

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introductory remarks of this study, which cover the overview and context of the study. It is divided into several parts, starting by the background of the study. It is then followed by the purposes of the research and research questions. Definition of terms that are frequently used in the study are also presented. Finally, this chapter is closed with an outline of the significance of the study.

#### **1.1. Background**

The United States of America is one of the biggest multicultural nations in the world that is famous as a ‘melting pot’ as it is filled with people coming from different backgrounds with different characteristics. This phenomenon is all due to the act of migration where people from around the world travel between spaces, such as from their homelands to The United States of America, thus, impacting the local cultures immensely. This in turn inevitably affects the identity of the people, especially those of immigrants. It raises issues on individuals’ identity since people are exposed to new cultures which may influence the way they identify themselves with regard to their culture; they either identify their selves with multiple cultures (hybridity) or struggle to even belong to one particular culture (identity crisis).

This identification of self that relates to culture is referred as one’s cultural identity. In other words, cultural identity is a person’s sense of belonging to a certain group or culture that is signified based on how they view and share the similar cultural features of a group (Ferdman & Horenczyk, 2000; Hall, 1996). It is one of the main concerns in postcolonial criticism which was mainly raised by Bhabha (1994). Postcolonial criticism itself predominantly deals with the colonized people’s struggles related to identity, gender, race, racism, and ethnicity as their reaction towards the power of the dominant (Barry, 2017). Contributing to the field of postcolonial criticism, in his book entitled *Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) puts forward the issue of the marginalized people’s cultural identity as a result of being in contact with the dominant culture, which is still relevant today.

The issue of cultural identity has become an increasingly popular topic and

an ongoing debate in today's hybrid world, especially in a multicultural context like The United States of America. It is also a very relevant topic in The USA at the present time since more and more immigrants come to the USA who not only face acculturation and possess hybrid identities, but may as well seek to become and be an American as a whole, leaving their native identities behind. Numerous media and various literary works have addressed this topic of cultural identity crisis since the signs and issues related to it is extending, making the concept turn out to be more complex. One of the literary works which explores this matter is a novel written by Nicola Yoon entitled *The Sun is Also a Star* (2016). This

*The Sun Is Also a Star* follows the story of Natasha Kingsley and Daniel Bae, teenagers of American immigrants from Jamaica and South Korea, who meet one day at a disk shop and try at giving a chance on falling in love with each other. The events in the story only happen in one day, yet within that limited time, many occurrences happen, affecting their lives forever. Even though this novel is a Young Adult novel that centres on the love life of adolescents, there is actually much more to that being discussed. One of the issues being addressed is the concept of cultural identity, which focuses on the struggles of the protagonists to identify their selves and to be identified as an American.

Since the novel presents two characters who are not entirely from the western culture, postcolonial criticism is relevant in this case. Postcolonial criticism is implemented as the lens to uncover the issue of cultural identity crisis in the novel since it can be used as a means to put forward the stories of those marginalized (Barry, 2017). It is especially suitable since the issue that is being brought up in the present study is regarding identity matters of the marginalized people that have been impacted by their contact with the dominant culture, which in the novel is American culture.

Nicola Yoon's (2016) *The Sun is Also A Star*, which is her second publication, is a very popular work of art that has received many praises, such as being nominated as 2016 National Book Award Finalist, Michael L Printz Honor book, Walter Honor book, Entertainment Weekly Top 10 Best Books of 2016 selection, and many more (The Sun is Also A Star Book, n.d.). In addition to all of these acclaims, adding to its success, this novel has been adapted into a major

motion picture only within two years of its publication, which hit the theatres on May 17, 2019.

In spite of its fame, especially after being opted to be adapted into a film, this novel has not seemed to have caught any researcher's interest. Other than being discussed in reviews, *The Sun is Also a Star* does not appear to have been studied and discussed academically.

In terms of prior studies concerning cultural identity, (e.g. Henry, Stiles, and Biran, 2005; Kumagai, 2013; Kaya, 2009; Lee, 2011; Riaz, 2015; Saudelli, 2012; Tartakovsky, 2009; Uwase, 2014; Yankova & Andreev, 2012), these studies have generally been done in the field of sociology, which are mostly conducted in a form of case studies. One example is done by Martsin (2008) towards Estonian students in the United Kingdom as well as Whitesell, Mitchell, and Spicer (2009) on American Indian adolescents. Meanwhile, in literature or cultural studies, most research bring up the issue of hybridity and diaspora (Kistnareddy, 2011; Manolachi, 2013; Talley, 2007). Most of the studies on cultural identities in literature are also conducted towards adults as most of them try to focus on the sole experience of immigration that impacts one's identity, such as Mostafae's (2016) study that examines the cultural identity crisis of a 52-year-old character. In addition, research on cultural identity, either as case studies or through narratives, mostly discuss the topic from one party of one cultural decent who is familiarized with another culture, like that of Ng, Mani, and Yahya's (2015) research that investigates a South Korean adult character who is affected by the western culture. Zohdi's (2018) research is also another example that examines the cultural identity crisis of two Sudanese academicians who migrated to United Kingdom.

All of the research mentioned above generally talk about a specific individual and is adult oriented. This shows that lack of attention has been paid towards the issue of cultural identity crisis among young adults, particularly in fiction. Meanwhile, academically, the issue of cultural identities for young adults in narratives is pivotal in revealing how the characters can negotiate their identities. Although this issue can also be discussed in autobiographies, however, studying autobiographies is a part of case study which have already been conducted prolifically. In addition, since autobiographies are mostly written when the person

is at a certain point where they have reached their peak of life and have their identities well-framed, autobiographies have become an unreliable source to investigate the identity of an individual at their adolescent stage due to the nature of the self that is constantly changing (Reece, 2014). Since the authors write about their past, about their experiences as a teenager that shape their identities by relying on their memories, it has become problematic since it can be contradictory to what is objectively true and actually happened at that current time (Reece, 2014). Therefore, analyzing novel in this case, is most suitable to reveal the cultural identities of young adults. Moreover, this novel is particularly chosen since there have not been many research studies that are concerned with uncovering the cultural identity crisis faced by characters from different origins in one habitat, such as the case presented in this novel.

Therefore, since few studies have tackled the issue of cultural identity among young adults from two different backgrounds of origin, this study endeavors to investigate the cultural identities of young adult immigrants in The United States of America with different cultural heritage in Nicola Yoon's *The Sun Is Also A Star* (2016) through the lens of postcolonial criticism. Thus, this study will contribute to the studies of cultural identity and postcolonial criticism as well as open paths for further academic research on this particular novel, considering that the novel *The Sun Is Also a Star* has not been much explored yet.

## **1.2. Purposes of Research**

This research aims to examine the identity issues encountered by the main protagonists, Natasha Kingsley and Daniel Bae. Specifically, this research attempts to examine in greater detail regarding how the characters understand their cultural identities and the factors that shape their cultural identities.

## **1.3. Research Questions**

Since the characters in the novel seem to be struggling with their selves, with who they are and where they belong in relation to their cultural groups, there is an indication that the characters' may experience cultural identity crisis. Therefore, this research addresses the following questions:

1. How do the main characters of *The Sun is Also a Star* understand their cultural identities?
2. What factors shape the characters' cultural identities?

#### 1.4. Clarification of Terms

- Culture

Culture is formed by shared elements that govern people's way in perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting according to standards among the same group who share a language, history, and geographic location (Triandis, 1999). Thus, culture in this research can be referred to the dynamic social force filled with shared elements; signs and symbols, which unites people who are initially different in many different ways. (Holliday, Hyde, and Kullman, 2010).

- Identity

Identity, in its broadest sense, falls into two categories: identity as a social category and concept that defines one as a distinct individual (Fearon, 1999). As a social construct, it can be seen as a concept that refers to how an individual belongs to a certain group based on the similarities that they share (Hall, 1996). Meanwhile, the second category can be referred to as "unique sense of self" (p. 4) that a person has. (Beller & Leerssen, 2007)

- Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is one's view and attitude on how a group's culture is shared and reflected within oneself in comparison with other cultures and communities. (Ferdman & Horenczyk, 2000; Petkova, 2005)

- Identity crisis

Identity crisis is a condition where one loses strong "sense of self" and tries to decenter their selves both socially and culturally (Hall, 1996).

- Migration

Migration is an act of social change signified by the movement of an individual or a group from one geographical space to another, either for prolonged or permanent stay. It is often times driven by "reasons of

economic betterment, political upheaval, education or other purposes” (Bhugra, 2004)

- Hybridity

The emergence of new cultural forms within the contact zone by colonization. (Bhabha, 1994).

- Mimicry

Mimicry is a phenomenon where the colonized imitates the cultural features of the colonizers as a “desire for a reformed, recognizable ‘Other’, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122).

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

This novel presents a case of young adults’ struggles to find their identities, in particular, their cultural identities. Therefore, the findings of this research are expected to contribute to the field of cultural studies where the issue of cultural identity is one of the central topics. Since the characters of the novel are young adults, it will also add to the field of young adult literature that explores the topic of identity formation. Moreover, the results obtained from analyzing this novel is expected to help raise people’s awareness and ability of understanding others as well as tolerating and appreciating cultural differences that may influence the process of identity formation.

### **1.6. Organization of Thesis**

This paper is organized into 5 chapters as follows:

#### **1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the introductory remarks of the study that includes the rationale and the purpose of pursuing the study, the research questions, clarification of terms commonly used, and the significance of the study that explains this study’s contribution towards the field of cultural studies in general and young adult immigrants specifically.

#### **2. Theoretical framework**

This section explores the fundamental theories as well as other related research that has been conducted in the current topic that are used to help conducting this research.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methods in collecting and analyzing the data of this research.

### **4. Findings and Discussion**

The elaboration of the findings obtained from the data analysis is presented in this chapter. It is then discussed by referring to the research questions as well as the relevant theories.

### **5. Conclusion**

The final chapter of this research presents the conclusion which was drawn from the overall findings. Suggestions for future research in the current topic are also presented.