historical reality in their favor and represented the indigenous as wild and primitive. So, following this constructed truth, the colonized face an inferiority complex and struggle to achieve that very framework of civilization. Hall (1990) emphasizes, identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

Furthermore, Fanon opposed a static conception of culture. He never favored the historical culture which is fixed and museum-like reality. Rather he favored on the dynamic process of culture. He (1961) warned the indigenous people of the 'museum-like' culture. Culture does not mean only traditions to follow, like old folklore, mythology, music, and other artifacts. Colonization always tries to hold the ideology of the people in its grip and their beliefs as well. This dominance over ideology shapes the psychology of the indigenous who come to believe colonization is a form of civilization. Fanon (1961) mentions that colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. Therefore, to challenge these psychological impacts of colonization, it is necessary for one to value one's own roots. In this regard Fanon (1961) observes that to

escape from the supremacy of the white man's culture, the native feels the need to turn backward toward his unknown roots and to lose himself at whatever cost in his own barbarous people. So, the protagonists' after adopting colonial culture, follow nativism of the Fanon to develop their own cultural identity. This is what Fanon named, cultural consciousness or cultural decolonization. Furthermore, he presented the third space as a liminal zone of making an hybrid identity. He believed that when two different identities meet in the postcolonial arena, both blend with each other to make a different reality or hybridity. Bhabha (1994) writes that it resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups, sipahis and sahibs, as homogeneous polarized political consciousnesses. He addresses the binary oppositions in the context of identity. And believes that binaries are also in the process of change due to blending with each other. In addition, he mentions ambivalence in his theory that reinforces the resistance and mimics the cultures. Owing to this process, hybridity emerges in the cultural context.

Procedure

This article employs M. J. Murphy's Methods of Characterization to examine the crises of identity of the central characters in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah*. Murphy's model offers a multi-faceted approach to character analysis, examining both textual and sociocultural aspects. The study is qualitative, using descriptive interpretation. Although the characters initially appear static, they are revealed as dynamic and influenced by cultural change. Physical appearance, such as clothing, body parts and general appearance, provide instant clues to a character's personality and social status. Authorial commentary offers direct information about characters, directing our attention and showing ideological meanings. Characters' background draws attention to their experiences that influence their present actions and motivations characters' thoughts are analyzed, revealing the inner life and their emotions, fears, and desires to offer psychological insight. In sum, Murphy's approach allows for a holistic understanding of characters through appearance, actions, thoughts and social setting. It also reveals underlying elements like ideology, identity and culture. Here, some aspects of Murphy's model are used to analyze the construction and negotiation of identities in postcolonial contexts.

IV. RESULTS

Strategic Essentialism

Strategic essentialism is the practice of assimilating one's native identity while adopting an alien or dominant cultural identity for survival and acceptance purposes in the postcolonial arena. Since colonial representation of the indigenous as primitive places the colonized in inferior complexities regarding the culture. To claim that very civilized status, oppressed people attempt to negotiate their roots to be accepted under the colonists' representation. The very first thing highlighted here is the physical appearance of the central characters in both novels. Their appearance demonstrates the characteristics of strategic essentialism in their personalities. "A man of medium height, of around fifty or slightly older, his hair thick and going grey, beardless and with a moustache slightly smaller than those worn by men in the village; a handsome man" (Salih, 1961, p.12). This is the description of Mustafa's appearance in the season of Migration to the North. His being 'beardless', along with keeping a moustache smaller compared to traditional men in Sudan, contrasts with his very appearance in the Sudanese identity framework. In terms of Ifemelu in *Americanah*, she is described, "She was fat" (Adichie, 2013, p.11). Her body does not match the American beauty standard, where slim and zero-figure are appreciated. This very description contrasts her appearance with that of native Nigerian culture, where being "fat" means health and well-being.

Descriptions or direct comments of authors on the protagonists also reveal their character traits in the novels. "America's mythologies began to take on meaning, America's tribalisms, race, ideology, and region became clear" (Adichie, 2013, p.160). In *Americanah*, Adichie brings forth Ifemelu's attention towards American cultural characteristics. She seems to adopt the American cultural components without any second thought. And in the case of Mustafa, Salih writes his obsession with English poetry, how he narrates "English poetry in a clear voice and with an impeccable accent... from an anthology about the First World War" (Salih, 1961, p.20). Their actions contribute to the term strategic essentialism as well. Mustafa "was the spoilt child of the English... would contort his mouth and thrust out his lips, and the words would issue forth as though from the mouth of one whose mother tongue it was" (Salih, 1961, p.44). And Ifemelu's action also shows the same, as she "began to practice an American accent" (Adichie, 2013, p.143). These are not just minor attempts, but active efforts to copy the lifestyle

and cultural practices. These practices are the pathway that is promoted by strategic essentialism to assimilate dominant identity in the postcolonial period.

As for speech or expression, Ifemelu writes: "light skin is valued in the community of American Blacks... most of the American Blacks who are successful... are light" (Adichie, 2013, p.226). Such an opinion is an expression of strategic essentialism because success equates with whiteness. Mustafa says "I, although I had a sort of superiority complex... I, more than anything else, am a colonizer" (Salih, 1961, p.70). His description of himself as a 'colonizer' is ultimate strategic essentialism.

Other characters' reactions also show strategic essentialism in the texts. The narrator describes Mustafa: "There was not the slightest doubt that the man was of a different clay" (Salih, 1961, p.19). This is the reaction on his personality that does not resemble Sudanese identity. And the hairdresser compliments Ifemelu "Look how pretty it is. You've got the white-girl swing!" (Adichie, 2013, p.215).

The characters' thoughts reveal internal aspects of strategic essentialism. The author writes: "Ifemelu watched Mariama in the mirror, thinking of her own new American selves" (Adichie, 2013, p.202). Assuming herself as American is like an achievement Mustafa also recalls "This was a turning-point in my life. It was the first decision I had taken of my own free will" (Salih, 1961, p.25). Both characters adopted strategic essentialism for the sole purpose of assimilation of dominant cultures that are considered civilized and developed, to achieve success and for survival, following the colonial representations.

Nativism

Nativism is a process of resistance to decolonize culture. Colonialism devalues and destroys native culture, replacing native attributes (Food, sports, music, etc.) with colonial ones. Natives rid themselves of these colonial traits, regaining their precolonial, native identity. In *Americanah* and *Season of Migration to the North*, characters Ifemelu and Mustafa make a shift from adopting colonial identities to reclaiming native identities.

Physical appearance and Authorial comments show the characteristics of nativism. Ifemelu wants to "braid her hair for the journey home" (Adichie, 2013, p.13). And Adichie notes Ifemelu's love of a Nigerian song: "She would remember this moment...listening to 'Yori Yori'" (Adichie, 2013, p.449). In both textual references, her appearance, along with her thought reflection of Native

music, resembles that of indigenous identity, manifesting the reclaiming attitude of her roots instead of transforming herself fully into American identity. Likewise, Mustafa's portrayal also emphasizes nativism: "Your nose is like the noses of Arabs in pictures, but your hair isn't soft and jet black like that of Arabs" (Salih, 1961, p.35). The author describes, "he regularly attended the mosque for Friday prayers, and that he was 'always ready to give of his labour and his means in glad times and sad'" (Salih, 1961, p.15). The appearance and authorial words reflect Mustafa's true identity and his return to traditions, where he joins other people at the mosque instead of English people at the pub. The Speech and actions of the two characters show nativism in recovering cultural identity. Mustafa recites the poetry of Abu Nuwas, a classical Arab poet:

Does it not please you the earth is awaking, that old virgin wine is there for the taking? Let's have no excuse, come enjoy this delight; Its mother is green, its sire black as night. Make haste, Karkh's gardens hang heavy with bloom, Safe and unscathed from War's blighting doom." (Salih, 1961, p.100)

And in terms of his speech, he mentions, "For a number of reasons, I decided to change over to agriculture... Something inside me told me that this was the place" (Salih, 1961, p.18). Looking deeply, his obsession with classical poetry of his mother tongue, along with his words of leaving the English soil to prefer a life in the mud of his native land, demonstrates the nativism that is the sole motivation behind his whole transformational struggle. Also, Ifemelu follows the same strategy through nativism. She is found along with a friend "lapsing into their Nigerian voices and their Nigerian selves, louder, more heightened, adding 'o' to their sentences" (Adichie, 2013, p.234). And then saying, "I like Nollywood... Nollywood may be melodramatic, but life in Nigeria is very melodramatic" (Adichie, 2013, p.416). Such attempts of her active role to reclaim her assimilated identity are revealed through nativism in her speech and actions.

Internal thoughts of the characters and the reactions of the other characters to the protagonists' personalities reveal the traces of nativism and indigenous cultural reclamation. Ifemelu expresses, "I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black" (Adichie, 2013, p.484). Further in the storyline, another character describes

Ifemelu, "You don't have an American accent" (Adichie, 2013, p.241). In the first case, she feels homecoming is the freedom from the chains of colonial representations. Secondly, her changed accent resemble herself to Nigerian native. In the same intensity, Mustafa thinks, "Life in this village is simple and gracious. The people are good and easy to get along with" (Salih, 1961, p.17). And then another character says about him, "I found that Mustafa was a member of the Committee. They were looking into a matter concerning the distribution of water to the fields" (Salih, 1961, p.19). It is a complete transformation of the culture that he struggles for. Both are denouncing the assimilated identity and returning to their roots. Nativism is significant considering the struggle of the characters for a native identity. It reveals the true picture of how a postcolonial individual goes through certain efforts to achieve his roots after assimilating a colonial identity.

The Third Space

The third space is an imaginary space where cultures encounter, collide, and transform. It disrupts dualistic thinking, such as "us/them" or "colonizer/colonized," by creating hybrid identities. Likewise, both the above-discussed assimilations and reclaiming of identity are processes of the third space. Though the characters attempted first to adopt colonial assimilations, then resisted that, evidently, but as a matter of fact, both central characters of the novels remain hybrid and ambivalent in terms of culture and identity. The appearance and the direct authors' description represent how the third space blends the identity. Ifemelu first fights American beauty standards: "Why you don't have relaxer?" - "I like my hair the way God made it" (Adichie, 2013, p. 214). This is the resistance she acts upon not to assimilate identity. Later, "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair" (Adichie, 2013, p.127), is the assimilation of the identity. Both appearances of her contrast with each other, owing to resisting and embracing the dominant culture. However, Mustafa goes through the same experience when his description is given, "beardless and with a moustache slightly smaller than those worn by men in the village" (Salih, 1961, p. 13). Here, his appearance is similar to that of English, but then the description of his natural features, like "his forehead broad and generous, his eyebrows set well apart... his fingers none the less were long and elegant" (p. 16), does not relate to that of his adopted identity. Focusing on appearance, both characters are stuck in the third space, that is creating their character hybrid and ambivalence. Authors' statements on their characters also place them in the third space. In Salih's novel, Mustafa is "reciting English poetry in a clear voice and with an impeccable accent." This is an example of mimicry.

The third space is also transparent in their actions and speech. Ifemelu switches between two identities: "You are looking at things with American eyes. But the problem is that you are not a real Americanah. At least if you had an American accent, we would tolerate your complaining" (p. 392). Here, she takes on an American prism: seeing things through American eyes. Later, "Lapsing into their Nigerian voices and their Nigerian selves, louder, more heightened, adding 'o' to their sentences" (Adichie, 2013, p.234) shows her comfort in native accent and language. That happy reunion with her homely voice is a metaphorical resistance. Also, Mustafa first imitates, like, "contort his mouth and thrust out his lips and the words would issue forth as though from the mouth of one whose mother tongue it was" (Salih, 1961, p. 45). Then, after realization, he says, "A lecture I gave in Oxford on Abu Nuwas ... I read them some of his poetry about wine in a comic oratorical style which I claimed was how Arabic poetry used to be recited in the Abbasid era" (p.101). He comes back to his roots, which is somewhat an indirect resistance. Both characters occupy a metaphorical zone, adopting and resisting the identity.

The third space is also indicated by their speech. In her blog, Ifemelu says: "In America, racism exists but racists are all gone. Racists belong to the past (p.327). The incompatibility of race matters and race is gone is a literal translation of the third space: she is neither able to embrace the American narrative entirely nor to disregard it. And Mustafa goes in the same line, saying "We stopped at pubs on the way; sometimes drinking cider, sometimes beer, red wine, white wine, and sometimes we drank whisky, and with every glass I would quote to her from the poetry of Abu Nuwas" (Salih, 1961, p. 102). He is mixing the poetry of the native poet Abu Nuwas with pub culture and mixing his identity entirely. In their speech, it is crystal clear that both are hybrid in terms of identity in the third space. Mustafa says, "We went to pubs by the way; we drank cider, we drank beer, and we drank red wine, and we drank white wine, and we drank whisky, and each time I drank a glass I would recite to her a poem of Abu Nuwas. He recites a classical Arab poet, in an English pub, drinking forbidden wine. Such hybrid speech act cannot occur without the third space; it combines the ritual of the colonizer with the heritage of the colonized in the same breath.

The third space is also confirmed by the reactions of other people around them. "With a combination of admiration and spite we nicknamed him 'the black Englishman'" (Adichie, 1961, p. 45). This symbolic name is a reflection of the English identity that he imitated. But the term 'Black' shows his true and original self. This description of him by others shows his hybridity in the third space by mixing two different identities. What other people around Ifemelu think of her is similar to this, like, "I'm sure you've read every American novel ever published" (Adichie, 2013, 442). In fact, this comment comes out of her assimilated personality, indicating her preferences. Later, one of the characters asks her about her lost American accent, and she mentions "I make an effort not to" (p. 442). Both remarks contrast with each other, placing the character in the hybridity of the third space. Their thoughts also contribute to revealing their identity in the third space. Ifemelu reflects, "The thought that she could always return to America did not comfort her as much as she wished it to" (Adichie, 2013, p.199). She craves America yet finds no real comfort, a thought suspended between desire and disenchantment. Then, when a friend tells her, "Ifem, you're not fat. You're being very American about that. What Americans consider fat can just be normal" (p. 438). Her thinking of herself as an American individual reflects her assimilated attitude, along with the beauty standard. At one point, she is not feeling comfortable in association with America, and in the second point, she sees herself and other things through the American standard, which makes her hybrid in terms of her point of view.

Mustafa thinks, "I'm like Othello Arab African" (Salih, 1961, p. 35). He identifies with an English literary character from a Shakespearean play, reflecting an assimilation into English identity. Then he thinks, "I am no Othello. Othello was a lie" (p. 71). At first, he considers himself one of the English characters, but later rejects that very thought. His thoughts oscillate, never settling. That oscillation is the signature of the third space, a space where no final identity is possible, only change. Both protagonists, in their appearance, their authors' descriptions, their actions, their spoken words, others' perceptions, and their deepest thoughts, dwell perpetually in the third space. They are neither colonized victims nor successful mimics; they are new, mixed beings, forever translating between cultures and identities.

V. DISCUSSION

Strategic Essentialism: Mimicking the Assimilative Identity

The results indicate that identity negotiation within postcolonial situations is not simply imposed, but can also involve voluntary choices and is guided by strategic essentialism. The central characters in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah* adopt aspects of dominant cultures to survive and are accepted within the colonial representation. Ifemelu imitates the American culture, whereas Mustafa adopts English values. Both alter their appearance, language, actions, thoughts, and way of living to meet the standards of the colonies. Strategic essentialism is a tool of survival that assists them in abandoning their native identity in favor of a Western identity. Their changes are not temporary; rather, they are intentional and profound. Ifemelu picks up American standards of beauty; Mustafa defies his Sudanese identity. They are perceived differently by others: Mustafa is called of a different clay, and Ifemelu is said to have a white-girl swing. Assimilation of colonial identity is reflected in their internal thoughts, actions like relaxing hair, joining English people in the pub, mimicking accents, and reciting English poetry. Finally, strategic essentialism transforms cultural insecurity into non-verbal alienation and deconstructs their initial selves. Their choices value the English and American languages, dress, accents, and lifestyle and culture, following the strategic essentialism.

Nativism: Reclaiming the Native Identity

Nativism functions as an opposing force against the assimilation of culture and identity. Once they reconnect with their roots, Ifemelu and Mustafa acknowledge the worth of their indigenous culture and reject assimilation by themselves. They recover their origins through nativism in dress, actions, speech, music, and poetry. Ifemelu's rejection of hair straightening and American accents, and her preference for native music, landscapes, poetry, and traditional lifestyle shows the nativist approach returning to their roots. Ifemelu's acceptance of Nigerian music and preference for the Nigerian film industry are elements that she adopts. Mustafa is a practicing Muslim who attends Friday prayers, puts on traditional Sudanese clothes, and recites native poetry instead of English pub culture. Their resistance is not accidental: Ifemelu abandons the American accent, and Mustafa becomes a

member of a village farm. Even other characters notice their return to their native culture and identity. Nativism not only opposes colonialism but is also an active force in decolonizing language and cultural identity. Both protagonists struggle to revive their original selves and undo the previous assimilation.

The Third Space: Ambivalence of Identity

Switching between the resistance and adoption of colonial identity continuously places Ifemelu and Mustafa in a liminal state of third space. They are turned into hybrids, neither completely native nor completely Western. The two have mixed appearances: Ifemelu switches between American and Nigerian standards of beauty, and Mustafa combines Sudanese and English features. They are ambivalent in their actions and speech. For example, Mustafa likes both Keats and Abu Nuwas; the blogs by Ifemelu are supportive and critical of the American racial attitudes. They are perceived by others as being between: Mustafa is referred to as the black Englishman, and Ifemelu is never fully accepted as an American. They engage in internal negotiation, as can be seen in their minds, being drawn to Western ways and being pulled back to their native identity. This unceasing tension brings about an uncertain, indistinct identity. The third space transforms their bodies and minds into the location of constant cultural struggle, in which no one of the identities completely triumphs. Recent research further supports the present interpretation of identity as fluid, negotiated, and shaped by cultural hybridity. Alkhawaldeh (2024) highlights the importance of rootedness and place in the construction of identity in *Season of Migration to the North*, while Çulhaoğlu (2024) examines the protagonist's movement toward an authentic and dignified identity. Chen (2024) similarly emphasizes cultural ambivalence and the third space in contemporary postcolonial narratives. Shah et al. (2024), in a study focused on decolonizing identity through cultural hybridity, also demonstrates the continuing relevance of these issues in a broader and more regionally relevant context. Taken together, these recent studies reinforce the finding that postcolonial subjects may simultaneously resist dominant cultural norms, retain indigenous affiliations, and negotiate hybrid identities.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study's discussion is structured based on the research questions. All of the research questions were answered respectively within the framework of the postcolonial society, taking into account the novels *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah*. Using a postcolonial lens, the paper has examined identity conflicts of Mustafa and Ifemelu and how postcolonial people face identity transformation as they mediate on their cultures. The findings show that there is an understandable struggle of postcolonial identity in both novels. First, there is the negotiated essentialism of origin and inherited identity practiced by the protagonists, who adhere to strategic essentialism. Then, they understand the value of their inherited past and strive to avoid assimilative forces, staying in touch with their native identity with nativism. Adhering to cultural norms and identity at one time, Mustafa and Ifemelu turn into hybrids in terms of culture and identity as they can be found in the third space of their identity struggle. Therefore, this paper finds that the identity struggle of the postcolonial as presented by Adichie and Salih is a slow process of hybridity of culture and identity of the characters in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah*.

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