

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Migration is a growing phenomenon in the age of globalization and affects communities and individuals around the world. People migrate for various reasons, including education, employment, safety, and better living conditions. However, migration is not a simple process. According to Tataru (2019), migration is a complex phenomenon because people migrate under different circumstances and come from diverse social, cultural, and personal backgrounds. Therefore, migration involves more than physical movement across geographical borders. When individuals move to a new cultural environment, they encounter different values, beliefs, languages, and social practices that may influence their experiences and sense of belonging. As a result, migration can affect how individuals understand themselves and their place within different cultural contexts.

Migration also influences how individuals understand themselves and their sense of belonging. According to Buhgra & Becker (2005) identity is shaped by racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds and may change through migration and acculturation processes. As migrants adapt to new cultural environments, they encounter different values, beliefs, and social practices that can influence their identities. Therefore, migration is not only a process of relocation but also a process that may contribute to identity transformation.

These experiences are often represented in diasporic literature. According to Samuel and Pulizala (as cited in Nawaz & Khan, 2025) diasporic literature is written by authors who live outside their homeland and is characterized by themes such as alienation, nostalgia, loneliness, identity search, and displacement. It focuses on the experiences of immigrants and the internal and external conflicts they encounter while living in a foreign land. Through these themes, diasporic literature portrays the challenges of identity, belonging, and cultural adaptation in

One literary work that discusses issues of identity and cultural experience is *Bliss Montage* (Ma, 2022), a collection of short stories written by Ling Ma. The collection consists of eight short stories that portray different experiences and

challenges in contemporary life. Through its characters and stories, the book explores themes such as identity, belonging, memory, relationships, and cultural experiences. These themes show how individuals understand themselves and respond to different social and cultural environments. Therefore, Bliss Montage is relevant to the study of identity negotiation.

This study only focuses on three of the selected short stories in Bliss Montage, which are “*Los Angeles*”, “*Returning*”, and “*Peking Duck*” out of eight pieces in the collection. Three stories are selected because they provide more explicit experiences of personal transformation in the context of diasporic living in the US. In these stories the characters are in changing social and cultural settings that affect how they see themselves in their relationships, their memories and their daily lives. The three stories offer more specific experiences of identity transformation, compared to the other stories, which are more abstract and symbolic. Therefore, they are deemed better suitable for the analysis of identity development in diasporic life in the United States.

“*Los Angeles*” is a short story about a woman who lives with her husband and children and many of her ex-boyfriends, who all live in the same big house in Los Angeles. The story follows her daily routine life in an unusual living situation and her interactions with the people around her. She may have a life of comfort and luxury but her life is still tied up with memories of past relationships and experiences. The story shows life in a modern city, where human interactions, memories and everyday routines are closely connected and constantly changing. She has experiences of cultural movement and complicated social environment.

“*Returning*” is a short story about a narrator who follows her husband to his native country of Garboza for a local celebration called the Morning Festival. She comes to realise that her husband disappeared suddenly, and she is alone in an unfamiliar place. While looking for him, she learned that the Morning Festival is a local ceremony when people grave themselves in the woods in hopes of transformation or healing, and risk dying if it doesn’t work. The story demonstrates her experience with a different cultural setting and an unexpected social situation.

“*Peking Duck*” by Ling Ma is about a mother who is a Chinese immigrant

and a caregiver in the United States. She faces linguistic challenges, loneliness, and unfair treatment from her job. A strange man intimidating her at her employer's house brings the conflict to a head, and rather than support, she is blamed by her boss in the questioning that follows the incident. She leaves her employment, feeling that she is not being treated with respect. The term "*Peking Duck*" symbolizes "ideal happiness" which is simply a dream, demonstrating the difference between desires for a better life and the realities of an immigrant in a new country.

This creates an emotional and cultural conflict as she tries to reconcile her ancestral cultural background with the demands of adaptation in her daily life. It is this thematic concern about identity negotiation in diasporic experiences that led to the selection of these three short stories for analysis. All the stories show how identity is constantly built and rebuilt through memory, displacement and interaction with different social and cultural contexts. These experiences illustrate that identity is not something static and unchanging, but something always in flux, depending on time, place and social context. So, such stories offer a good ground for exploring the making of identity through cultural experience and everyday life practices.

Furthermore, the chosen short stories also emphasize that personal identity is shaped by the internal emotions and external social pressures. The characters themselves are not only battling with personal memories and feelings but also the expectations from family, society and cultural background. This complicates and layers their identity as they have to constantly adjust themselves to different situations. Identity here is a dynamic thing, constructed through an ongoing negotiation between past experiences and current realities.

This study employs Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, especially the idea of ambivalence and the Third Space. These concepts suggest that identity is created at the intersection of different cultures where meanings are not fixed but fluid, unstable and constantly negotiated. It is a space where tension, contradiction and the blending of cultural influences impact on who people are. This study aims to investigate the operation of ambivalence and the Third Space in

identity negotiation in the selected short stories from *Bliss Montage*, through this theoretical framework.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What challenges do the main characters experience in Ling Ma's selected short stories "*Los Angeles*," "*Returning*," and "*Peking Duck*"?
2. How do the main characters negotiate their identity through cultural hybridity in Ling Ma's selected short stories?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the challenge experienced by the characters in *Los Angeles*, *Peking Duck*, and *Returning* by Ling Ma.
2. To examine how the characters negotiate identity through cultural hybridity in the selected short stories.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide a better understanding of how migration, cultural encounters, and identity negotiation are represented in contemporary literary works, particularly in Asian-American literature. This study is important for two reasons: This study will contribute to academic discussions on migration, diaspora, identity and cultural hybridity by analyzing Ling Ma's *Bliss Montage* in theory. This study could contribute to the discussions of identity negotiations and cultural experiences in multicultural societies by applying Homi K. Bhabha's theory. Besides, this study may serve as a useful reference for students of English Literature and future researchers interested in Asian-American literature, diaspora studies, and postcolonial studies. In practical terms, this study is hoped to help readers to understand more about the cultural experiences, emotional struggles and identity challenges faced by those who live in several cultural contexts. The selected short stories help readers to deeply understand how migration affects belonging,

self-understanding, family relationships and the everyday social experiences in diasporic life.

1.5 Methodology

This study uses qualitative descriptive method because the research focuses on examining the cultural challenges and identity negotiation experienced by the characters in literary works. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it is concerned with interpretation, understanding, and textual analysis rather than numbers. The central text for this study is Ling Ma's *Bliss Montage*, particularly the short stories "*Los Angeles*," "*Returning*," and "*Peking Duck*."

The data of this study are narrations, dialogues, descriptions and events in the stories reflecting challenges, diasporic experiences and identity negotiation. In the data collection, the researcher uses close reading techniques to locate passages that are useful for the research questions. The collected data is then organized into themes that relate to the challenges and the negotiation of identity experienced by the characters. The data analysis of the study is based on Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity. The analysis is concerned with the cultural challenge that the characters face and how they negotiate identity through the process of cultural hybridity in the diasporic experience. The paper discusses how the selected short stories portray the ongoing process of identity construction and reconstruction in relation to different cultural contexts.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on the analysis of challenge and identity negotiation experienced by the characters in *Los Angeles*, *Peking Duck*, and *Returning* from *Bliss Montage* by Ling Ma. The study specifically examines how the characters experience the challenge within diasporic life and how they negotiate identity through cultural hybridity. This study is limited to the analysis of narrations, dialogues, descriptions, and events that reflect diasporic experiences, cultural challenges, and identity negotiation in the selected short stories. In addition, this study only applies Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity as the main

theoretical framework-

1.7 Status of the Studies

Some earlier research have discussed identity and culture difficulties for English Literature students at Universitas Kristen Indonesia but none of them studied cultural hybridity. Lieberin (2019) looked at identity change in the main character of *Sky Burial: An Epic Love Story in Tibet*. The research indicated that the main character's identity developed as she adjusted to a new cultural setting in Tibet, illustrating how cultural experiences could impact the formation of personal identity. Similarly, Meronia (2019) examined the experiences of Indian women residing in the US in *Arranged Marriage* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The study revealed that the characters' roles, lives, and identities were shaped by migration, separation from family, and cultural differences as they adjusted to life in America. Although both studies focus on identity and cultural experiences, they mostly examine identity transformation and diaspora without exploring identity negotiation through cultural hybridity. Therefore, this study differs from the previous studies by focusing on the difficulties encountered by the characters and how they manage their identities via Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of Ambivalence and Third Space in the selected short story from *Bliss Montage* by (Ma, 2022).

1.8 Organization of the Study

The study is divided into four chapters:

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, methodology of the study, scope and limitation, previous studies, and organization of the study. It provides the general overview and direction of the research.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

This chapter discusses the theories and concepts relevant to the study. It includes discussions on diaspora, Asian American literature, Homi K. Bhabha's theory of Cultural Hybridity, Ambivalence, and Third Space. These theoretical concepts

serve as the framework for analyzing the challenges faced by the characters and the ways they negotiate their identities in the selected short stories from *Bliss Montage*.

Chapter III: Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings and discussion based on the analysis of the selected short stories, namely *Los Angeles*, *Returning*, and *Peking Duck*. The analysis focuses on two main aspects: the challenges faced by the characters, including language barriers, identity confusion, discrimination or labeling, and sense of belonging; and the ways the characters negotiate their identities through cultural hybridity, including using language to negotiate identity, balancing cultural influences, and negotiating belonging across cultures.

Chapter IV: Conclusion and Suggestions

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the findings and discussion. It summarizes the challenges experienced by the characters and the ways they negotiate their identities through cultural hybridity in the selected short stories. This chapter also provides suggestions for future research related to cultural hybridity, diaspora, and identity in literary studies.