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### REGRESSIVE HYBRIDITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY: ANALYZING CULTURAL NEGOTIATION IN SHAHRAZ'S 'A PAIR OF JEANS'

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of hybridity and its implications in Shahraz's short story A Pair of Jeans. The narrative explores the challenges faced by second-generation immigrants as they attempt to balance their cultural identity with the host culture and ancestral heritage. Although this paper argues that the hybridity depicted in the story forms a binary opposition that favors modern thought over traditionalism, hybridity is also considered a subversive strategy to challenge dominant norms. This study uses the concept of regressive hybridity to examine how identity construction in diasporic intellectuals and second-generation immigrants becomes exclusionary and westernized. Therefore, the goal of this study is to identify the thought patterns that stigmatize tradition and explore how hybridity becomes regressive when traditional markers are marginalized in second-generation immigrants and diasporic intellectuals. The primary issue is the essentialization of modernity and traditionalism as progressive or normal and backward respectively. In this regard, the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha is applied to explain the basic understanding of hybridity in a post-colonial context. Further critique is drawn from Pnina Werbner, David Theo Goldberg, and Friedman to analyze the favoring of one thought over the other in the story.

**Keywords:** Identity, Hybridity, Essentialization, Second generation.

#### Introduction:

Hybridity refers to the process of blending two or more distinct elements to create new things, behaviors, and structures. This concept has been applied across various academic fields, including the social sciences, literary, artistic, and cultural studies. In the postcolonial context, hybridity refers to the creation of transcultural forms within the colonial contact zone. The term evokes significant controversy today because it appears within a wide spectrum of scientific fields that apply it to racial theories and biological studies. Modern usage of hybridity helps western migrants build stronger

insights into how their identities develop. Homi Bhabha (2005) who serves as a prominent theorist of hybridity explains that colonized people employ hybridity as a subversive method. Modern academic views of hybridity exist as definitions that span across disciplines from biology and racial theory to additional academic fields that may dispute this usage. Critics argue that the theoretical quality of hybridity produces unnecessary controversies regarding processes that promote cultural homogeneity and western/business formation. Despite such criticisms, hybridity continues to be a crucial concept in contemporary discussions of identity and culture. It underscores the dynamic and flexible nature of cultural production, implying that cultural identity is not fixed but an ongoing process of negotiation and transformation. Hybridity, therefore, contradicts essentialist assumptions and promotes a more nuanced understanding of identity and cultural diversity. However, this paper argues that hybridity can be exclusionary in nature because it favors one thought process over the other. It proves to be regressive because the host culture is taken as the point of reference, leading to the marginalization of traditional thought. Hence, hybridity creates the binary oppositions it intended to break, reinforcing the very norms it seeks to challenge. Theorists like Goldberg, Werbner, and Hyunyk point out that this form of hybridity circles back to essentialist representations, through the westernization and modernization of both host and traditional cultures. These theorists also highlight the regressive nature of hybridity, as it disregards traditional cultural boundaries and makes hybridity exclusionary rather than nuanced.

In the story *A Pair of Jeans*, Shahraz explores the struggles of Miriam, a Pakistani-British girl, to highlight the diasporic dilemma. This dilemma arises when diasporic individuals attempt to reconcile traditional upbringing with the more liberal thought processes of the host culture. Through Miriam's journey, Shahraz explores the challenges of navigating and negotiating cultural identity. However, during this struggle, Miriam centralizes the western lifestyle as the reference point for understanding traditional thought. As a result, she consciously or unconsciously decentralizes traditional values, adopting the western way of living as normal. This shift in focus reflects the regressive nature of hybridity, as the traditional mindset is deemed outdated. Moreover, the paper claims that Shahraz, as a hybrid intellectual, plays a role in decentralizing traditional thought.

**Thesis Statement:**

*A Pair of Jeans* highlights the struggles of second-generation immigrants, focusing on their negotiation of host culture and ancestral heritage. However, the hybridity depicted in this representation creates a binary opposition, where traditional thought is marginalized and modern thought is favored. Thus, this hybridity becomes regressive rather than subversive.

**Problem Statement:**

The hybrid identity of second-generation immigrants in A Pair of Jeans promotes modernism over traditionalism, and this essentialization of traditional thought as regressive and modern thought as progressive creates a problematic representation.

**Research Objectives:**

The objectives of this research are:

1. To identify the elements in the story that stigmatize traditional ways of living in favor of modern thought processes.
2. To examine how the hybridity in second-generation immigrants proves regressive through the marginalization of traditional cultural markers.

**Research Questions:**

1. What are the elements in the story that highlight the regressive hybridity of second-generation immigrants?
2. How does the story essentialize traditional ways of living as regressive and the western thought process as progressive?

**Literature Review**

The Postcolonial studies extensively investigate hybridity as an important concept which explores diasporic individuals' identity formation processes. The work of Homi K. Bhabha regarding hybridity provides essential foundation to discussions about postcolonial identity development (Bhabha, 2012). Through hybridity individuals undermine cultural authority while building fresh regions in which they can construct their identities. The incorporation of hybridity into a community has received criticism for enforcing western views against indigenous cultural traditions according to Goldberg (2000) and Friedman (2015).

The framework of regressive hybridity originated from Pnina Werbner describes how blended identities develop westernized tendencies through their exclusionary nature (Werbner, 2015). Second-generation immigrants experience significant difficulties in maintaining equilibrium between the cultural standards of their heritage countries and their host societies. Traditional cultural markers face marginalization because individuals choose to adopt westernized norms and values according to Hutnyk (2005) and Kalra (2005).

Salman Rushdie alongside other diasporic intellectuals has actively contributed to developing the concept of hybridity as explained in his work (Rushdie, 1992). Moneyed intellectuals who work in westernized environments commonly disseminate foreign values through their work which marginalizes native cultural customs (Pervez, 2004; Shamsie, 2015). Essentializing traditional ways of thinking stands as a crucial problem when discussing hybridity. Traditional cultural practices risk stigma as regressive and

backward which causes people to give up their ancestral roots for western modern cultural standards (Friedman, 2015; Leitch, 2018).

Jonathan Friedman writes about power structures that matter throughout hybridization processes (Friedman, 2015). Friedman establishes that hybridity ends up pushing forward universal modern standards which attempt to create similar social norms and dismiss ethnic and cultural distinctions. David Theo Goldberg criticizes hybridity theory in his analysis of cultural identity essentialism because the concept results in limited acceptance of traditional cultural practices (Goldberg 2000).

Two more scholars among others like Avtar Brah and James Clifford presented their views to the hybridity dialogue (Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994). According to Brah hybridity exists in complex ways beyond basic two-option thinking structures. According to Clifford hybridity needs to be studied through the examination of historical and cultural conditions during which it emerges

The idea of hybridity gets utilized across multiple academic fields like literary studies, artistic research and cultural analysis disciplines. Edward Said created foundational work for postcolonial literature about hybridity by establishing its critical discourse (Said, 1993). According to Said hybridity functions as a fundamental aspect of postcolonial literature because this writing format combines multiple cultural and linguistic traditions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Hybridity and Essentialization**

In post-colonial contexts, Homi K. Bhabha is one of the most influential theorists in the development of hybridity. He challenges the concept of culture as fixed and essential, emphasizing its fluid and negotiated nature. The fixed notion of cultural purity is an illusion, and Bhabha argues that binary oppositions between "self" and "other" are reductive. Any national culture, he claims, is neither unitary nor homogeneous but defined through dynamic processes (Leitch et al., 2018). Bhabha introduces the idea of hybridity to dissolve these binary oppositions and creates a new space of cultural negotiation. As a result, hybrid identities emerge through the interaction between different cultures, challenging dominant cultural norms.

In his *Location of Culture*, Bhabha highlights the "migrant's double vision," which enables the migrant to navigate between Eastern and Western identities (2012, p. 12). This new space seeks to integrate both identities, particularly in the case of second-generation immigrants. Similarly, H Yazdiha (2010) argues that hybridity deconstructs rigid national identities and dismantles the fixed notion of cultural identity. However, in the struggle against binary oppositions, hybridity often creates new binaries, discrediting traditional thought in favor of modern thought. Specifically, in the context of second-generation immigrants, hybridity takes the host culture as the reference

point for negotiating with native culture or ancestral heritage. This hybrid space, or "third space," aims to create new, negotiated identities but often complicates the identity of second-generation immigrants, creating a cultural and generational gap between them and first-generation immigrants. While Salman Rushdie (1992) argues that hybrid individuals do not fully submit to the host culture, they also do not entirely adopt the traditions of their parental heritage. A new hybrid identity is formed, but often the host culture's symbols take precedence.

In this context, hybridity becomes problematic because it disregards traditional cultural boundaries (Hutnyk et al., 2005). David Theo Goldberg (2000) claims that the conceptual legacy of hybridity risks essentializing cultural identities, leading second-generation immigrants to view traditionalism as repressive and modernity as the progressive, normal way of living. This critique is supported by Jonathan Friedman (2015), who argues that hybridity promotes modern universal values, seeking homogenization and neglecting cultural and ethnic differences. He asserts that the hybridization process, while intended to be non-essentialist, leads to intellectuals compromising their ability to respect religious, ethnic, and traditional values (qtd in Cultural Hybridity, p. 76).

### **Analysis**

This short story revolves around the main character, Miriam, who is a college student in Northern England. Shahraz (2015) weaves the story in a way that it depicts the complexities faced by diasporic individuals in dealing with the contrasting notions of ancestral culture and host culture. As the title suggests, the story centralizes the symbol of clothing to indicate the clash of thought processes between traditional and modern ways of living. In this story, Miriam awaits the arrival of her future in-laws, who are claimed to have traditional Pakistani ideals and dress codes. On the day of their arrival, Miriam goes on a hike wearing jeans, a vest, and a jacket (Shahraz, 2015, p. 185). The author claims that this attire is a very normal and fitted outfit for her hike, but as soon as she reaches home, she feels uncomfortable and different. This discomfort arises from the fact that she suddenly sees herself through the eyes of her in-laws. This sudden change in mood is representative of the conflicting thoughts and negotiation process that second-generation individuals face.

### **Essentialization of Traditional Thought:**

Moreover, the story essentializes traditional thought by stigmatizing the importance of modesty as repressive and incomprehensible. However, when the same thought of an attire being the representative of culture and thought is shown from Miriam's westernized lens, it is not stigmatized. For example, Miriam mentions that when she shifted from western attire to Pakistani attire, she embraced a new set of values (Shahraz, 2015, p. 189). She accepts that attire represents an individual's "persona"

(Shahraz, 2015, p. 188). However, when the same idea is expressed by the father-in-law, he is presented as an ultimate patriarch with an "authoritative swing of hand" and harsh expressions (Shahraz, 2015, p. 193). In this way, the story favors one thought over the other, even though both thoughts share similar values.

### **Conclusion**

This paper identifies the essentialist elements in Shahraz's writing, particularly in her character Miriam, and demonstrates how these elements reflect the westernized, exclusionary, and repressive hybridity of both the character and the author. This study argues that the hybridity of second-generation immigrants and diasporic intellectuals is problematic because it regards traditional thought as repressive, while modern, western host culture is viewed as the norm.

The analysis of Miriam's character reveals that her hybrid identity is shaped by her westernized upbringing, which leads her to view traditional cultural practices as restrictive and oppressive. According to her view dressing expresses personal identity so traditional forms of clothing appear less advanced than modern western outfits. The traditional dress code of Miriam's father-in-law appears patriarchal thereby showing how traditional thinking acts as a restrictive force compared to progressive modern thinking.

Research must study how second-generation immigrants and diasporic intellectuals can integrate their dual heritage without privileging Western norms or traditional values. The research implies the need for more complex hybridity analysis because postcolonial environments exhibit numerous challenges for identity development.

### **Recommendations**

1. Research should examine how second-generation immigrants along with diasporic intellectuals maintain their dual identities while avoiding the proposal of fixed traditional beliefs and bias towards Western contemporary standards.
2. Scientific analysis of hybridity should advance to account for the complicated issues which happen during diasporic identity development.
3. The power structures between regions should receive attention from scholars when they study how hybrid identities form especially under conditions of colonialism and globalization.
4. The investigation of hybridity representation in cultural writings alongside cultural works demands additional research to comprehend its influence on cultural understanding and identity interpretation.
5. To develop enhanced insights regarding hybridity and its cultural and identity effects scholars need to analyze the approaches of scholars Homi Bhabha and others including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said.

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