
Between Cairo and New York: The Crisis of Egyptian Immigrant Identity in *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English*

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Abstract

This paper analyses Noor Naga's *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English* (2022), through the lens of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, emphasizing the novel's depiction of fractured, hybrid, and diasporic identities influenced by colonial legacies and modern global modernity. The study examines how the novel's protagonists deal with identity crises, displacement, and cultural dislocation by placing the story within the context of transnational mobility and postcolonial trauma. The female protagonist, an Egyptian American with a Western education, and the male protagonist, a disillusioned Egyptian photographer traumatised by failed revolution, are both fascinating characters whose interactions highlight the conflicts between language, class, and race. These factors not only make their relationship more difficult, but they also represent the isolation and division that characterise the diaspora as a whole. The concept of double consciousness helps to understand the struggle of migrant identities to fit in different cultures. The paper asserts that Egyptian identity in Naga's narrative is not fixed but rather is continuously constructed through interactions with different cultures by placing the book within a diasporic and postcolonial context. In the end, *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English* (2022) presents immigrant identity as a flexible hybrid space influenced by contemporary displacement, historical memory, and the never-ending quest for speech.

Keywords: Diasporic Identity; Cultural Hybridity; Postcolonial Fragmentation; The Black Atlantic; Transnationalism; Double Consciousness.

Introduction

Diasporic writing explores the globalized realm of transnationalism, hybridity, and mobile identities by concentrating on narratives of mobility and identity building (Nyman, 2009). This literature often focuses on marginalized groups particularly migrants highlighting their struggles and experiences. Because of this, migration literature naturally aligns with postcolonial theory, as both explore issues of displacement, identity, and belonging. According to Sten Pultz Moslund, post colonialism is, admittedly, an important element of the overall image of the twentieth century as the age of wandering (Moslund, 2010), which supports the previously mentioned relationship. Naga's novel *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English* (2022) presents a compelling story of identity crisis, cultural hybridity, and the struggles of navigating multiple worlds. The novel follows an Egyptian-American woman who returns to Cairo, hoping to reconnect with her roots. However, instead of feeling at home, she finds herself lost between cultures. She speaks Arabic but not fluently, understands Egyptian customs but not deeply enough, and carries an

American identity that separates her from those around her. Her experience is a reflection of what many second-generation immigrants go through caught between their ancestral homeland and the place they grew up in, unable to fully claim either as their own. At the same time, the novel also tells the story of an Egyptian man, a struggling photographer whose life is shaped by the trauma of Egypt's political turmoil. His experience stands in contrast to the female protagonist's journey. While she struggles with returning to a homeland that does not feel like home, he faces the harsh reality of living in a country where hope and opportunity seem to be fading. She stands for external displacement, while the male character represents internal displacement what it means to feel like an outsider within your own country, even without ever leaving it. Their relationship exposes the deep tensions between those who leave and those who stay, between privilege and survival, and between personal identity and national history. Through these two contrasting characters the novel explores what it means to belong when home no longer feel stable and safe. For a variety of reasons, people who must leave their homeland may want to preserve the cultural values they have acquired in order to prevent them from vanishing from the newly adopted culture. On the other side, a person unintentionally becomes involved in an identity crisis and an issue of belonging while attempting to fit in with the new culture. The person has a hybrid identity, an inclusion issue, and is no longer herself/himself or the other. In his work, Said provides the following summary of the identity problem and exile situation: Exiles are in a state of coexistence; they are neither able to blend in with their new surroundings nor fully separate themselves from the past; they are either emotionally and nostalgic on one level, a skilled imitator on another, or someone who has been shunned in private on a third (Said, 1994). Said and Bhabha are two key figures in postcolonial studies who have significantly shaped the principles of migration literature. One of the most important ideas from Bhabha's work is "hybridity", which suggests that in today's world, a migrant's identity is not defined by strict adherence to their original cultural traditions. Instead, it evolves through constant negotiation with new cultural environments, often shaped by contradictions and challenges faced by those in the minority (Bhabha,1994). This means that migration literature often explores themes of identity, adaptation, and the struggles migrants face in unfamiliar surroundings. Unlike traditional narratives that focus on nostalgia and longing for a lost homeland, contemporary migration literature emphasizes the continuous self-reinvention of migrant characters. Through their experiences with cultural differences and discrimination, their identities evolve beyond memories of the past, ultimately reaching a more complex and mature understanding of themselves. This research draws on Paul Gilroy's framework from *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double consciousness* (1993) to examine the concerned novels themes of transnational identity, cultural hybridity, and displacement. It serves as a critical framework for examining works of literature that deal with issues of migration, displacement, and hybrid identities. His views on colonialism's lasting effects, transnationalism, and double consciousness shed light on how displaced people deal with complicated historical and cultural issues. Characters battling with identity as a result of forced or voluntary migration, historical trauma, and cultural hybridity are common in literature that reflects these concepts. Using Gilroy ideas, this study explores how Naga's novel portrays the struggles of characters caught between nations, languages, and histories. The protagonist's sense of disconnection both in Egypt and in the United States embodies the challenges of cultural hybridity that Gilroy discusses. By applying his framework, this research analyses how globalization and migration shape personal and collective identities in the novel, showing how literature captures the emotional and psychological complexities of transnational existence. This approach not only situates *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English* (2022) within global literary discussions but also deepens our understanding of the broader cultural and political forces that influence identity formation today.

Significance of the study

By extending existing conceptions of identity in contemporary fiction, this work adds to postcolonial, diasporic, and transnational literary studies, which is why it is academically significant. It makes the case that identity in postcolonial literature is moulded by factors like globalisation, political trauma, linguistic power structure, and transnational movement rather than being based in a single country, stable language, or fixed cultural origin. Even outside of the particular Afro-Atlantic history that first influenced his work, the research illustrates how identity arises through travel, displacement, and unequal power relations by utilizing Paul Gilroy's transnational framework. In doing so, the article encourages future researchers to view diaspora as a psychological and affective state rather than only a physical migratory issue, to apply Gilroy's concepts outside of Black Atlantic contexts, and to investigate fragmented narrative forms as strategies of resistance. In the end, my study proves that *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English* (2022) is a crucial book for comprehending how contemporary postcolonial identities are formed in a world growing more integrated by the day.

Research Objectives

To examine how, Naga's characters represent broken, hybrid, and diasporic identities influenced by colonial histories and global modernity in the novel by using Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) theory.

Research Questions

How does Naga's novel portray diasporic identity through the lens of Gilroy's Black atlantics concept?

Literature review

The problem of identity is considered as the most debated one in migrant diasporic literature because identity crisis exist all over the world due to frequent migration and globalization. In postcolonial world, it is a difficult concept that would be hard to define. Identity is not a fixed and rigid concept as it is assumed mostly rather it's a fluid concept that keeps on changing and lead to crisis. According to Erin Mercer identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when the experience of doubt and uncertainty replaces something assumed to be fixed, coherent, and stable (1995). According to Ivan Chamber, "national identity in postcolonial states is never fixed; it constantly shifts based on the environment and culture. This change is influenced by factors like sovereignty and migration, often leading to identity confusion" (1994). This notion is further supported by Hall, who states that "Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses" (1989). Since the colonial legacy had complex and broad effects, and colonialism impacted different regions in different ways, the question of identity took on different forms across various contexts. The resistance to decolonization took different form in various regions. Identity is therefore not only forced. Additionally, it is selected and keenly utilized, albeit under specific societal restrictions and conditions. In opposition to prevailing depictions of others, rebellion exists. Agency exists within dominance structures (Goldberg). Displacement, migration and cultural hybridity often shapes an individual's self-perception. These forces lead to identity crisis and hybrid identities. Displacement whether forced (as in the case of refugees) or voluntary creates a sense of dislocation and loss. This in-betweenness can lead to identity fragmentation, where people feel they belong neither fully to their homeland nor to their host country. Edward Said describes exile as the irreversible division created between a person and their home environment, between their true self and their home: Its fundamental misery is unsurmountable. (2000). Migration causes individual to experience different norms and cultures. Some struggles to maintain a balance between their original culture and the foreign one. While other create a dual identity and feels

connected to both culture. According to Stuart Hall, identity is not as clear-cut or trouble-free as we believe. Perhaps we might consider identity as a production, which is never finished and is always in process, rather than as an already achieved reality (1990). Cultural hybridity, as put forward by Bhabha, refers to the blending of cultural elements, creating a third space where new identities appear. Hybrid identities are fluid, allowing individuals to navigate multiple cultural influences rather than being confined to a single national or ethnic identity. While hybridity can empower individuals by providing them with a diverse worldview, it can also lead to alienation. In an increasingly globalized world, migration fosters transnational identities, where individuals identify with multiple cultures simultaneously. Gilroy claim that transnationalism undermines fixed national identities by challenging essentialist conceptions of identity, especially as they pertain to the African diaspora. By promoting a more dynamic perspective through the idea of the Black Atlantic, he contends that traditional frameworks frequently ignore the fluid and changing character of black experiences. According to him the history of the concept of culture in the modern West is deeply entwined with an earlier discourse of racial and ethnic difference, which is unmistakably linked to the particularly primitive and simplistic ideas of culture that form the basis of contemporary racial politics (1993). Gilroy begins by critiquing traditional approaches to the study of black identity, arguing that they often fall into the trap of essentialism and fail to capture the dynamic and evolving nature of black experiences. As he stated,

I wish to develop the idea that cultural historians could use the Atlantic as a single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective, in contrast to both of these nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches (Gilroy,1993).

Instead, he proposes the idea of the Black Atlantic as a more fluid and dynamic framework for understanding the interrelated histories and cultures of African diaspora communities. The cultural and historical bonds formed by the forced migration of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade are referred to as the Black Atlantic. The blending of Black and other cultures from across the Atlantic was known as Black Atlantic culture. Slavery and the slave trade have now had a significant impact on the Atlantic globe. Slavery plays a significant role in this work (The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity), as Gilroy describes it as “capitalism with its clothes off” (Gilroy, 1993). Africans made up two-thirds of those who crossed the Atlantic to America between 1492 and 1820. Gilroy argues that the experiences of black people cannot be confined to the borders of nation-states and must be understood in a broader, transnational context. He examines the ways in which black cultures have been shaped by the circulation of people, ideas, and cultural practices across the Atlantic Ocean. The idea of “double consciousness,” which Gilroy appropriates from W.E.B. Du Bois, is central to his writing. In Gilroy’s words, “this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others” (1993), describes the dual identity that Black people frequently acquire as a result of being both a part of and marginalised by the society in which they live. The conflict between negotiating the reality of life in the diaspora and preserving a feeling of cultural and historical ties to Africa shapes this dual identity. Gilroy examines the Black Atlantic's cultural output, including as literature, music, and religion, to show how these mediums function as arenas for negotiation and resistance. He analyses the impact of Jazz and blues as musical genres that emerged from the Black Atlantic and became powerful tools for expressing the complexities of black identity. In views of Gilroy (1993) and other post-colonial theorist’s western colonialism may be no more in terms of taking over other people’s countries, it is still alive and kicking by our cultural products where ethnic minorities continue to be covered. Black Atlantic cultural products then are fusion of African and other Atlantic cultural influences. Edward Said summarizes the situation of exile and the identity crisis in his book. He said the idea that being in exile entails being totally cut off from our birthplace, alone, and in need is a common but wholly untrue one. Migrants may feel content

knowing that what they have left behind is unfathomable and irreparable if only this simple distinction were true. On one level, the exile is nostalgic and emotional; on another, they are a skilled imitator; on a third, they have been secretly shunned; and for this reason, they are in a state of coexistence and are neither able to blend in with their new surroundings nor be totally detached from the past (Said, 1994). While Said's perspective highlights the exiled individual's struggle with identity, homeland, and displacement, scholars like Hall, Roza Tsagarousianou, and Bhabha shift the focus toward the formation of diaspora identities in host societies, emphasizing hybridity and cultural negotiation over a fixed connection to the homeland. Some people from the diaspora are driven to keep in touch with their country in order to improve family ties between those who reside there and the country and participate in domestic affairs (Schulz & Hammer, 2003). Unlike certain scholars like Hall (1997), Tsagarousianou (2004), and Bhabha (1994), the diaspora no longer produces its identity at the conceptual motherland. Instead of diaspora people's sense of desire for their native homeland, they contend that how they integrate into their host countries is what shapes their diaspora identity. According to Hall (1997), maintaining a fixed essence or pure identity is not the goal of the diaspora experience. Rather, it recognizes diversity and heterogeneity, viewing identity as something that is shaped by hybridity and existing via difference rather than in spite of it. Groups whose sense of identity is based only on returning to a holy homeland are not considered diasporic. As a result, diaspora identities are dynamic, continually changing and recreating themselves.

Research Methodology

This research is based on qualitative, interpretive methodology that deals with literary and cultural analysis. The main goal is to closely study and critically analyse the present work, with *The Black Atlantic* (1993) by Gilroy serving as the main theoretical foundation. The primary methodology of the study is textual analysis. It involves a thorough analysis of the novel's stylistic choices, symbolic patterns, character development, and narrative structure. Relevant journal papers, academic analyses of Gilroy's writing, and previous critical reactions to Naga's book serves as secondary sources. This approach, which has its roots in postcolonial literary criticism and theoretical application, enables the research to stay theoretically informed and textually grounded while creating room for a unique, context-sensitive interpretation of cultural displacement and identity in the concerned novel

Research Framework

This study examines how identity, language, and power play a role in the present work by drawing on ideas from Gilroy's 1993 book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Despite having its origins in Black diaspora history, Paul Gilroy's primary theoretical contributions are transnational in nature rather than grounded in racial essentialism. His theory goes beyond race to explain identity as something shaped by history, power, and mobility across national boundaries. His theories are therefore applicable to postcolonial Egyptian settings as well. As an alternative to rigid national and racial borders, Gilroy suggests the Atlantic as a "single, complex unit of analysis," where identity is moulded by trauma, migration, and cultural exchange. Gilroy's paradigm offers a critical perspective for analyzing postcolonial fragmentation, cultural hybridity, and transnational identity formations in the modern Global South. This study primarily uses the parts of the theory that are consistent with the thematic themes of Naga's novel, rather than utilizing the *Black Atlantic* in its entirety, both geographically and historically. In Gilroy's description of diasporic modernity, the first essential idea is identities are created through "movement and mediation rather than roots or rootedness" (1993). Gilroy describes the modern postcolonial subject as having a "loss of a coherent mode of belonging" (1993), which is reflected in his broken identity. According to Gilroy (1993), the *Black Atlantic* originated from a "desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and

the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity” and “provides a means to re-examine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory” (Gilroy, 1993).

Gilroy asserts that identities in the Black Atlantic are “restless, recombinant, and internally differentiated” because The black Atlantic is “a web of diaspora identities and concerns” (Gilroy, 1993) that cannot be confined to single, fixed and ethnic identity. This helps to analyse the novel’s depiction of culturally hybrid characters particularly the female protagonists, whose identity is influenced by both her Egyptian ancestry and her American upbringing. The conflicts between cultural authenticity and cosmopolitan detachment are exemplified by her sense of alienation. The Black Atlantic’s history serves as an example that challenges essentialist views of nationality and cultural identity. According to him it “Yields a course of lessons as to the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade,” (Gilroy, 1993). This viewpoint not only emphasizes the “pattern of movement, along with the inescapable hybridity and intermixture of ideas” it also contributes to “knowledge of the African diaspora as a transnational and intercultural multiplicity” (Gilroy, 1993). The concept of double consciousness, which Paul Gilroy borrows from W. E. B. Du Bois, is a key concept in The Black Atlantic (1993). A person who views oneself through the eyes of others and feels split between identities experiences what Du Bois refers to as having “two souls, two thoughts... in one dark body” (Du Bois, 1903). Gilroy challenges rigid and untouched notions of race and culture with this theory. According to him, both Eurocentric and Afrocentric theories overemphasize “roots and rootedness” while undervaluing the ongoing migration and blending of cultures (Gilroy, 1993). He refers to this error as “over integrated conceptions of pure and homogeneous culture.” Rather, Gilroy contends that identity is constantly evolving and is influenced by history, travel, and cross-cultural interactions. For this reason, he moves the emphasis from “roots” to “routes,” implying that identity is derived from travels rather than places of origin (Gilroy, 1993). He reiterates later that identity is mistakenly thought to be specific to one race and one location, but it is actually shaped by movement and blending (Gilroy, 1993). This concept of double consciousness challenges limited cultural perspectives and provides a framework for researching how migration, race, and world history influence identity. By concentrating on these particular ideas from The Black Atlantic (1993), this study filters Gilroy’s theory via the lived and reported experiences of Naga’s characters rather than just applying it generically. By doing thus, it pays attention to the novel’s particular Egyptian setting while placing the concerned work inside a larger international discussion about postcolonial identity.

Textual Analysis

In order to avoid alienation in America and re-establish a connection with her roots, the female heroine decides to relocate to Egypt. She becomes an outcast in Cairo, nevertheless, both linguistically and culturally. Locals examine and exclude her because they perceive her appearance, accent, and Western customs as alien. By contending that diasporic people invariably hold hybrid positions moulded by movement, trauma, and cultural mixing, Gilroy (1993) questions the entire notion of pure, essentialist cultural identity by saying that the diaspora “identities are always unfinished, always being remade” (Gilroy, 1993), i.e. they are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. This is best illustrated by the experience of the female protagonist, who is neither entirely a part of Egyptian culture nor American society. Her vision of returning home crumbles, revealing the impossibility of a simple return to one’s roots in a society influenced by global migration and displacement. Gilroy suggests that roots refer to the nostalgic view of past, which refer that certain group of people are inherently tied to particular place and culture. It promotes the idea of fixed identity. The idea of roots is a powerful and enticing one, but it is also deeply problematic one. It suggests

that identity is fixed and essential, that it is tied to a particular place or culture, and that it is therefore unchanging and unchangeable (Gilroy, 1993). Gilroy argues that this concept is quite problematic and we should think in terms of “routes” (1993). He writes that routes are the paths that people take as they move through the world, and they are shaped by a variety of factors, including history, culture and geography. Routes are not fixed or essential, but rather they are complex and multiple, and they are subject to change and transformation (Gilroy, 1993). He argues that the concept of routes is particularly more relevant to the experience of people who have been subject to forced migration, slavery, and other forms of violent displacement. The female protagonist’s recollection of a childhood day is a significant moment to illustrate that her identity keeps on changing according to the place and people she was in touch with: “At seven years old, I came home crying, Are we Black or white? The children at school want to know.” (Naga, 2022). In the US, where identity is frequently reduced to binary classifications, this event represents the beginning of her racial anxieties. Without parental supervision, she blends in with a Puerto Rican girl clique, picking up their language and customs. She later talks about her relationship with Elijah, a Black American man who wears “a leather thong around his neck with a pendant of Africa outlined in silver,” according to the heroine. He calls her a “Black queen” (Naga, 2022), when she identifies herself as Egyptian, a term she doesn’t refute. “On some level, I wanted to be let in” (Naga, 2022), she says. The politics of skin tone and belonging in diasporic communities are encapsulated in this moment. It is in line with Gilroy’s concept of “routes” rather than “roots,” (1993) according to which identity is constantly reshaped by travel, cross-cultural interactions, and the histories one brings with them. The protagonist’s changing identities Arab, Latina, and Black showcase the intricate intertwining of race, diaspora, and belonging in The Black Atlantic (1993) world by revealing how diasporic people construct their identities along these transnational, lived routes.

The female protagonist, who is torn between Egypt and America, personifies the diasporic hybridity Gilroy describes as a state that is neither whole nor stable. According to Gilroy (1993), contemporary diasporic identities are inevitably disputed and fractured. These cultural forms reveal the open-ended, unfinished character of identity in the diaspora. The protagonist’s identity fluctuates between feeling like she belongs and feeling alienated, between pride in her Egyptian heritage and unease with its realities. A continual crisis of recognition and belonging is the result of this shattered identity. The protagonist’s fractured identity occurs as she moves through Cairo, repeatedly questioned about her origins. She remembers that because of the way her hair made her stand out, people would always ask her where she was from, sometimes even in English (Naga, 2022). She continues by describing how her shaved head instantly made her stand out on the street and attracted unwanted attention. “On the street, my shaved head made me an easy target. Everyone had something to say. Women giggled. Men shouted from the backs of motorcycles and the interiors of cars.” (Naga, 2022). In this scenario, the female protagonist’s appearance which is influenced by Western standards becomes a public symbol of her mixed identity in Egypt, making her both hyper-visible and subject to mockery. She is perceived as neither completely Egyptian nor completely foreign, which represents the problem of authenticity and belonging. At one point, the male protagonist sharply observes the female protagonist’s fragmented identity. She represented a mixture of contradictions to him:

She was Egyptian enough to wax her arms but American enough to shave her head. She was Egyptian enough to sit at the ahwa under the bridge but American enough to think a silk nightie was appropriate wear at the ahwa under the bridge. She uncrossed her legs when she heard the athan, but then kept them wide at the knees like a truck driver. (Naga, 2022).

The female protagonist's dual identity neither entirely American nor entirely Egyptian is highlighted in this discussion. She must continually navigate between opposing cultural norms. It illustrates how people like her become liminal beings who belong to neither culture completely and deal with both internal and external criticism. The Egyptian American girl acknowledges in another moment of introspection that she and others like her appeared more Egyptian in New York than they ever could have in Cairo.

We were both more convincing Egyptians in New York than we'd ever be on this side of the Atlantic... But here I keep saying I'm Egyptian and no one believes me. I'm the other kind of other, someone come from abroad who could just as easily return there. (Naga,2022).

This depicts the protagonist's conflicted identity, as she is torn between the contested, rejected identity she encounters in her native country and the diasporic Egyptian identity she performed outside. The idea of hybrid subjectivities influenced by migration, mobility, and cultural negotiation is reminiscent of Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) theory. Being Egyptian was a mark of exotic belonging in New York, but it is questioned and doubted in Cairo. The main character turns into the other kind of other neither entirely Egyptian nor entirely Western, always on the move, dispersed, and unclaimed by either center. The Egyptian American girl considers, in another nuanced yet telling example of identity negotiation. "I noticed myself delaying the shave". She says that by progressively increasing the clipper guard size, she was able to let her hair grow longer and longer (Naga, 2022). Which showed her increasing insecurity and lack of confidence in meeting expectations. In this case, changing one's look turns into a location of both conformity and resistance. According to Gilroy, every bodily decision has symbolic significance within the cultural conflicts of the *The Black Atlantic* (1993) globe, and the body itself is entangled in the transnational politics of identity performance. This internal conflict is made visible at moment when she realized that her appearance is seen differently in Egypt. "If I was a white girl with a shaved head, they probably wouldn't have cared. But because I was an Egyptian girl with a shaved head, they wouldn't let me forget it." (Naga, 2022) It demonstrates the Egyptian American girls realization that her diasporic identity makes her neither fully accepted in the America nor truly included in Egypt, presenting the double consciousness that Gilroy and Du Bois describe. In an interaction with police officer she reflects: "It was clear that the officer was picturing me with hair he was searching for the Egyptian in me or possibly the illness." (Naga, 2022)

In this moment the girl realises that people in Egypt judge her over her appearance. They are looking for signs that give proofs either for her Egyptian identity or some illness. This shows how she is struck between two identities. She is experiencing double consciousness because she is mindful of her Egyptian identity while simultaneously being aware of how others perceive her as an American. In the apartment of the American girl, the male protagonist once confesses his uneasiness. He compares it to the hotel rooms used by foreigners in 2011 and believes that it belongs to her in a manner that he never could. In his opinion, the furniture itself appeared to reject its geographical location, and he wandered clumsily through the rooms, unsure of how to act or where to sit. (Naga, 2022). This illustrates the male protagonist's geographical estrangement, even in his own city. The American girl's flat serves as a physical representation of the displaced, hybrid reality. Being an outsider in both public and private settings, the male protagonist represents the shattered postcolonial identity that is torn between familiarity and exclusion. As she considers her status as a diasporic returnee, the female protagonist remembers how she had watched the revolution from the comfort of her Upper West Side home while holding a French bulldog. She admits how simple it would be to show up only after the threat had

passed and then declare support by saying, “I’m one of you.” She is aware, though, that the male protagonist perceives her comeback as tardy and aloof (Naga, 2022). The post-revolutionary, late homecoming of the female protagonist establishes her as an outsider trying to build herself in a socio-political environment in which she was not involved. Her shattered sense of belonging and shaky claim to Egyptian identity are intensified by this delayed return, underscoring the guilt and alienation that diasporic groups frequently feel when they return to their native countries following a conflict. At one point, the male protagonist shows his anger at the American girl’s ignorance and cultural encroachment by saying that It’s her American performance: arriving in my village in a military tank and throwing three-quarters of an apple that she has only peeled with her teeth at my mother’s feet (Naga, 2022). Power imbalances and colonial imagery are evoked by this highly symbolic metaphor. Together, the tank, a representation of military occupation, and the apple, a sign of Western luxury and excess, show how he saw her not as a unique person, but as a symbol of the greater history of Western cultural invasion and domination. It echoes Gilroy’s theory that colonial memory and historical trauma continue to influence diasporic and postcolonial identities through these kinds of intimate and symbolic interactions. The interaction between the female protagonist and the guy from Shobrakheit best illustrates the conflict between diasporic guilt, and the desperate need to fit in. After a furious quarrel with the boy from Shobrakheit the female protagonist considers the physical and emotional gap between her life in Cairo and the one she left behind in America. She asks herself: “I find myself measuring for the first time how far America is from Cairo let alone Shobrakheit. How to bridge this ocean? How to explain all I left behind to get even this far?” (Naga,2022).

As she alternates between two separate worlds, each of which pulls her in a different path, this passage perfectly captures her struggle to reconcile her hybrid identity. When the female protagonist considers her role in connection to the male protagonist, it is another important insight. She wonders why he chose to remain with her, speculating that it might be because she was half outside and half inside, standing at a threshold, neither quite a stranger nor quite family (Naga, 2022). She expresses here how she feels like an in betweener, torn between cultures and identities, neither totally Egyptian nor totally Western. Because “a foreigner would be too obvious a symbol of Empire” (Naga, 2022) and “a real Egyptian doesn’t work either,” (Naga, 2022) she understands that the guy from Shobrakheit preferred someone like her. He discovers a middle ground in her “the cream of both worlds” (Naga, 2022). Although she has a “Western inflection, carrying in her fashion sense” (Naga, 2022), she is sufficiently Egyptian to be recognizable. This is exactly in line with Gilroy’s theory that hybridity is the result of transnational interactions influenced by colonial pasts and ongoing global injustices. According to Gilroy, the female protagonist in represents a threshold zone where the diasporic subject’s identity is shaped by the conflicts between familiarity and foreignness, self and other, and home and abroad. Her Western symbols of freedom and prosperity reinforce the male character’s class and cultural differences while also signaling opportunity. Gilroy’s insight that postcolonial modernity produces new modes of exclusion through the overlapping hierarchies of race, class, and nation. This is also highlighted in this instance, positioning her as desirable specifically due to her liminality.

Conclusion

This article has shown how Naga’s characters represent fragmented, hybrid, and diasporic identities influenced by global modernity and colonial legacies. This aligns with the study’s first initial objective. Gilroy’s claim that diasporic identity is determined by routes rather than roots is clearly illustrated by Naga. The inability to ever completely reconcile one’s fixed identities in a postcolonial, globalized society is reflected in the protagonist’s desire to return to a homeland

that no longer seems like home. Her chaotic presentation of identity through language, aesthetics, and relationships displays the emotional toll of internalizing colonial and diasporic tensions in addition to the suffering of being seen as “the other kind of other” (Naga, 2022) (neither Egyptian nor completely American). The story highlights the psychological consequences of maintaining various, frequently contradictory cultural ties and challenges essentialist ideas of cultural authenticity by highlighting the complexities of hybrid subjectivity. Ultimately, as seen via Gilroy's lens, the protagonist's dilemma serves as a reminder to readers that identity in postcolonial modernity is more of a continuous struggle than a destination, embodying the restless, fluid, and constantly changing nature of diasporic existence.

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