

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Culture is not a static structure but a fluid process shaped by power dynamics, at the heart of which lies the construction of meaning determining what is considered normal and legitimate while simultaneously othering those who deviate. Such meaning-making, as Hall (1997) argues, is never neutral but constantly produced and negotiated through representation, wherein dominant cultures strive to naturalize particular meanings while marginalized groups actively resist and contest such impositions. This ongoing contestation is most visible in cultural texts such as popular literature, which serves as a productive site where meanings are constructed and disputed a framework within which this study examines how racially and culturally marginalized characters in *Green Book* (2018) negotiate dominant meanings through Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial lens.

Popular literature does more than entertain it actively shapes how societies understand themselves. Storey (2010) argues that popular texts function as ideological battlegrounds where dominant and subordinate meanings are continuously produced and challenged. Berger (1996) similarly notes that such literature carries cultural values and social ideologies directly into everyday experience, influencing how audiences make sense of identity, difference, and belonging. In this regard, popular literature becomes a critical space for cultural negotiation rather than mere consumption. The present study engages with this

understanding by treating *Green Book* (2018) as a popular cultural text through which the negotiation of racial and cultural identity can be examined in concrete, narrative terms.

The development of cultural identity through popular literature grows particularly complex in multicultural societies such as the United States, where White, European-centered cultural standards have long functioned as the dominant norm. Minority groups including African Americans and Hispanic communities are frequently positioned as subcultures compelled to negotiate their identities within this prevailing structure, facing the recurring tension between assimilation and cultural preservation. This tension is vividly rendered in the movie *Green Book* (2018), which portrays how characters from marginalized backgrounds navigate racial and cultural boundaries in a deeply segregated social landscape, making it a compelling site for examining identity negotiation as a lived, rather than merely theoretical, process.

Movie, as a form of popular literature, functions as a cultural text through which identity negotiation and cross-cultural interaction are meaningfully rendered. *Green Book* (2018), directed by Peter Farrelly and written alongside Nick Vallelonga and Brian Hayes Currie, depicts the true story of Tony "Lip" Vallelonga, an Italian American driver, and Dr. Don Shirley, an African American classical pianist, during their 1962 concert tour across the racially segregated American South. The movie's title references *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, a historical travel guide that documented safe locations for Black travelers during the Jim Crow era, foregrounding the racial tensions that underpin the narrative.

Beyond its historical grounding, the movie achieved considerable cultural reach: it premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, where it won the People's Choice Award, before grossing over \$321 million worldwide. At the 91st Academy Awards, it received five nominations and won three Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Supporting Actor while also taking the Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture in the Musical or Comedy category and being named Best Movie by the National Board of Review. This combination of commercial success and critical recognition positions *Green Book* as a widely consumed cultural text, and therefore a significant site through which the dynamics of racial identity and cultural negotiation can be critically examined.

Within the movie, the two central characters embody contrasting approaches to negotiating identity within the prevailing culture. Dr. Don Shirley adopts dominant cultural standards refined conduct and highbrow artistic expression yet continues to be marginalized by both White and Black communities alike. Tony Vallelonga, by contrast, openly upholds his subcultural identity throughout their journey. These divergent experiences illuminate the workings of mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence as theorized by Bhabha, positioning the movie as a productive site for examining how identity is actively constructed rather than passively depicted with particular attention to those rendered as "Other" by dominant cultural forces.

Existing studies on *Green Book* (2018) have largely concentrated on how racial identity is represented within the movie, particularly in relation to Don Shirley's psychological struggle as a Black man navigating White-dominated

spaces. While these analyses offer valuable insights into the politics of representation, they tend to treat identity as something that is portrayed rather than something that is actively negotiated. What remains underexplored is how characters from marginalized backgrounds employ concrete strategies whether through adaptation, resistance, or selective appropriation of dominant norms in responding to the cultural pressures they face. This gap calls for a framework that moves beyond representation toward a more dynamic understanding of identity as an ongoing process of negotiation.

To address this gap, the present study draws on Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial framework as its primary theoretical lens. Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes identity not as a fixed or inherent category, but as something continuously produced through unequal cultural encounters. Central to his framework is the notion of the Third Space a discursive site where dominant and marginalized cultures interact, producing meanings that are neither wholly one nor the other. Within this space, cultural boundaries are rendered fluid rather than absolute, enabling the emergence of identities that resist easy classification. This perspective is particularly productive for examining how characters in the movie *Green Book* (2018) position themselves within, and against, the racial and cultural hierarchies of 1960s America.

Building on this foundation, Bhabha introduces three interrelated concepts that further illuminate the dynamics of identity negotiation. Mimicry describes the process by which marginalized individuals partially adopt the norms of the dominant culture an imitation that is never complete, always "almost the same but

not quite," thereby exposing the instability of dominant authority. Hybridity refers to the blended identities that emerge from such cultural crossings, challenging any notion of pure or static cultural belonging. Ambivalence, meanwhile, captures the psychological tension inherent in this process the simultaneous pull toward and resistance against dominant cultural norms. Together, these concepts provide the analytical tools through which this study examines how identity is not merely represented but actively negotiated in the movie *Green Book* (2018).

This study is therefore concerned not with how difference is represented in the movie, but with how it is negotiated strategically, dynamically, and under conditions of cultural inequality. The urgency of this inquiry lies in the fact that mainstream movies like *Green Book* (2018) reach mass audiences globally, making them powerful sites through which cultural understandings of race, identity, and belonging are shaped and contested. Rather than treating the movie as a mere reflection of social reality, this study approaches it as an active cultural text in which identity negotiation is performed, challenged, and renegotiated through character interactions and narrative choices. By drawing on Bhabha's postcolonial framework, the analysis moves beyond surface-level readings of racial representation toward a deeper examination of how subcultural individuals maneuver within and sometimes against dominant cultural structures as a matter of survival. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to broader scholarly conversations on identity, power, and cultural endurance in popular movie, while reinforcing the critical importance of recognizing negotiation, rather than representation alone, as the central lens through which marginalized identities in

cultural texts must be understood.

B. Research Focus

This research examines the movie of *Green Book* (2018) as a type of popular literature that illustrates cultural exchange and identity negotiation within a prevailing cultural context. It explores how the idea of otherness is both created and negotiated through Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory, focusing on hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and the Third Space. These ideas offer an important structure for examining how subcultural identities are formed, contested, and transformed in connection with mainstream White American culture. The research focuses on the contrasting experiences of Dr. Don Shirley and Tony Vallelonga as they traverse cultural divides. Through this emphasis, the study examines how identity transforms into a fluid process shaped by power dynamics, cultural norms, and social standing.

The analysis will focus on specific scenes and character interactions that demonstrate the process of identity negotiation throughout the story. It examines how mimicry signifies efforts to adjust to the prevailing culture, how ambivalence uncovers internal struggles in identity development, and how hybridity arises from cultural exchanges. Moreover, the idea of the Third Space is utilized to explore how cultural significance is created through negotiation instead of rigid opposition. These aspects emphasize that identity is perpetually formed through engagement with the "Other". Thus, the research highlights negotiation as a tactical process that encompasses both adaptation and opposition.

This study is limited to the narrative aspects of *Green Book* and does not encompass other movies or wider media contexts. It seeks not to assess the movie's historical accuracy but rather examines how identity is portrayed and negotiated within the story. The examination is limited to important scenes and character interactions that signify cultural negotiation. Restricting the scope allows the study to conduct a concentrated and thorough examination of identity negotiation. This constraint facilitates a clearer understanding that corresponds with the goals of the study.

C. Research Questions

This research questions of this study are:

1. How the dominant culture plays the arena to the subcultures?
2. How is the negotiation toward dominant culture of otherness in the movie *Green Book*?

D. Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. Identifying and explaining the dominant culture plays the arena to the subcultures in the movie *Green Book* (2018).
2. Analyzing the identity negotiated by the "Other" toward the dominant culture in the movie *Green Book* (2018), particularly in terms of adaptation, resistance, and the preservation of subcultural identity.

E. Significance of the Study

This study theoretically enhances literary and cultural studies by highlighting identity as a fluid and negotiated process instead of a static representation. Utilizing Bhabha (1994) postcolonial framework, this study emphasizes how ideas like hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and the Third Space elucidate the intricacies of cultural interaction and identity development. It further reinforces the idea of negotiating the “Other” in popular literature, especially in movie, as an arena where power dynamics and cultural interpretations are persistently challenged. Consequently, this research broadens the scholarly conversation from representation to negotiation as an essential analytical viewpoint.

Practically, this research offers valuable perspectives for readers and upcoming scholars how movies mirror and influence cultural identities within prevailing social frameworks. It aids in understanding how people from subcultural backgrounds handle cultural pressures by means of adaptation and resistance. Moreover, this study provides a basis for additional research on race, identity, and cultural dynamics in mainstream literature and movie. This research emphasizes negotiation, promoting a deeper analysis of how identity is created and altered in modern society in line with the implications for English language teaching, this research also has a direct impact on English students as learners and prospective researcher. In practical terms, students can develop critical and analytical thinking skills through the study of non-conventional literary texts such as song lyrics. This understanding helps students see that language analysis does not only focus on linguistic structure, but also on social, cultural, and political dimensions. This study encourages students to understand language as a means of social reality as well as a

tool for criticism in academic and social contexts.

F. Definition of Key Terms

1. Popular Literature

Literary texts that appeal to broad audiences due to their accessible language, compelling storytelling, and themes that resonate with current social realities.

2. Postcolonial Concepts

Analytical approaches that explore the cultural and identity-related consequences of colonial rule, often centered on notions such as otherness, hybridity, and mimicry.

3. Negotiation

A dynamic process in which individuals or groups actively construct and adjust their identities through interaction with dominant cultural norms, involving adaptation, resistance, or a combination of both.

4. Otherness

A concept referring to how certain individuals or communities are viewed as distinctly separate from the societal majority, often emphasizing differences that reinforce hierarchies and social divisions.

5. Dominant Culture

The set of cultural norms, values, and standards maintained by the socially privileged majority, which functions as the normative framework against which subcultural identities are measured and frequently marginalized.

6. Adaptation

A negotiation strategy in which subcultural individuals selectively adopt dominant cultural norms or behaviors as a means of gaining social acceptance while navigating unequal cultural environments.

7. The Third Space

A theoretical concept by Bhabha referring to the discursive space of cultural encounter where dominant and marginalized cultures interact, producing new meanings and identities within which negotiation, hybridity, and resistance become possible.

8. Mimicry

A concept from Bhabha's postcolonial theory referring to the partial imitation of dominant cultural norms by marginalized groups "almost the same but not quite" which exposes the fragility of dominant authority rather than reinforcing it.

9. Hybridity

The emergence of blended identities formed through the interaction of dominant and subcultural cultures, representing an ongoing process of cultural negotiation rather than a fixed or static fusion.

10. Ambivalence

The state of tension experienced by individuals simultaneously drawn toward and resistant to dominant cultural norms, capturing the internal conflict inherent in identity negotiation within unequal power structures.

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