

## Hybridity Portrayed by Main Characters in the Novel *The Map of Salt and Stars* by Zeyn Joukhadar

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### Abstract

*This research is conducted to find out the traits of hybridity by the main characters in the novel *The Map of Salt and Stars* by Zeyn Joukhadar. This research is analysed using a postcolonial approach with the theory of hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha. According to Bhabha, hybridity is the mixing of two or more different cultures and creating a new culture that has the characteristics of both cultures. It can be said that hybridity is the result of a culture that emerges in society due to cross-cultural interactions that occur over a long period of time. Descriptive qualitative method is used in this research to analyse the problems that occur in the novel. Based on the analysis, it is found that hybridity is symbolised by the two main characters in this novel. To highlight the relationship between the past and the present, two narratives are presented, namely through Nour's story, set in contemporary Syria, and Rawiya's mediaeval background. The diasporic experience of Nour and her family depicts a character who must adapt to changing circumstances. Meanwhile, Rawiya, who is connected to Nour's story in the present, reflects Nour's defiance of expectations as a refugee in contemporary Syria. Both protagonists, Nour and Rawiya, traverse diverse landscapes, reflecting the region's mix of cultures and traditions.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural Identity, Postcolonial, Hybridity*

### A. Introduction

Hybridity is one of the common phenomena that often occurs in our society today, hybridity is also a term that is often known in the science of biology. However,

in the world of literature, hybridity is closely related to postcolonial studies as it relates to the cross-cultural identity that occurs to a person after the end of colonialism. One of the leading researchers who studied postcolonial with one of the concepts of hybridity is Homi K. Bhabha with his theories of hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence. Colonisation is the process by which a nation establishes and maintains its domination on foreign territory, using its own settlers and its own institutions (Said, 1993). Colonisation involves political, economic, and social control exercised by the colonising ruler and the colonised territories. Colonisation involves establishing a country's control and domination over foreign lands, often involving the migration of settlers from the colonising country. This encompasses various aspects of power, including political governance and the implementation of institutions, as well as economic exploitation and cultural influence.

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2013), colonisation is defined as the establishment, maintenance, acquisition, and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory. Colonisation is the process in which a country or group of people occupy, control, and develop another territory that is different from their origin. Colonisation includes an unequal relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, where the coloniser has greater power, influence and interests than the colonised. Colonisation can also have various impacts, both positive and negative, for colonisers and colonised. Among postcolonial theorists, there is a broad consensus that hybridity arises from culturally internalised interactions between “coloniser” and “colonised” and the dichotomous formation of these identities. Considered by some to be the father of hybrid theory, Homi K. Bhabha, a leading theorist in the fields of colonialism and identity studies, argues that colonisers and colonised are interdependent in building a common culture.

According to Homi K. Bhabha, hybridity is a reflection of the entire culture that emerged from colonial cultural equilibrium and dependence. In this context, hybridity reflects cultural dependence that covers various aspects of life, such as language, attitudes, and identity. As stated by Bhabha in Pourviseh & Pirnajmuddin (2014), hybridity can be described as the views about cultural identity and aims at the creation of a kind of community where different groups with different cultures while accepting their differences, form a union of “coalition”. The creation of this coalition can lead to an identity crisis for both groups. The new culture that comes from the combining process becomes a hybrid culture that causes multiculturalism.

Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural identity emphasises the concept of hybridity, which refers to the ways in which different cultures intersect and influence each other. Homi K. Bhabha states that, “the paranoid threat of the hybrid is ultimately untenable because it destroys the symmetry and duality of self or other, within or without.” Bhabha also argues that cultural identities are not fixed or monolithic but continually develop and change as a result of cultural encounters and exchanges. Hybridity is a form of cultural resistance to dominant power structures because it disrupts binary categories of identity and challenges notions of cultural purity. By recognizing and valuing cultural differences, According to Bhabha, we can challenge the hegemony of dominant cultural norms and create a more pluralistic and inclusive

society.

According to Praseno (2011) hybridity can take many forms, including ways of thinking, fashion and style, language and even politics. Language is also a kind of hybridity, because most languages in the world are no longer pure. Many languages in the world have been mixed with other languages so that they become hybrids. In *The Map of Salt and Stars*, language and politics are both aspects that show the existence of hybrids. Through language and political conflicts, the main characters in the novel accept the consequences of the conflicts they experience in their own country so that the two main characters experience the complexity of their culture and language, and experience significant hybridity.

In the novel *A Map of Salt and Stars*, there are issues that discuss postcolonialism and hybridity. In this novel, we can see the issue of postcolonialism and hybridity from two interconnected narratives, namely Nour's story and Rawiya's story. The novel begins with a character named Nour, a twelve-year-old girl living in New York City with her Syrian family. The family was forced to return to Syria due to the death of Nour's father and the escalation of conflict in the region. As they seek safety, they face challenges and dangers in war-torn Syria. Apart from that, Nour also has synaesthesia, namely the ability to see colours from sounds.

Rawiya's story also shows how he and al-Idrisi faced challenges and adventures on their journey. They crossed various regions that were then under the rule of the Islamic Empire, Byzantine Empire, Norman Empire, and Frankish Empire. They also meet various legendary figures and creatures, such as the poet Khaldun, the giant bird Roc, and the sea dragon. Rawiya and al-Idrisi witnessed the richness and diversity of cultures that exist in the world, but also saw the conflicts and tensions between different nations. Rawiya and al-Idrisi also had to hide Rawiya's identity as a woman, because at that time women were not considered equal to men.

As the novel progresses, Nour's and Rawiya's parallel narratives converge thematically, exploring themes of identity, courage, and the power of storytelling. The title *The Map of Salt and Stars* reflects the idea that maps are not only geographical but also symbolic representations of personal and cultural journeys. From these two stories, it can be seen how this novel depicts the issues of postcolonialism and hybridity. This novel shows how nations that were once colonised or involved in colonialism experienced changes and influences from other nations. Apart from that, this novel also shows how different cultures interact, exchange, and create something new and unique. Additionally, this book refutes essentialist and stereotyped ideas about identity and culture and demonstrates how dynamic, multifaceted, and multifaceted these concepts are.

Using a postcolonial theory approach, this study intends to investigate and analyses Zeyn Joukhadar's novel *The Map of Salt and Stars*, with a particular focus on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity. In this context, the study will concentrate on how the novel's central characters portray hybridity, considering their identities and experiences. With the topic of the study "Hybridity Portrayed by Main Characters in the novel *The Map of Salt and Stars* by Zeyn Joukhadar," This study aims to investigate and analyses how hybridity is framed and portrayed in the book, as well as how this

affects the story and how we perceive cross-cultural interactions in a postcolonial setting.

This research explores the theme of hybridity depicted by the main character in the novel "*The Map of Salt and Stars*" by Zeyn Joukhadar. The theoretical framework used in this study is based on the postcolonial hybridity theory proposed by Homi K. Bhabha. According to Bhabha (1994), hybridity refers to the mixing and mingling of different cultural identities and experiences in postcolonial societies. To support the theoretical framework, previous research conducted by Viviani and Mandala (2021) with the title "Hybridity Described by the Main Character in the Novel 'Crazy Rich Asians' by Kevin Kwan" is used as a reference. This study examines the concept of hybridity in different literary works and shows its relevance in understanding the complexity of cultural identity in contemporary literature.

Based on Bhabha's hybridity theory and the insights provided by previous research, this study aims to analyse and interpret the depiction of hybridity in *The Map of Salt and Stars*. The main characters in the novel will be analysed based on their cultural backgrounds, experiences, and how they navigate hybrid identities in a postcolonial context. By exploring the theme of hybridity in the novel, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of cultural and identity dynamics in postcolonial literature. The analysis will highlight the complexities and nuances of the hybrid identities portrayed by the main characters and provide insights into the broader themes of cultural representation, identity formation and the negotiation of multiple cultural influences.

## **B. Method**

Qualitative descriptive method is the method used by researchers to analyse data in this study. Qualitative research provides descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words and the behaviour of the people observed (Bogdan, Taylor, 1957). According to Creswell (2009) Qualitative methods are methods used to analyse social problems that occur in human life. While the descriptive method means that the data that has been analysed will be displayed descriptively using words and paragraphs. Researchers divide the analysis process into two steps. The first step is data collection and the second step is analysing. The process of collecting information that can be used as data to analyse is called data collection (Kabir, 2016).

In the first step, the data for this analysis will be collected through a close reading of the novel *The Map of Salt and Stars* by Zeyn Joukhadar. After reading the main data, the researcher will find out some data related to the research problem and make an analysis based on postcolonial theory. After collecting data, the researcher will step into the next stage which is the next stage called analysing. The data will be analysed thematically, with a focus on the themes of hybridity. The analysis will draw on critical theories related to hybridity, namely by using the theory of Homi. K. Bhabha on the main characters in the novel *The Map of Salt and Star*. After analysing the data, the

researcher will present the research results in a descriptive manner. The results of the research descriptively by using words and sentences in the form of paragraphs.

### **C. Findings and Discussion**

#### **The Main Character**

In the postcolonial context, Bhabha highlights that colonial and subaltern (oppressed group) cultures and identities often influence each other. The process of colonisation creates new forms of identity and culture that reflect complexity and instability. In this case, hybridity emerges as a form of resistance to static categorization and also as a form of creativity in the face of colonial power. According to Bhabha, the existence of a culture or identity is not pure or fixed, it is formed through the interaction and exchange of various elements. Hybridity is not only about mixing different cultural elements, but also about the process of transformation and the formation of something new as a result of the encounter. *The Map of Salt and Stars* is a novel written by Jennifer Zeynab Joukhadar and published in 2018. The novel brings together two stories that are far apart in time but connected by themes of identity, displacement, and the search for a place called "home". The story begins with the main character, Nour, a young girl from the modern Syrian city of Homs. Nour and her family are forced to flee due to the violence and destruction caused by the civil war in Syria. In the hope of a safer future, Nour's family decides to embark on a dangerous journey along with many other refugees seeking refuge in a place that is foreign to them.

Nour's story tells how she and her family experienced the conflict, violence and displacement caused by the civil war in Syria. They were forced to leave their home in Homs and travelled to countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Libya, and Morocco. During their journey, they met people from different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. Not only that, they also face discrimination, oppression, and danger from those who do not sympathize with the refugees' plight.

Nour and her family try to survive and find a safe and comfortable place to live. They also try to maintain their identity and cultural heritage as Syrians. Apart from that, Nour also often tells the story of Rawiya, a fictional character from the 12th century who disguised herself as a man to become the pupil of a mapmaker named al- Idrisi. Rawiya and al-Idrisi travelled to various places in the world to create accurate maps.

Postcolonialism is a term used for a state or behaviour of a person towards others after the colonial period (Iverson, 2015). Postcolonial studies are usually related to the circumstances or conditions felt by colonized people after the end of colonialism. So, this study is usually assumed to be a study that deals with the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, but in reality, the study of postcolonialism does not only talk about the behaviour of the colonizer towards others, but also talks about human experience. Postcolonialism in *The Map of Salt and Stars* represents two narratives from the historical and contemporary periods between the two main characters Nour and

Rawiya, where Nour, a character from the present, behaves like the historical character in the past, Rawiya, during the colonial to post-colonial conflict.

As Nour and her family travel across the Middle East, their journey begins to resemble that of the legendary 12th century figure Rawiya. A young girl with a passion for storytelling, Rawiya disguises herself as a boy in order to join a famous cartographer as he embarks on a dangerous journey to map the unknown world. As she faces challenges and encounters mythical creatures and fantastic landscapes, Rawiya's story becomes intertwined with Nour's as they navigate their respective journeys through history.

Bhabha in Waworuntu (2019) adds that hybridity is a cross between two different cultures in an interaction that intersects. In this case, hybridity that occurs is not only seen as a fusion of cultures, but also seen as a cultural product that is placed in a social and historical space under postcolonialism which is part of the imposition of colonial power relations. Thus, this condition will affect people's attitude towards their own traditional culture, because people may forget about their own traditional culture and not develop their culture so that, this can affect the world's cultural identity. If the people themselves do not want to develop it, then the world will become boring and uninteresting because it only has one culture, another result is that people will be confused whether the culture they preserve is their own culture or not. As a result, the culture owned by our ancestors will be destroyed and there will be no more pure and traditional culture in this world.

In *The Map of Salt and Stars*, hybridity is evident through the fusion of cultural, geographical and historical elements. The novel combines two different narratives, one set in contemporary Syria and the other set in the golden age of mediaeval Islam. In this context, there is a cultural crossroads that occurs for the main characters. Through their experiences, Nour and Rawiya illustrate how individuals can hold multiple cultural identities that arise from the fusion of diverse backgrounds. Thus, this fusion creates a perspective as well as a tradition for the two main characters.

The contemporary narratives in the novel illustrate the hybrid nature of identity, especially in the context of diaspora where Nour and her family are displaced by events such as the Syrian civil war. Characters like Nour in the novel navigate the complex interplay between cultural influences, language and traditions, due to the cultural complexity between western and Syrian cultures. Thus, it highlights the hybrid identities that emerge in the face of geopolitical turmoil. Nour and her family's diasporic experiences in this novel illustrate characters who live in changing conditions. The ability of adapting a culture integrates elements from two cultures of resilience and their ability of adapting to its hybrid identity.

*The Map of Salt and Stars* by Jennifer Zeynab explores postcolonial themes, particularly through its dual narrative structure. The novel tells the story of two different timelines, modern contemporary Syria and medieval times, highlighting the impact of colonialism. The protagonist's storyline explores issues of identity, refugees and the consequences of political unrest often associated with postcolonial literature. In medieval times, the story follows the character of Rawiya who connects with Nour's contemporary narrative. The

novel presents a historical perspective that highlights the rich cultural and scientific contributions of the Islamic world during a period often overlooked in Western-centred history. The protagonists' hybridity, encompassing the Middle East and North Africa, serves as a backdrop for geographical hybridity. Nour and Rawiya, as the protagonists, explore diverse landscapes that represent the fusion of cultures and traditions specific to the region. Colonial influence is reflected in the social and cultural changes that occur over time. Hybridity can thus be seen as a response to an uncertain future, where individuals create narratives and identities that reflect a unique blend of different cultural elements. This quote also emphasises the power of choice and the ability we have to navigate the challenges of our lives and carve our own path.

The two narratives, past and future, both describe the concept of home of the two main characters who experience hybridity due to postcolonialism. As a result, they experience post-colonial identity questions, one of the quotes in *The Map of Salt and Stars* is when Nour says:

*"Home is not a place, but a feeling."*

In addition, *The Map of Salt and Stars* connects the stories of Nour and a 12th-century girl, Rawiya, by linking two interconnected narratives between the past and the present, clearly illustrating how past history can shape and inform the present. The relationship between the two protagonists serves as a reminder that the struggles faced by Nour and the other refugees are not isolated events, but continue to be influenced by a long history of losing everything and conflict between cultures. One quote that can be seen through a postcolonialism lens is

*"The map of our lives is constantly changing, but it is up to us to chart the course."* (p.76)

In the postcolonial context, "map" can be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the individual experience of the protagonist or society, which is influenced by colonial history. This change occurs due to interaction with various cultures and colonialist forces. In the context of hybridity, "Charting the course" reflects the process of creating a new identity, but often involves some merging of different cultural heritages.

The quote highlights the emotional and identity dimensions associated with the concept of home. As we know that Nour was displaced by the conflict in her home country of Syria, the quote has a postcolonial perspective as it responds to the impact of colonialism on the understanding of the concept of home. Colonization often causes significant changes in the social structure and identity of local communities, triggering a re-reflection of the meaning of home and loss of identity.

In this quote, hybridity can be seen in the emphasis that home is not just a physical place, but also a place of feeling. This illustrates how identities are mixing and how home is now determined by a community's amalgamation of diverse experiences and relationships rather than only being determined by its location or culture. This passage illustrates how the idea of home may be expanded and dismantled beyond conventional borders through the lenses of postcolonial and hybridity, as demonstrated by Nour's

forced relocation during her displacement. This is the outcome of intricate interactions between many cultural identities that are shaped by historical influences.

The question of pre-colonial identity in the sentence above illustrates the question of how "home" exists as a barrier to change and also as a source of conflict caused by colonialism. The concept of home in this vignette is an extension of identity lost or changed by colonialism. In addition, the understanding of home as a teaching tool indicates that identity is not fixed to a particular holiday or location. This can be seen as a manifestation of the aforementioned hybridity, where components from different religious beliefs and experiences are combined to create something new and unique. Furthermore, the quote above reflects colonial trauma, where one's daily life does not have a stable or consistent environment. Therefore, the house exemplifies how human connection and identity can be formed through adversity and amongst each other, not just geographically or culturally.

In the main characters of *The Map of Salt and Stars*, Nour and Rawiya, there is religious syncretism. Both characters depict a world moving from east to west, where religious identities are gradually becoming more and more distorted. This research highlights the potential for harmony and understanding among different religions, as well as eliminating stereotypes and improving individual perception. As the main protagonists embark on their personal journeys, both consider the evolution of their hybrid identities. While facing challenges in each journey, their identities may be shaped by the religious changes that occur in each of their life journeys, as well as challenging conventional beliefs about their religious or personal identities.

The novel's two central protagonists represent the hybrid nature of history itself, set against the backdrop of historical events. Nour takes place in contemporary Syria, whereas Rawiya is set in medieval periods; both shows how the past and present are intertwined. In order to contribute to the story of a collective history influenced by many cultural influences and conflicts, the novel delves into how the characters deal with the difficulties of their pasts, which are frequently marked by war and migration. Stereotypes are challenged by the way the main characters in this book represent gender roles, and they also show a hybrid viewpoint. The main protagonists help to create a more inclusive and complex concept of identity by navigating cultural expectations that reinterpret established gender norms.

These two narrative-narrative interactions' hybrid structure also makes it possible to take a fresh look at gender norms and expectations. Rawiya's audacious decision to dress like a boy in order to flout social conventions is reminiscent of Nour's defiance of expectations during his time as a refugee in contemporary Syria. *The Map of Salt and Stars* fosters a wider conversation on how women's roles have changed throughout time in various cultures by encouraging readers and reviewers to question and challenge gender stereotypes through this hybrid perspective. Furthermore, the way the two stories interact offers an examination of the significance of "maps" as representations of both displacement and connectedness. Maps' symbolic potency unites Rawiya's journey as a cartographer with Nour's quest for home. As a result, this hybrid representation



highlights the map's dual function as a tool for navigation and a representation of the quest for identification and belonging.

Then, in the perspective of historical cycles, the hybrid structure of *The Map of Salt and Stars* has a unique aspect. The novel's plot demonstrates how history repeats itself in both the present and the future as Nour follows in Rawiya's footsteps in the present. The difficulties the two main individuals and their society have navigating from the past to the present are thus made clear by the cycle's examination. Furthermore, the hybridity of the stories told by Nour and Rawiya highlights how war and conflict affect both individual and societal history. By juxtaposing the two narratives of the contemporary refugee experience with Rawiya's own historical journey, the novel depicts two characters who suffer the devastating consequences of conflict. However, both characters reflect the resilience and strength of those affected to protect themselves.

The hybridity between the two main characters in *The Map of Salt and Stars*, Nour and Rawiya, skilfully uses the hybridity between the two narratives of the past and the present to create a diverse exploration of the different cultures between Syria and other countries where Nour is displaced, as well as the legendary Rawiya's past journey that breaks stereotypes. In the journey of the main characters, Nour reflects on Rawiya's past narrative during her refugee journey during the conflict and post-colonial era. Through the interplay between historical and contemporary elements, the novel explores universal aspects of identity, resilience, cultural intersections, and the enduring power of both narratives. Through a hybrid approach, the two narratives not only unite the divergent circumstances of the two main characters, but also encourage readers to reflect on the interconnectedness of human experience across time and culture.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The phenomenon of hybridity occurs in Zeyn Joukhadar's novel *The Map of Salt and Stars*. The phenomenon in the novel's is examined exploiting Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial hybridity theory. From the analysis, hybridity is evident through the fusion of cultural, geographical and historical elements. Nour is set in modern Syria, while Rawiya is set in mediaeval times, demonstrating the connectivity between the past and the present. The protagonists' hybridity, which encompasses the Middle East and North Africa, serves as a canvas for geographical hybridity. The two protagonists, Nour and Rawiya, traverse diverse landscapes, reflecting the fusion of cultures and traditions in the region. In this Novel, Nour who experiences diaspora with her family, portrays a character who must adapt to shifting circumstances. Meanwhile Rawiya, who connects to Nour's present day story, reflects Nour's defiance of expectations as a refugee in contemporary Syria by dressing like a boy. Two characters in the book experience the terrible consequences of conflict. Nevertheless, the ability to bounce back and defend oneself both characters.

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