

Hyphenated Identity: A Postcolonial Study of Cathy Hong's Minor Feelings

Mariam Kainat

maryq6859@gmail.com

M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Language and Literature,
The University of Lahore Sargodha Campus, Pakistan

Javeria Amjad

javerialaeeq83@gmail.com

PhD Scholar, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

Laiba Anwar

M.Phil Scholar (English)

The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus Pakistan

Sadaf Afreen

sadaf.afreen@ell.uol.edu.pk

Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature,
The University of Lahore Sargodha Campus, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: * Sadaf Afreen sadaf.afreen@ell.uol.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impacts of multiculturalism and increasing diversity in cross-national interaction. Hong's (1976) goal is to examine the world in which various civilizations coexist and either reject or assimilate with one another. The study particularly sought to concentrate on the notion of the us and them as superior and inferior in the context of post-colonialism (1978). The research encompasses the memoir Hong's Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning (2020). The researcher has applied Homi K. Bhabha's (1966) theory of Hybridity from the Location of the culture (1994). The findings show that Hong's memoir is filled with examples of her own internalized racial agony and challenges to the idea of ethnic authenticity. This memoir is filled with personal narrative, cultural exchanges, and the hurdles Hong faced as an Asian American. Voluntarily and involuntarily, she embraced some unfamiliar cultural norms despite having certain shared beliefs, she tries to maintain her unique cultural identity.

Keywords: Hyphenated identities, Asian- American, Korean Culture Multiculturalism, Colonialism, internalized racial agony

INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial criticism, in the words of Bhabha (1994, P.171), "bears witness to the unequal and universal forces of cultural representation" that are engaged in a never-ending struggle for political and economic dominance in the modern world. Furthermore, Bhabha believes that colonial experiences are the source of postcolonial critique as the colonial testimonies of Third World nations and the discourses of "minorities" within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South, give rise to postcolonial ideas. They get involved in the modernity's ideological discourses that aim to offer a hegemonic "normality" to the diverse and frequently disadvantaged histories of peoples, communities, races, and nations (Bhabha, 1994). The phrase "hyphenated identity" describes the hyphenation of two national identities, for example, "Korean-American, or Japanese-American". But its meaning grew to encompass people from a variety of backgrounds, including racial, ethnic, and social classes, as well as gender and sexual orientation. In a diasporic society, identity and interpersonal challenges are common. The importance and challenges of hyphenated identity as Salman Rushdie mentioned in *Imaginary Homelands* (1982): "Our identities are intricate and varied. We frequently feel like we never truly belong to one culture, although we do belong to

multiple. This transitional phase can be confusing and difficult, particularly for writers who may find it difficult to establish a consistent and unambiguous outlet for their expression” (Rushdie, 1982).

According to Bhabha (1994), the identity of immigrants is in constant flux, and the hope of a new land creates a dialectical relationship that represents a continuous process of mutual shaping and reshaping as they strive for a satisfying existence in their adopted country. Several social outcomes have been examined about the phenomenon of hyphenated identity or divided loyalty between national origins and host countries. They maintain relativities and connections while acknowledging the norms of different and unique values. These outcomes include adopting a culture and worldview that accepts oppressive social relations, the nature of cultural and social practices among immigrants and their descendants about labor market outcomes, friendships and marriages between national-origin groups, and the identification of discrimination based on the group membership (Zaleza, 1987). This is a common problem in diaspora communities; as defined *"a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings, of networks of affiliation,"* as well as *"a state of being and a process of becoming"* (Zaleza, 1987, p.32). People's closest interpersonal relationships are greatly impacted by their hyphenated identities in diaspora communities, which can result in several problems like nostalgia, loneliness, grief, and depression, to mention a few. Jhumpa Lahiri deftly examines these topics in her novel, *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008). The issue further narrated in *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order* (1996) which focuses on the evolution of multiculturalism and the process by which Korean Americans, especially those in Los Angeles, have combined their two national identities into one. There remain individuals in the Korean-American community who find it difficult to identify as either American or Korean despite the difficult process that was involved. Nonetheless, the proportion of Korean-Americans who recognize that they may and do belong to both communities is rising.

Background of Korean Immigrants:

Korea introduced multiculturalism to the nation, which turned into a theater of war where China and Japan fought each other. In 1903, the Korean government, despite its smaller size, dispatched its first Korean immigrants to America to labor on sugar plantations in Hawaii. However, Korean immigration to America abruptly ended when Japan declared Korea its protectorate. Kim (2012) states that the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association's desire for Korean laborers over Japanese laborers may indicate that the Japanese government desired to stop immigration. It is unclear, although if the Japanese government was the only one with the authority to decide to terminate immigration, as the Korean government may have encountered popular resistance to the emigration plan. After the Korean War, a second wave of Korean immigration to the US began, mainly involving Korean women who married US soldiers. The Immigration Act of 1965 led to a steady increase in Korean immigration, and the largest Korean diaspora community is currently in California, where a significant number of Koreans migrated in 1975. According to Kim (2012), While Korean-Americans are spread throughout the US, the largest concentration is found in Los Angeles, California. Korean immigrants initially arrived in America primarily to find work, with a focus on the political situation in their home country, its annexation, and the Korean War. After these events, they began to consider the idea of permanent residency and its implications. The second wave of Korean immigrants sought employment in small businesses, academia, science, and engineering after completing their education. Throughout Korean-American history, immigrants have primarily identified themselves as Korean as they need a place to call home while living abroad. They sought a space to come together, participate in traditional Korean activities, enjoy Korean cuisine, and connect with like-minded individuals. Some found a Korean community at the nearest church, while many embraced Christianity before leaving Korea. However, holding on to one's heritage may have made those outside the community view them with suspicion, as evidenced by the 1992 L.A. riots. (Kim, 2012). The 1992 riots were influenced by Korean immigrants who started small businesses in a high-crime neighborhood. They faced difficulties due to language barriers and lack of English proficiency. Their presence confused the primarily second or third-

generation Jewish American neighbors, who often encountered rudeness from the Korean business owners and had trouble communicating in English. These factors contributed to a tense atmosphere in the neighborhood. (Kim, 2012).

In *The Politics of Recognition* (Taylor, 1992), that the private realm of multiculturalism for Korean immigrants is defined by their ability to freely practice their cultural traditions without government intervention. However, they struggle to engage in public discourse due to a lack of familiarity with gestures, artistic language, and the formation of a distinct cultural identity through dialogue. According to Taylor (1992), their difficulty in verbal communication makes it challenging for the public to recognize and appreciate their ethnic background. Self-exclusion marked the beginning of the history of Korean immigrants, leading to unnecessary cultural conflicts and supporting the argument that cross-cultural hybridization is impossible. To ensure a stable future, there is a strong emphasis on higher education for the second generation of Korean Americans. However, this emphasis may lead to a simpler acceptance of both cultures but also create uncertainty regarding cultural identity. Initially, parents of Korean immigrants teach their children English out of fear that they may not fit in. Although children naturally pick up English as they get older, they have fewer opportunities to learn their parents' native tongue. English becomes more comfortable for the kids, but Korean remains their first language. The linguistic barrier thus made it more challenging for the kids to identify with both Korean and American cultures (Kim, 2012). The second-generation individuals in this scenario have an easier time understanding both their own culture and the culture they were born into when they grasp a similar culture. Those in the first scenario could eventually learn to respect both cultures. In simple terms, when people can relate to both, they will try to choose one over the other.

The study focuses on the *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (Hong, 2020); as an advocate for to voice of Asian Americans, Hong's (1976), narrates cultural estrangement and a conflicting identity (Boston Review, 2020). While sharing her own experience as an Asian American woman she states that “*I aimed to explore the existential crux of being in this nation and experiencing daily criticism from the American populace about your lived reality—what it does to you and how you can't express it. In addition, she was working to expose several stereotypes that had hurt vulnerable communities*” (Hong, 2020).

The title “*Minor Feelings*” (Hong, 2020), is influenced by the Korean notion of “*Han*”, which deals with emotions, like shame, hate, envy, anger, and melancholy generated from the Korean history of colonialism and late capitalism. Hong (1976) states, “*I desired that Han could be translated by the people of the USA. The stories of dysphoric people which I heard from my childhood that immigrants are struggling to overcome hardships and find themselves, like the narratives of Oprah Winfrey didn't connect to my notions. In an interview with BBC, she says that “I just wanted to outlet my different experiences and sufferings that felt true to my day-to-day life as an Asian American. Hong argues that these emotions reflect the experience of minorities in America today”*. Building a cross-culture relationship between Asian, Latina/Latino, blacks as native or Indigenous population is crucial” (OpenStax, 2024).

Her use of an episodic format lets her explore a wide range of topics, such as the significance of language, the idea of innocence, and the connections between race and the arts. She highlights the enduring nature of racial trauma and the continuing negotiation of identity in a culture that usually marginalizes Asian voices by using an “episodic form,” defying conventional storytelling that frequently seeks resolution or catharsis. Her observations on people like Richard Pryor show how art has the power to express and challenge preconceptions, providing Asian Americans with a means of reclaiming their stories and making their identities known in a world where white viewpoints predominate (Shah et al., 2020).

Research Objectives

1. To investigate hyphenated identity as the cause of trauma in the second generation of Koreans, particularly in *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020)
2. To examine the issues faced by Asian Americans while being immigrants, as portrayed in Cathy Park's *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020)

Significance of the Study

The American dream has inspired immigrants to move towards a metropolitan world in pursuit of a better life; *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (Hong, 2020) narrates the traumas and complexes the diasporic communities have to face while being minorities from a Korean background. The current study aims to provide a voice and representation to people who have been suffering with the double identities. Hong (2020) verbalized the struggle of second and third-generation Americans of Asian heritage as they feel that they still don't enjoy first-class status in America as natives do. She aimed to find common ground with people of the same experiences and believed that the title "Asian American" lacked identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural dichotomies and hyphenated identities result from the different cultures and lifestyles of the host country and the homeland, and these factors ultimately lead to cultural integration. Hyphenated identities raise awareness of the cultural distinctions between Asian and American groups (Hashim & Raihanah, 2018). In Maxine Hong Kingston's 1976 novel *The Woman Warrior* (1976), hyphenated identity and national identity are constructed in a multicultural culture and literary discourses shape newcomers' sense of cultural identity. Hu, illustrates how literature functions as a vehicle for self-recognition and identity formation by highlighting the complex interactions between cultural narratives that shape immigrants' hyphenated identities (HU, 2010). Jabeen (2023) illustrates the experiences of immigrants who have been exiled, including emotions of rootlessness and loneliness along with the identity issues that immigrants experience in Nadeem Aslam's (1966) well-read novel "*Maps for Lost Lovers*" (2004). Hong's (1976) work emphasizes the immigrant self's continuously redefining boundaries as it examines the paradox of self-definition in Korean American literature. "*The Ethnic Canon*" by David Palumbo-Liu (1995) demonstrates how seeming diversity has eliminated cultural variation and closed down particular locations of difference. By demystifying and complicating the process of constructing subjecthood, relating to an Other, and understanding the popular discourses in the literary world. Her art questions the existing quo and the seeming palatableness of variety. The figures created by Hong (1976) resist integration into immigrant communities or American national structures, exposing the individual and the group as hegemonic and subversive forces. As they balance self-defined individualism and relational communities—whose instability and liminality reveal their disruptive potential—they become international subjects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Methodology

The present study has implied the lens of postcolonial theory and is purely qualitative as it uses close reading of the text, which is further supported by the critical intuitions in finding out the of Hong (1976) work. It explores the overtone and undertones of postcolonial memoir. Cathy Park Hong's (1976) "*Minor Feelings; An Asian American Reckoning*" (2020) is the primary source of data. Textual evidence has been used as a reference to support the researcher's argument and assertions. The available critical writings, reviews, and commentaries published in National and international press regarding the work and theory have been referred to and utilized to support and understand the research findings. The interviews of Hong (1976) published in magazines and available on the web help to get a clear glimpse of the author's mind and intentions and to reach a conclusion.

Theoretical framework

"Homi K. Bhabha" born in (1949) in Mumbai, India. He talks about a more complex topic, subjectivity or identity within colonial interactions in "*The Location of Culture*" (1994.) Hybrid forms of identity occur when a person falls into the dilemma of two opposite cultures which leads him towards double consciousness and finally towards a merged or lost identity. The citizen of any particular country or region has their particular language, religion, culture, customs, beliefs, and other markers of identity. This is the reason, when the citizen of any culture and region moves towards another country, he/she experiences a new culture and language and this experience throws him or her into dual life and identity. This fluctuation between two spaces and opposite worlds brings about the need for a merged identity. Bhabha's terms are in-betweenness as a third space that is full of contradictions. Bhabha (1994) says that "border lives" put the person in "the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, there is a concept of disorientation, a disturbance of direction in the "beyond" (1994, p.1). Moreover, Bhabha points out that "*these in-between*" spaces provide the train for elaborating strategies of selfhood- singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the ideas of society itself (1994, p. 1-2). Therefore, those who leave their country and live as a diaspora suffer from an ambivalent state of mind, for a stable identity home is of vital importance. The third-world diaspora in Europe and America after leaving their motherland face identity crises. They long to develop their countries by bringing the education and sources far from the developed countries of the colonizers but they end up losing their own culture and identity. The alien culture and the in-between lives of the diaspora lead to Hybridity. This oscillation between two opposite worlds victimizes diaspora communities. According to Bhabha, (1949) the text dramatizes the activity of culture's unintelligible nature and highlights the in-betweenness of "*the minority position*".

DATA ANALYSIS

The idea of hyphenated identities is intimately related to Korean-American identities. A person's identification as a Korean-American is a hyphenated combination of Korean and American components. The intersection and coexistence of two cultures inside a single person is represented by this hyphen. Korean Americans frequently juggle their upbringing in America with their Korean background, fusing the two to create a distinct identity. The hyphen represents their experience's duality, recognizing that they are a hybrid of Korean and American culture rather than being entirely either or both. To keep clear deliberately of hyphens while discussing Korean Americans. "Hyphens serve to divide even as they are meant to connect," according to Fuhrman. People of color are implied to be partially American but not wholly American, as the usage of hyphens in "racial and ethnic identifiers can connote an otherness," implies Fuhrman (2018). It is essential to evaluate the immigration history of each culture to comprehend the distinct difficulties of the people encounter when relocating abroad. Unlike those who came to the country voluntarily, other immigrants might have experienced trauma, stress, or violence in the past.

Julie Yi (2022), examines this dichotomy and points out that because the value systems of the Korean and American cultures are so different, second-generation Korean Americans frequently encounter cultural conflicts. The influence of Korean honorifics and the more casual American attitude to relationships can be seen in everyday decisions like how to address authoritative persons, which can lead to problems (Yi, 2022). The hyphen that separates Asian Americans' two pieces of identity gives them equal weight, even though they do not feel it. As it is, the term "Asian American" specifies "Asian" as an adjective that characterizes a certain type of American, without the hyphen. I am many different types of Americans, as Eric Liu states in his piece explaining why he doesn't hyphenate the term "Chinese American": a politically engaged American, a short American, an authentic American, and an educated American.

The hyphen in "*Korean-American*" may additionally represent the battle for recognition and appreciation within the wider American identity. In the words of Fuhrmann (1952), hyphens have the potential to create division instead of unity, indicating that those who are considered fully American are only completely

American. This viewpoint draws attention to the continued difficulties Korean Americans have in claiming their true identities in a culture that frequently sees them as "different" or as everlasting outsiders. The concept of "*minor feelings*" (2020) as put forth by Hong (1976) sheds light on the emotional complexities of the Korean-American identity. As a result of societal standards and preconceptions that fail to accurately reflect their experiences, Korean Americans may feel insufficient and disconnected, which makes it challenging for them to feel like they belong and move around both their Korean cultural assets and the American community.

Hong (1976) probes that small emotions arise when you are pushed to embrace American optimism against your racist reality, resulting in a stagnation of cognitive dissonance. People tell you that everything is so much better, yet you feel like nothing has changed. People tell you, "Asian Americans are so successful," even though you feel inadequate. When minor emotions are eventually externalized, they are perceived as belligerent, gloomy, resentful, aggressive, and envious, associated with racist behavior that White people view as inappropriate. Because our lived experiences of structural injustice do not match their illusioned reality, our feelings are overreactions.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989), summarize major trends in postcolonial literature and say that "*Place and Displacement*" are the aspects of major concerns for Postcolonial literature. These two notions are analyzed concerning the identity crises, and the effects to develop an effective identifying relationship between *self and place*. (Ashcroft, 1989 p.8-9). In "*Minor feelings*" (2020) too Hong (1976) has given an expression to this sense of being displaced and disorientedness. Hong (1976) probes that for Korean American members of the family, simply heading inside or staying at a psychological professional's appointment could prove embarrassing. Hong (1976) idea of "*minor feelings*" (2020) emphasizes how a variety of unfavorable emotions stemming from the challenge of being a racial minority within the United States can be provoked by even seemingly unintentional behaviors. Korean American families may be intimidated from acquiring the support that is necessary simply because they fear discernment, incorrect interpretation, or being deemed as "*other*". The negative image that many Korean American communities attach to psychological problems. As Hong (1976) points out, getting help from a counselor or psychiatrist can frequently be plagued with shame because it can be perceived as a sign of vulnerability or incompetence. When the decision to look for treatment becomes imposed upon someone by external circumstances, like a legal order or social services enforcement, this prejudice may be especially intense.

Hong discusses the difficulties and struggles in creating a cohesive "Asian American identity" with her various experiences that Asian ethnic groups suffered in the United States. She states "*Who is us? What is us? I am only capable of "speaking nearby" the Asian American conditions, which is so involuted that I can't stretch myself across it.*" (103). She struggled to maintain her identity through her narrative as she says "*I have struggled to prove myself into existence*" (P.11). A possible approach to understanding the battle to "*prove oneself into existence*" is as a hybrid identity pursuing validity and acknowledgment. Hong's (1976), struggles with demands from both their own culture and the dominant culture, as well as the lingering effects of colonial tyranny. As she states that "*I, the modern-day scrivener, working five times as hard as other and still I saw my hands dissolve, then my Arms*". This conflict highlights that she conforms to established social norms and stays faithful to her cultural roots. As people negotiate the difficulties of belonging in a society defined by historical and cultural intersections in particular, Bhabha suggests that this conflict might result in an atmosphere of dislocation and alienation. "*They Think we have no inner resources, but while I may look impressive, I am frantically paddling my feet underwater*"...(2)

"*There are so many Qualifications weighing the "WE" in Asian America.*" (P.19). The intricate interplay of cultural, historical, and social influences that shape Asian American identity is exemplified by Hong's statement. According to Bhabha's (1949) theory of hybridity, identities are created through the blending of many cultural influences, creating a "*Third Space*" whereby emerging identities might arise rather than

being fixed. It is possible to understand the "qualifications" that Hong points to as the many levels of anticipation and practical knowledge that members of the Asian American community must negotiate. "*Do I mean Southeast Asian, South Asian, East Asian, and Pacific Islander, queer or straight, Muslim and non-Muslim, rich and poor?*" (19). These requirements could be the result of outside social influences, including the model minority myth that eliminates the variety of Asian Americans' everyday lives while portraying them as consistently successful and obedient. Those who do not meet this restrictive description may feel inadequate as a result of this myth, which can fracture their sense of self and make it difficult to balance their own identities with the narratives of the group. The use of the pronoun "we" draws attention to the conflict between personal and group identity. Bhabha highlights that navigating between one's own experiences and larger cultural narratives is frequently necessary while forming a hybrid identity. "*I didn't know whether to tell this guy to fuck off or give him a history lesson, "we were here since 1587!" I could have said..."*" (p. 19). These qualifications can cause cognitive dissonance, as the enthusiasm enveloping the Asian American experience conflicts with the brutal facts of discrimination and isolation, as Hong's analysis of the intricacies of Asian American identity demonstrates. The multidimensional existence is characterized by this contradiction, wherein individuals feel obliged to recognize their value and existence in the face of social assumptions that may not adequately convey who they are.

"*Can you please be softer?*" I asked tartly. He mumbled an apology but pinched his nipper even harder into my skin." (P. 13). In 2002 Cathy and her friend visited Coral Ridge Mall for a pedicure she met a Vietnamese family the owner of that place, the nail technician was not looking so trained and he showed his inner aggression when his Father snapped and asked him to complete his work timely. A sense of ambivalence and disintegration is created by the protagonist's hybrid identity, which is fashioned by the interaction of various cultural variables. Cathy's desire to establish her control and limitations in a connection that is marked by power disparities and cultural differences is shown in the statement "Can you please be softer?" (P.13).

"I asked tartly," (p.13) the protagonist's reply, implies a defensive stance, a safeguard against the imagined danger of cultural hegemony.

Cathy's physical and psychological costs of juggling a mixed identity are highlighted by the use of visceral images, such as the "nipper" piercing her skin. Despite being whispered, the boy's repentance seems to acknowledge the power disparity and the prospect of getting hurt. Pedicurist and Hong's pressure, however, indicates both the ongoing fight for independence and the ongoing perpetuation of the legacy of the empire. A discussion of Hong's work additionally needs to take into consideration

Hong (1976) states "*We are a carpenter ants of service industry*" (p.11) shows the complicated connections between assimilation and racism in postcolonial studies. She emphasizes the marginalization that Asian Americans encounter since they frequently find themselves divided between the two main racial narratives of Blackness and Whiteness. She states; "*Asian- Americans inhabit the purgatorial status; not White enough nor black enough; distrusted by African-Americans, ignored by Whites, unless we are being used by whites to keep the black man down.*" (p.11). This purgatorial reality is an expression of the wider effects of assimilation, wherein an intense sense of estrangement and disappearance can result from the urge to fit in with mainstream cultural standards. It's common to blame assimilation for destroying minority people's distinct cultural identities. Hong's depiction of Asian Americans as "*not Black enough nor White enough*" (p.11) exposes the falsehood of the assimilation stories, which claim that compliance with White standards is a pathway to success and recognition. Asian Americans' identities have been misrepresented and their sense of belonging gets lessened as a result of this narrative, which frequently results in their expulsion from both Black and White communities.

Hong's therapist's rejection of her feelings highlights a deep sense of displacement and the precariousness of belonging in a racially charged environment as "*I talked all about my feelings of rejection from the first*

therapist.” The complicated process of establishing an ethnic and personal identity is reflected in Hong's interactions with her therapist, as her goals of acceptance and comprehension are at variance with her experience of being composed.

The difficulties for minority writers, encounter in a culture where white narratives govern are illustrated by Hong's (1976) struggle to "rise above" herself in her writing. As she says *"I always thought my physical identity was a problem, but writing made me realize that even without myself present. I still couldn't rise above myself, which pitched me into a kind of despair"*. Hong's (1976) "despair" implies that she feels restricted in her capacity to challenge these established norms via her artistic expression. She further narrates her experience as :

"I was finally living the New York life I wanted. I was recently married and had just finished writing a book. There was no reason for me to be depressed. But anytime I was happy, the fear of an awful catastrophe would follow, so I made myself feel awful to preempt the catastrophe's hitting. Overtaxed by this anxiety, I sank into a deep depression. A friend said that when she was depressed, she felt like a "Sloth that fell from its tree." An apt description. I was dull, and depleted, in till I had to go out and interface with the public, and then I felt flayed."

Hong (1976), draws attention to the psychological effects of existing in a society where minority groups have long been ignored and undergone oppression. The need to *"avoid the collapse's hitting"* by making oneself *"feel awful"* and the fear of *"an awful catastrophe"* might be interpreted as an expression of the subconscious oppression and anxiety that many Asian Americans endure. The sense of being *"lifeless, exhausted"* and susceptible to censure from others coincides with the larger themes of guilt, dissatisfaction, and anonymity that characterize the Asian American experience. Her allegory of the *"sloth that fell from its tree"* highlights even more how many Asian Americans, despite their outward success and security, experience a sense of dislocation and alienation.

“When the 1965 immigration ban was lifted in the United States, my father saw an opportunity. Back then, only selected professionals from Asia were granted visas to the United States; Doctors, engineers, and mechanics. This screening process, by the way, is how the whole model minority quackery began: the U.S. government only allowed the most educated and highly trained Asians in and then took all the credit for their success. See! Anyone can live the American Dream! They'd say about a doctor who came into the country already a doctor”. This perspective upholds the notion that anybody can work hard and accomplish the *"American Dream"* in the United States of America, while simultaneously ignoring the nation's long history of racism, discrimination, and unjust treatment of minorities and immigrants. Additionally, it promotes the common perception of Asians as the *"model minority,"* which is a controversial narrative that is meant to promote egalitarianism and destroy relations with other oppressed communities.

Hong (1976) idea of "minor feelings" is essential to comprehending the psychological cost of structural injustices. A state of cognitive dissonance results when Asian Americans' real experiences conflict with the prevailing narrative of prosperity and assimilation. Her statement that *"You are told, 'Things are so much better,' while you think, 'Things are the same' (P.47)*, is part of a larger attack on the American Dream myth, which frequently ignores the historical obstacles that members of racial minorities must negotiate.

Her writings are a potent reminder of the need for a more complex interpretation of Asian American culture that takes structural and historical factors into account as she says *"The life of Koreans is so Heartbreaking! (P.30)*. She documented that "minor feelings" (2020) are the mental turmoil that Asian Americans go through when their hard-earned American success story collides with the brutal reality of prejudice based on race. *"Our Race has nothing to do with this country"*, (p. 31). Her thoughts on conformity pressures and subconscious prejudice emphasize the difficulty as *"it is being ghosted, I suppose, where deprived of all social cues.... I ransacked my mind for what I could have done. Could have said. I stop trusting what I see*

and what I hear. My ego is in free fall.... my existence is not enough, never enough..... blindly following this country's gospel of self-interest, proving my worth by expanding my net worth, until I vanish".

Hong (1976), gives the reference in her book, the lines that talk about Adam and Eve's loss of innocence are an analogy for what many Asian Americans go through when they realize they are ashamed of their race. This shame, in a postcolonial environment, is a reflection of how outside the West bodies have been integrated into colonial narratives that characterize them as "other" and less valuable, creating an inconsistency between expectations from society and one's reality.

The flip side of innocence is shame. When Adam and Eve lost their innocence, "Their eyes were open, and they suddenly left shame at their nakedness." Shame is that sharp, prickling awareness that I am exposed like the inflamed ass of a Baboon its neurotic, self-inflicting wound. (P.60).

Likened to a baboon's responsiveness, the "painful, burning sensitivity" of shame emphasizes the psychological cost of negotiating a society that frequently minimizes or disregards the everyday struggles of Asian Americans. This shame emanates from a shared history of prejudice and imperial rule, which continues to shape interactions with society and the development of identity. It is not just a personal issue, "it was once a source of shame, but now I say it proudly: bad English is my heritage". This shows linguistic limitations and the enforced use of English is a source of confidence as well as embarrassment Asian Americans' hyphenated identities represent a dichotomy in which people are torn between the requirements of their assimilation into a largely white society and their ethnic background.

Hong's story emphasizes the psychological wounds caused by institutional racism and the internalized inferiority complex that results from discrimination. In addition to being personal, the bullying she reports is a symbol of a greater social trend that eliminates people who don't fit the conventional narrative. "When I met the poet Hoa Nguyen, the first question she asked me was, "Tell me about your mother... You have an Asian mother... She has to be interesting". Hong (1976) captures the nuances of identity, especially when considering Asian American perspectives. When Hoa Nguyen's inquiry about Hong's mother, it provides a prism through which to consider how race, culture, and familial expectations intersect, drawing attention to the misconceptions that are frequently but silently associated with Asian mothers as being automatically "interesting." The idea that an Asian mother has to be "interesting" reflects an abstract understanding of identification in which perceptions of race as a group overwhelm the experiences of the individual.

Said addresses in Orientalism: the exoticization and commercialization of Asian cultures demonstrates how past colonies still influence modern racial identities and frequently result in the "othering" of people based just on their ethnic heritage. Hong (1976) remark, "That's an icebreaker," highlights the conflict between one's unique identity and the standards of society that have been fostered by racism and past colonialism. It indirectly undermines the expectation of adhering to these stereotypes. "I think it's a problem how Asians are so private about their traumas, you know, which is why no one ever thinks we suffer any injustices. They think we're just these__ Robots". This keeps Asian Americans in a cycle of invisibility. From a postcolonial position, Asian Americans' hyphenated identities—often trapped between their ethnic background and American identity—create a special arena for negotiation. This "in-between" identity represents the resistance against forced narratives that use stereotypes as the only means of defining individuals.

It help others comprehend their complex identities and the traumas they have experienced such as "She had no culture," said Erin, "so she took from other people's culture". The phrase illustrates the complexity of identity for Asian Americans. Erin believes that Cathy Hong doesn't have a clear cultural identity which captures the difficulties that many Asian Americans have while attempting to reconcile their hyphenated identities. The idea of "taking from other people's culture" alludes to the fuzziness of the lines dividing different cultural identities. It implies that people might mix or appropriate cultures to create their identities if they don't have a strong cultural base. It acknowledges that cultural identities are the product of continual negotiations and exchanges between various cultural influences rather

than being set or pure. The "Asian-American" hyphen denotes a transitional area where these identities meet and change.

The difficulty for Asian Americans in the context of their experiences is to accept the multiple layers of their separated identity while giving in to the pressure to assimilate or conform. It means asserting their freedom to define their identity according to their standards while simultaneously appreciating the diversity of their cultural background. A strong connection with identity is demonstrated by Cathy Hong's examination of language in her book, both a source of suffering and a tool for obscuring one's real identity, as the lines *"Cha treats language that both the wound and the instrument that wounds; hers is a language that conceals rather than reveals identity"*. This illustrates the difficulties people encounter when personal narratives are shaped by historical and cultural legacies. These identities live in a metaphorical space symbolized by the hyphen, which highlights the complexity and difficulties of hybrid identities. Hyphenated identities, such as *"Indo-Trinidadian,"* as noted by Kavyta Raghunandan, highlight the continual negotiation of cultural belonging, where people must make harmony with their historical history and modern circumstances. In exploring the idea of language as an identity disguise, Hong emphasizes how language can be used in postcolonial situations to both empower and eliminate people. The hyphenated person's language embodies the scars of past tyranny as well as the strength required to maintain one's sense of self in the face of cultural transformation. This piece challenges readers to consider the nuances of forming an identity in a society where language has the power to both bring healing and destroy. *"I was never satisfied with those immigrant talking points about "not belonging" and "the sense of in-betweenness." It seems rigid and rudimentary like I just need the right GPS coordinates to find myself"*. Hong (1976) explains how frustrated she is with the popular tales among immigrants about feeling like outsiders and torn between two different cultures. The narrator makes the argument that these clichés are too basic and don't adequately convey the complex reality of hyphenated identity. Her dissatisfaction with *the "talking points"* of immigrants implies a need to go past the victim narratives and opposing perspectives that frequently appear in discussions about migration and diaspora. Her statements suggest a broader, multifaceted view of hybrid identity that welcomes its paradoxes and ambiguities. The expression *"the paint on the Asian American label has not dried"* refers to the continuous fight against stereotypes and expectations that are placed on Asian Americans. *Similarly she says; "Will "WE" a pronoun I use cautiously, solidify into a common collective, or will we remain splintered, so that some of us remain "foreign" or "brown" while others, through wealth or intermarriage, "pass" into whiteness?* The lived experiences of people inside hyphenated identities thus highlight the continual struggle against essentialism and the need for recognition in a new world formed by immigrants' history and contemporary power relations, even though the vision of a unified "we" is alluring *"Or as activists used to say, "I am here because you were there"*.

CONCLUSION

The paper reflects the world of hyphenated identities struggling to cope with culture shock and the inescapable fate of being assimilated for their survival which endorse stereotypes representing Asians as uncivilized, degenerated, and irrational. The present study also focuses on identity which has been acknowledged as a fluid, not a rigid entity. Hong (1976) rejects the idea of a single Asian American identity by emphasizing the psychological and emotional costs of racism and instead calls for an appreciation of the varied and frequently contradictory experiences that exist within the community. The narrator is representative of Asian culture. She is represented as inferior, different, uncivilized, and neglected by White people. Secondly, she struggles to live peacefully in Western society as she is considered an outsider. To achieve mutual cohesion, she mimics the American culture and finally hybridizes herself with it. As she describes how she feels *"not white enough nor black enough"*, Hong emphasizes her place in the cultural *"in-betweenness"*. Bhabha's concept of hybridity—where a person dwells in a space where two influences converge but do not entirely belong to either culture—is typified by this feeling of being caught between

identities. Hong's (1976) ability to question both her Asian background and American society is a result of her hyphenated identity.

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