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VOL. 4, Number 1, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 **Utopia or Dystopia: Connecting Begum Rokeya and Bernardine Evaristo**

Md. Nuruddin Pier Shihab (R.P.Shaha University, Bangladesh)

12 **Writing the Sacred from Within in Richard Burton's A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah**

Raeesabegam Usmani, (NMIMS University, India)

26 **Urdu Diaspora in Canada: Unveiling the Transnational Experiences through Jawaid Danish's Hijarat Ke Tamashey**

Sajaudeen Nijamodee Chapparban (Central University of Gujarat, India)
Shugufta Shaheen (Maulana Azad National Urdu University, India)

44 **Muslimah Mimicry and Cultural Adaptation in Hala Film (2019)**

Rahmatun Nisa, Nina Farlina (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia)

63 **Binary Oppositions in Atia Abawi's A Land of Permanent Goodbyes**

Meka Mona Ghazali, Elve Oktafiyani (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia)

79 **Bule Barbie's YouTube Channel and Religious Commodification: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis**

Pingky Theresya, Radya Rakha Mahendra, Salsabila Benj Arafat, Alfi Syahriyani (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia)

Muslimah Mimicry and Cultural Adaptation in *Hala* Film (2019)

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Abstract

This research examines the functions of mimicry in cultural adaptation strategy in the Muslimah or Muslim woman character in the *Hala* movie (2019). The study employs a qualitative research approach, analyzing the film's narrative, dialogue, and visual elements through Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory of mimicry and Jens Eder's theory of film character. The findings of this research are that Hala, as a Muslimah protagonist and a second-generation Pakistani Muslim Immigrant living in America, used the language, attire, behaviour, and mindset of American culture to balance the freedoms of American society. However, her imitation results in Muslim cultural ambivalence, as she is neither fully American nor entirely Muslimah Pakistani. This duality creates internal conflict, familial tensions, and an identity crisis. The study highlights mimicry as a survival strategy and a source of psychological turmoil, contributing to the broader discourse on second-generation Muslimah immigrant identity and postcolonial studies.

Keywords: *American Culture, Hala Film, Muslimah Immigrant, Mimicry and Postcolonial Studies, Pakistani Culture.*

Introduction

The phenomenon of mimicry has long been a topic of interest in postcolonial studies, particularly about immigrant people. People who immigrate to another country will usually imitate that country's culture to blend in with the local people. The term "immigrant" generally describes those who emigrate, or leave their home country, to relocate abroad in hopes of obtaining permanent residency in another nation (López 4). When minorities and immigrants encounter a new culture, individuals may adopt specific adaptation techniques due to linguistic, physical, and psychological differences (Alkhazraji 4). In determining which culture to follow, they will usually adopt the more dominant culture in the country. Because they live in America, the dominant culture they adhere to is American culture, so they are accepted by American society. An attempt to assimilate or blend into another culture is called 'mimicry'. Bhabha defines mimicry as the need for a transformed, identifiable 'Other' as a subject of a difference that is nearly identical but not quite (Bhabha 122). Although mimicry is frequently used as a survival tactic by people negotiating social or cultural contexts, it is fundamentally a problematic adaptation strategy because it can cause a person to lose touch with their true self, create internal conflict, and reinforce the power dynamics that mimicry aims



to avoid. Ultimately, this raises concerns about the costs of conformity and the difficulties of self-expression in multicultural settings.

Issues like mimicry are often presented in diasporic literature. One of these issues concerning cultural differences is discussed in the film that became the corpus of this research, entitled *Hala* (2019). This film tells the story of a Pakistani-American girl named Hala who struggles to balance two contrasting worlds, her traditional Pakistani-Muslim upbringing and her American surroundings. As a second-generation immigrant, Hala engages in mimicry by adopting Western norms, behaviours, and language, seeking to fit into the dominant culture. However, her mimicry exposes the tension between her outward appearance and her internal connection to her Pakistani heritage. This broken form of assimilation reflects Bhabha's idea that mimicry is always "almost the same, but not quite," illustrating the gaps and inconsistencies in Hala's efforts to belong in a space where she is perceived as both foreign and familiar.

Previous studies have examined *Hala* (2019) from a variety of perspectives. Ansori explored the representation of a Muslim immigrant teenager using Stuart Hall's representation theory, highlighting how Hala navigates her religious and cultural identity. Putro analyzed the film through the lens of liberal feminism, emphasizing themes of female autonomy and equality. Salsabila et al. approached the film using sociolinguistic analysis, examining language styles used by the protagonist. Murod utilized semiotic theory to interpret the cultural signs embedded in the film. While these studies contribute valuable insights, none of them explicitly address mimicry as a central theme. The gap in existing literature lies in the lack of focused discussion on mimicry as a cultural adaptation strategy and its psychological implications on Hala's character.

Moreover, related works by Setra and Ruslianti, and Istari have applied mimicry theory to literary texts such as Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*, analyzing how mimicry reflects immigrant struggles. However, their studies do not address visual media or the specific case of second-generation Pakistani-American identity. This study, therefore, fills a critical gap by applying Bhabha's theory to a contemporary film and emphasizing the character's internalization of mimicry in a visual and narrative form. By doing so, it situates *Hala* within broader postcolonial discourse and enriches understanding of identity negotiation in diasporic contexts.

The central research questions guiding this study are: (1) How does Hala as the main character represent mimicry in America? and (2) How does the effect of mimicry affect Hala's character? These questions are addressed through a qualitative analysis of selected scenes, dialogue, and character interactions in the film. The study seeks to unpack the layers of mimicry present in Hala's life and understand how these layers shape her journey toward or away from cultural authenticity.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach to examine the portrayal and implications of mimicry in the film *Hala* (2019). Qualitative methodology is well-suited for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of cultural and psychological phenomena through textual and visual interpretation. According to Busetto et al., qualitative research



focuses on exploring meanings, contexts, and lived experiences, rather than quantifiable data (Busetto et al. 1). The design of this study centers around film analysis that draws on postcolonial theory and character theory to understand how the protagonist navigates cultural identity.

The primary data for this study is the film *Hala*, directed by Minhal Baig and distributed by Apple TV+. The film was watched several times to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its plot, character dynamics, and cultural themes. Data collection involved identifying key scenes and dialogues that reflect the protagonist's engagement in mimicry, especially in relation to language use, clothing choices, behavior, food, and mindset. These scenes were documented using transcripts, screenshots, and analytical notes. The unit of analysis is the character Hala Masood, a second-generation Pakistani-American teenager who becomes the focal point for exploring mimicry as a cultural adaptation strategy. Through her character, the study investigates how second-generation immigrants balance the expectations of two contrasting cultures, her Pakistani-Muslim heritage and the dominant American culture.

The analytical framework combines Homi K. Bhabha's theory of mimicry with Jens Eder's theory of film character. Bhabha's theory is used to interpret how mimicry functions as both an adaptation strategy and a site of internal conflict, particularly when cultural imitation produces identity ambivalence. Eder's character theory, particularly the concept of character as symbol, supports the interpretation of Hala as a representation of broader cultural and generational tensions. This framework allows the study to explore not just what the character does, but what she symbolizes in terms of cultural hybridity. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, organizing findings into five major categories: language, fashion, behavior, food, and mindset. These themes were examined through a postcolonial lens, assessing how each form of mimicry contributes to the character's identity development and psychological conflict. This method of analysis enables a nuanced understanding of how mimicry operates within both the narrative and visual structure of the film, ultimately shedding light on the complex identity negotiations faced by diasporic youth in multicultural societies.

Results and Discussions

Hala's Representation of Mimicry in American Culture

Through her representation in the film *Hala* (2019), Hala can be categorised as *a symbol*. According to Jens Eder's theory of film characters, characters in films that serve as symbols may represent political opinions, psychological issues, or cultural values (Eder). In the film, Hala represents a second-generation Pakistani immigrant who has a problem with her cultural values. Eder also stated that when we look at characters as symbols, we need to know what meanings they indirectly express (Eder). Since this film represents Hala as a second-generation Pakistani immigrant, it indirectly expresses the experience of diasporic adolescents who are torn between their inherent cultural beliefs and the dominant customs of their environment. She is not only a single character with particular struggles. The conflict between tradition and modernity, East and West, and individual independence and family expectations can be seen in character Hala. As she



strives to balance the expectations of her conservative Pakistani-Muslim upbringing with American values and lifestyle, she mimics aspects of American culture to gain acceptance in American society. Hala's mimicry manifests in various ways, including language, fashion, behaviour, food choices, and mindset. The following describes the forms of mimicry practiced by Hala, beginning with the imitation of the American language.

Representing Mimicry in Language

One of the forms of mimicry carried out by Hala can be seen from the language that she uses. Language has been found to be one of the most important indicators of a cultural group belonging because it is always used in a cultural setting, serves as the primary means of internalising culture, and is an important indicator of a group's identity that is passed down from generation to generation (qtd. In Lie et al.). In immigrant communities, language frequently becomes a setting where adaptation and tradition are negotiated. When Hala talks with her friends, she often uses casual language and some teen slang. According to Mulyantini et.al, Slang, also known as "colloquial speech", is a term or phrase that is used to replace informal language among younger people and other groups with specific topics (Mulyantini et al.). In several scenes of this film, Hala uses informal language with her friends. Figure 4 below is one of the examples.

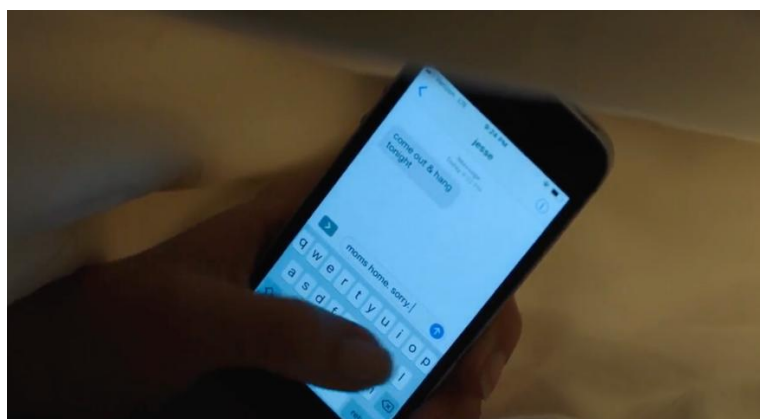


Figure 1. Hala's chat with Jesse.

(00:23:53-00:23:58)

In Figure 1 above, there is a conversation in the chat box between Hala and her classmate Jesse. Their conversation shows that the two of them are using slang while chatting with each other. In the chat box, Jesse said, "Come out and hang tonight," and then Hala replied, "Mom's home. Sorry." The phrase "hang tonight" is a casual American term for socializing, and Hala's brief, informal, yet serious response reflects the conversational tone of her peers. Her use of "mom's home" instead of a more formal phrase like "My mother is at home" illustrates her alignment with casual, Westernized speech patterns. This exchange highlights how Hala is not only aware of but also actively engages in the informal linguistic culture of American teenagers. She only uses this



informal way of speaking when she is with her friends. As stated by Pongsapan, adolescents often avoid using such terms when interacting with other generations, whom they label as outsiders and do not condone their use (Pongsapan). Therefore, the way Hala communicates in these contexts shows a conscious or unconscious effort to blend in with the American environment, adopting its speech norms instead of the more formal or culturally specific expressions that may be typical of communication within her own family. This form of mimicry is not limited to verbal expression alone, and it extends to other aspects of her identity, including how she presents herself visually.

Representing Mimicry in Fashion

Hala's mimicry can also be seen in the way she dresses daily. According to Wardaya et.al., fashion has long been used as a visual indicator of distinction and belonging, making it a powerful symbol of cultural identity (Wardaya et al.). Many immigrant families view traditional attire as a means of conserving their cultural heritage in addition to being visually appealing. On the other hand, adopting the styles of the dominant society could be an indication of adaptation or a desire for acceptance by others. As a result, fashion becomes a means of self-expression and of moving between two separate worlds. Hala differentiates herself from her mother and other Pakistani women by wearing Western-style clothes in her daily life, such as jeans, sweaters, denim jackets, and sneakers, which show her imitation of American culture.



Figure 2. Hala's casual outfit represents mimicry

(00:03:01-00:03:05)

In Figure 2, there is an example of Hala's casual outfit that represents her imitation of American culture. In the picture above, she is wearing a long-sleeved shirt with a t-shirt inside and an open button, sneakers, and jogger pants. She is listening to music using headphones while skateboarding. The clothes she wears symbolise American culture, as the attire typically worn by the average American teenager consists of casual outfits like those Hala wears. Besides that, the sneaker that she used is part of American culture. As Smith (qtd. In Yusup) stated, Charles Goodyear first invented the sneaker in the mid-18th century in America after developing a strong rubber that revitalised the country's rubber industry in the 1830s and later became the main



component of the shoe sole. Besides the sneakers she wears, the headphones Hala uses to listen to music are also part of American culture because they were invented by an American scientist. An American engineer named Nathaniel Baldwin created headphones, designed to enhance sound, in 1910 (Sundari et al.). By using clothes and items that are part of American culture, Hala indirectly has purposed as a journey of understanding herself, seeking of freedom, and navigating life with two different culture (Pakistan-American).

Representing Mimicry in Behaviours

Alongside language and fashion mimicry, Hala's mimicry of behaviour is evident as well. Henriques & Michalski defined behaviour as changes or actions of living organisms that are functionally influenced by external phenomena occurring in the present moment (Henriques and Michalski). In Hala's case, these external influences encompass the social and cultural norms of the Western world in which she resides. Cultural traditions are closely associated with moral principles, social norms, and daily activities that shape how individuals interact with the outside world. Western cultures tend to place a strong emphasis on personal autonomy and choice. In contrast, many traditional communities, like Hala's Pakistani background, base their behaviour on religious principles and expectations from their families. Between these conflicting cultural pressures, Hala, a second-generation Pakistani-American, experiences tension. Due to this cultural dualism, she must navigate two distinct sets of behavioural norms, which often leads her to imitate Western ways of acting. The following represents a form of Hala's imitation of American culture.



Figure 3. Hala is skateboarding at the skate park

(00:12:03-00:12:16)

In Figure 3, Hala skateboards in the skate park. Wearing casual clothes, Hala runs his skateboard in the centre of the court. Although it may seem a minor feature in *Hala* (2019), skateboarding promotes her conformity to Western youth culture by serving as a symbolic act of imitation. As stated by Borden (qtd. In Radikonyana et al.), skateboarding originated in the 1950s due to surfers' need to keep going "as the surf was flat", on the West Coast of the United States of America (USA). Since it originated in



America, skateboarding became part of American culture, particularly for the youth. Skateboarding is associated with urban street culture, independence, and self-expression. For skateboarders, performing tricks is a way to "express themselves freely" and find a "short-term escape or sense of empowerment through movement" (Glenney and Mull). Unlike conventional sports (like basketball or football), it is not typically institutionalized, which makes it an activity that defies strict structures. Instead, it develops in open areas, unaffiliated communities, and self-taught skills, demonstrating freedom and creativity.

Through skating, Hala is engaging in a Western cultural movement emphasizing personal agency, which she finds difficult to assert at home. Pakistani girls are often expected to engage in activities that align with modesty and propriety, and they are less likely to be seen participating in recreational sports, especially in mixed-gender spaces (Raza et al.). Ninety per cent of Pakistani women do not play sports, and a number of factors, including a lack of funds and facilities, parental consent, and social, cultural, and religious prohibitions, are significant (Laar et al.). Hala's choice to skateboard is a subtly rebellious act against these gendered societal norms. Even though her mother has already forbidden her from skateboarding, she chooses to ignore it. Hala finds that skating provides her with a sense of physical and spiritual freedom, allowing her to escape the limitations imposed on her by her culture. In addition to her imitation of skateboarding, Hala also mimics American culture by dating her classmate, Jesse.



Figure 4. Hala went on a date with Jesse at a restaurant

(00:33:19-00:35:08)

In Figure 4, Hala and Jesse are on a date at a restaurant. While filling in the crossword puzzle, Hala chats with Jesse and occasionally flirts with him. According to Nag et al., dating was once a proactive method of choosing a mate in the Western world, but today's youth utilize it as a testing tactic to find a match (Nag et al.). In Western culture, dating is considered normal and is not viewed as taboo. In contrast, in many non-Western countries, such as Pakistan, dating outside of marriage is often dismissed and regarded as taboo, particularly when it involves someone of a different religion; relationships are expected to follow a family-approved path. As stated by Connolly and McDonald, romantic relationships are often governed by higher-order social



conventions and regulations in non-Western cultures and collectivist societies, where romantic desires are perceived as subordinate to familial concerns (Connolly and McDonald). By adopting the habits of his American friends, such as dating, Hala has imitated American culture. Hala does this order to be accepted by her friends, including her boyfriend by imitating the habits or life style in America. As a result, Hala ended up having sex outside of marriage, which is strictly prohibited in her religion and culture.



Figure 5. Hala is having sex outside of marriage

(00:45:44-00:48:00)

In Figure 5, Hala lies on the bed next to Jesse after engaging in premarital sex. According to Ali et al., pre-marital sexual activity is any behaviour between a man and a woman that is driven by sexual urges to enjoy and stimulate their reproductive systems without making any official vows or agreements to one another as husband and wife (Ali et al.). What Hala did with Jesse certainly violated the rules set by Hala's religion and culture, as he was still in school and not yet in a marital relationship.

Representing Mimicry in Food

Hala's form of mimicry is also reflected in the food she eats. As a Pakistani-Muslim immigrant, Hala follows specific rules when choosing her food that align with her religious and cultural traditions. For immigrants, food serves as more than just nourishment; it is a cultural symbol that conveys religious beliefs, identity, and tradition. According to Rendy and Dam, in multicultural contexts, cooking and eating behaviors often serve as practical and physical means for migrants to maintain their ethnic identities while also being symbolic (Reddy and Dam). Food selection among specific ethnic groups is strongly shaped by culture and religion. In Pakistani culture, where most of the population is Muslim, food preferences go beyond mere taste; they are deeply rooted in religious practices. Since the majority of Pakistanis are Muslims, the consumption of white meat and red meat (such as beef, mutton, and camel) is permitted according to religious guidelines, whereas alcohol and pork are prohibited (Sadia et al.). Furthermore, meat must be prepared in a specific manner to ensure it is slaughtered according to Islamic law rituals.



In Islam, animals that are killed not according to Islamic rules are categorized as carcasses. An animal that does not undergo the butchering process is called a carcass. As a result, the animal's blood primarily does not flow out but instead combines in the liver, spleen, and veins (Farid and Basri). This blood can contaminate the meat, leading to a mixture of blood and meat. Unlike halal-slaughtered meat, halal slaughter involves severing the neck's capillaries to ensure complete blood drainage. The term "halal" originates from the Arabic word "al-halal," which signifies "permissible" or "legal" (Anggraini and Dewanti). In the film, Hala eats a non-halal burger, attempting to mimic American culture.



Figure 6. Hala is eating non-halal burger with Jesse

(00:39:29-00:39:53)

Jesse : Hey, I thought you didn't eat meat.

Hala Masood: It just has to be *zabiha*. Like, kosher. Just prepared in a certain way.

Jesse : Yeah, this is definitely not that. Nobody prayed on this.

Hala Masood: I don't care.

(Dialogue 1)

In Figure 6, while sitting in the car, Hala and Jesse eat a burger they purchased from a fast food restaurant. From dialogue 1, it is evident that the burger they ate was not halal. Jesse stated that the burger was not slaughtered in the *Zabiha* way because "*nobody prayed on this.*" *Zabiha* refers to a method of slaughter that conforms to Islamic law. As noted by Arshad et al., according to Islamic law, halal-slaughtered meat is referred to as "zabiha" or "dadha" (Arshad et al.). Hala's consumption of the non-halal burger exemplifies Bhabha's central concept of ambivalent mimicry. She attempts to perform American cultural belonging through food consumption, telling Jesse "*I don't care*" when he points out the burger isn't halal. However, this performance is marked by what Bhabha calls the "almost the same but not quite" quality that characterizes colonial mimicry.

The "almost" is evident in her ability to physically consume American food and participate in casual dining culture with Jesse. She successfully performs the role of a



typical American teenager sharing fast food with her romantic interest. However, the "not quite" emerges through several key elements: her initial explanation about zabiha reveals her deep knowledge of Islamic dietary law, her defensive "*I don't care*" suggests internal conflict rather than genuine indifference; and her very awareness of transgression marks her as different from Jesse, who consumes the food without any cultural or religious consideration. In addition, Hala is symbolically distancing herself from her family's traditions and embracing Western individualism and autonomy in her food choices by opting for a non-halal burger and disregarding her cultural food regulations. Eating halal food is vital to Hala's family's cultural and religious identity, reinforcing their connection to their Islamic and Pakistani heritage. Thus, food symbolizes the inner journey of Hala, which is to be a good girl according to her family or to be herself in American environment.

Representing Mimicry in Mindset

The last form of mimicry is seen in Hala's mindset. Social norms, cultural context, and ideological frameworks shape mindset and perspective. Immigrant groups in Western nations frequently embrace Western mindsets. This occurs because, as individuals from Eastern cultures take in Western ideas, they often develop an unconscious perception that the West is progressive, attractive, and beneficial, while viewing the East as underdeveloped, unattractive, and negative (Jin). In *Hala* (2019), the protagonist increasingly embraces attitudes aligned with Western individualism and liberalism, diverging from the values instilled by her Pakistani-Muslim family. Hala starts to reflect American values. According to Weil (qtd. In Khusnah et al.), American values encompass various aspects, including individualism, freedom, competitiveness, privacy, equality, informality, a focus on future change and progress, the inherent goodness of humanity, the importance of time, achievement, action, work, materialism, directness, and assertiveness. Hala develops a more individualistic perspective, prioritizing personal fulfillment and freedom over familial and societal expectations, contrasting sharply with the collectivist principles of her Pakistani-Muslim upbringing. One clear example of her rejection of parental authority highlights this shift.



Figure 7. Her mother gave Hala advice

(00:15:39-00:16:25)



Eram Masood: *Mrs. Ahmed called. She said her son saw you at the skatepark, and there were a lot of boys there*

Hala Masood : *I can't help it if boys are there, and I went with Melanie. That's what I told you and dad, you said it was okay as long as I didn't go alone.*

Eram Masood: *Yes, but be careful. You know what our community might think. They'll start gossiping.*

Hala Masood : *I mean, I don't really care what they think. If it were up to them, I would be married already.*

Eram Masood : *I understand, but you're older now. And you're a girl, just be careful. Dad and I won't always be there to protect you.*

(Dialogue 2)

In Figure 7, Hala and her mother discussed Hala's behavior, which she is worried might lead to community gossip. As mentioned earlier, Pakistani culture is collectivistic. According to Qu, in collectivist cultures, individual goals are shaped to align with the group's interests. When personal opinions differ from the majority, individuals often suppress them to avoid conflict and maintain harmony (Qu). Based on dialogue 2, we can see the concern in Hala's mother. She worries that Hala will become a gossip because she is involved in mixed gender activity. Hala's mother's concern about what her community will think aligns with the collectivist principles of Pakistani culture, where they prioritize group interests over personal interests. Meanwhile, Hala's response to her mother's advice reflects the individualistic nature of American society, where people tend to be indifferent when others gossip about them because they believe that each person has the freedom to express their opinions. Hala also appears to critique her community by suggesting that if she heeded their opinions, she could already be married.

Hala's commenting on her mother's advice highlights Hala's embrace of the individualistic values prevalent in American society. However, this psychological transformation, while seemingly successful on the surface, exemplifies the fundamental contradictions inherent in Bhabha's concept of mimicry, where the colonial subject's attempt to adopt dominant cultural frameworks inevitably produces an incomplete and anxiety-inducing identity position. Bhabha argues that colonial mimicry produces subjects who are "reformed, recognizable," but never quite acceptable to colonial authority. Hala's mimicry of mindset demonstrates this impossibility. Her adoption of American individualistic values doesn't grant her full acceptance into American society, she remains marked as a Pakistani-Muslim woman whose "liberation" is always viewed through Orientalist lenses that position her as escaping backward traditions rather than making culturally neutral choices. At the same time, her psychological transformation alienates her from her heritage community without fully incorporating her into



American social structures. She becomes what Bhabha calls a "flawed colonial mimesis", psychologically American enough to threaten Pakistani authority but ethnically Pakistani enough to remain suspect in American contexts. Furthermore, Hala's rejection of parental authority is further illustrated in a different scene where she rejects an arranged marriage set up by her parents.



Figure 8. Hala ran out of the house in the middle of an arranged marriage
(01:02:02-01:03:26)

Based on Figure 8, Hala is crying in the middle of the road because she does not want to be paired up in an arranged marriage. In this scene, Hala is set up with Arash, the son of Hina and Mahmoud, their neighbors in Khudad colony. According to Allendorf, parents often choose a potential spouse based on the individual's and their family's social and economic status, which includes factors like lineage, wealth, ethnicity or caste, and religion. Additionally, they consider personal attributes such as age, education, occupation, domestic skills, and physical appearance (Allendorf 77). Her parents set her up with Arash because they considered him the best choice due to his education and job, additionally, Arash was a Muslim Pakistani. In addition, Pakistani culture views marriage as a family matter. Adult family members, such as parents, are accustomed to being involved in choosing their children's spouses (Ahmed). Hala, disappointed and unaware of her parents' decision, ran away from home. By refusing this arrangement, Hala directly challenges parental control in her culture. Her refusal exemplifies her adoption of Western values like self-determination, individuality, and personal independence. In American society, marriage is often seen as a personal choice based on love and compatibility rather than an obligation to one's family. Even at the risk of disappointing her family, Hala's refusal shows that she is no longer willing to meet the expectations placed upon her. Thus, the imitation mindset is a reflection of the identity struggle experienced by many immigrant children.

The Effect of Mimicry on *Hala's* Character

According to the analysis of the mimicry performed by Hala above, ultimately, mimicry impacts her personal development, psychology, and identity. Hala's imitation of American culture, such as speaking English, wearing western fashion, eating western



food, skateboarding, dating, and discussing subjects like sex, helps her integrate and fit into American society, particularly with her peers. By engaging in these actions, she achieves a measure of social acceptance and builds connections, such as her friendship with Melanie and her relationship with Jesse. Her capability to communicate using the same cultural "language" as her American peers enhances her relatability and reduces her sense of being an outsider. Hala's sense of belonging boosts her confidence and empowers her, contributing to her personal development. Hala's empowerment is evident in her choice to live on her own.



Figure 9. Hala studies far from home and lives alone.

(01:25:08-01:25:52)

In Figure 9, Hala is standing in front of a dormitory where she will be living alone. Hala's choice to separate herself from her family reflects her independence. It highlights her preference for an individualistic stance that values personal freedom and self-discovery more than the collectivist views that emphasize the importance of family and community expectations. As research states, it is important to recognize the positive characteristics of individualistic cultures, as they provide a variety of social freedoms necessary for leading a fulfilling life (Humphrey and Bliuc). In the film, Hala initially finds it challenging to stand up for herself and often avoids having direct conversations with her parents. However, toward the end of the movie, she decides to emotionally and physically separate herself, indicating her need for independence. By moving out and attending college far from home, she can break free from her parents' authority and embrace a life where she has complete control over her choices.

While Hala has achieved independence and personal growth, her adaptation to American society comes with consequences. According to Farizi and Mustofa, Western or foreign cultures can have both positive and negative effects on individuals' lives (Farizi and Mustofa). Although she utilizes Western norms to foster her independence and navigate her dual identity, this also results in significant emotional and psychological distress. As Abdusamatov stated, children from immigrant homes often experience fear, anxiety, and depression (Abdusamatov). The psychological issues highlighted by Abdusamatov stem from a cultural ambivalence commonly experienced by many immigrant children. Hala engages in mimicry as a way to adapt because of cultural



ambivalence. However, this makes her feel disconnected from her Pakistani culture and results in feelings of guilt. A clear example of her guilt is her regret over engaging in premarital sex.



Figure 10. Hala felt guilty after having sex with Jesse.

(00:48:03-00:48:36)

Hala Masood: *Bodies next to bodies are just bodies. It is possible to feel unclean. Even when you are wanted. It is possible to feel alone. Lying next to someone you love, lying next to someone who loves you. It is possible to go back, knowing what you know now. It is possible to be full of contradictions.*

(Dialogue 3)

While returning home from Jesse's house, Hala appears to regret her actions, as illustrated in Figure 10. Hala appears to be experiencing intense internal conflict and psychological turmoil based on Dialogue 3. The phrase *bodies next to bodies are just bodies* conveys a feeling of disenchantment or disengagement. She appears to have hoped for a more meaningful or transformative experience from the encounter, yet instead, she feels hollow or disconnected. She appears to be dealing with feelings of shame, regret, and a lost identity, as indicated by her sense of being unclean despite being desired, and feeling alone even while lying next to someone she loves. This struggle may stem from her internalized cultural and religious beliefs that regard premarital sex as unacceptable. Hirsh and Kang (qtd. In Verkuyten et al.) stated that Neurological studies have shown that when immigrants feel a clash or incompatibility between their ethnic identity and the identity of their host country, it often leads to stress and psychological tension. In American culture, sex outside of marriage is considered normal, whereas in Pakistani culture, it is forbidden.

In addition to affecting Hala's psychology, mimicry also influences her identity. Hall (qtd. In Zhang) suggests that identity is constructed through a process of struggle and reconciliation. It is influenced by our resistance to or adaptation of dominant social ideas (discourses) and mirrors our self-perception in relation to those influences.



The earlier theoretical framework discusses that Homi K. Bhabha views mimicry as a problematic adaptation strategy, as it may cause an individual to undergo an identity crisis. Second-generation migrants often encounter an identity crisis as they attempt to balance two identities from an early age. Instead of choosing between an old identity and a new one, they struggle to integrate both. This inner conflict is exacerbated by societal prejudice and the pressure to fit in (Brance et al.). In the film, Hala occupies an ambiguous space, being neither fully American nor entirely Pakistani. If she were classified as an American, she would still not be fully American because of her name, family history, and the religious and cultural traditions of her upbringing. On the other hand, if she were classified as a Pakistani, she would not be fully Pakistani either because she rejects many commands such as following the traditional standards that include obeying her parents, dressing modestly, and strongly adhering to her religious beliefs. The ambiguity that Hala experiences is seen in the following scene.



Figure 11. Hala's feeling about her ambiguity world.

(01:07:15-01:07:54)

Hala Masood: *I'm of two parts divided. One that rushes forward fearlessly. Another that questions everything. Stranger and family under the same roof. Speaking different languages, yet sharing the same blood. Seeking to be understood, yet talking over each other. A cacophonous sound. That is the head and the heart.*

(Dialogue 4)

In picture 11, Hala is looking into the mirror. Based on dialogue 4, she wonders about her true identity. This dialogue reflects her identity crisis, as she feels caught between two worlds. In the dialogue, she states that she consists of two divided parts. The ambiguity Hala experiences with relation to her identity and cultural belonging is well-represented in this passage. The contrast of *rushing forward fearlessly* and *questioning everything* illustrates her emotional conflict. She feels torn between the desire to adopt Western ideals of independence and self-expression and the doubts rooted in her Pakistani-Muslim upbringing. The narrative presents an identity crisis in



which one aspect of herself feels liberated while the other remains confused. Her statement, *stranger and family under the same roof*, illustrates her sense of cultural homelessness within her own home. Although she shares a blood relationship with her parents, there is a disconnection between them stemming from their differing perspectives. The statement about speaking different languages while having the same blood emphasizes the cultural and linguistic divide between Hala and her family; her mother's use of Urdu reflects their cultural heritage, whereas Hala's preference for English over Urdu indicates her Western influence. Finally, the mention of the head and heart portrays the conflicting forces pulling her in different directions. Emotionally, she struggles to abandon her roots, even though she logically aspires to integrate into American society.

Finally, among all the effects mimicry has on Hala, from social acceptance and empowerment to psychological tension, the most profound and lasting impact is the identity crisis it creates. Hala's imitation of American culture boosts her confidence and forms connections, but it also distances her from her Pakistani-Muslim heritage. This cultural ambivalence, although allowing her the liberty to make her own choices, leads to feelings of guilt, confusion, and emotional detachment. The climax of this internal struggle is best represented by her choice to take off the hijab, which holds significant importance in her cultural and religious identity. This decision highlights the intensity of her efforts to balance two opposing identities. Therefore, Hala's mimicry is not simply a means of adaptation; it is a complex process that results in deep self-reflection and cultural displacement, clearly illustrating an identity crisis.

Conclusion

This study finds that mimicry functions as a cultural adaptation strategy and its psychological effects on the main character in *Hala* (2019), a film that captures the experience of a second-generation Pakistani-American Muslimah teenager. There are various imitations of Hala, including language, fashion, behavior, food, and mindset. This imitation is not just imitation, but a reflection of the process of self-discovery amidst the clash of two contradictory values, an identity crisis. Hala's journey represents the silent struggle of many diasporic Muslimah who must reconcile two opposing worlds. Mimicry in this context is not a superficial performance but a deeply rooted survival mechanism that comes at the cost of Muslim identity coherence and emotional stability. The study also reinforces the importance of viewing film characters as cultural texts and symbolic reflections of social realities, as posited by Jens Eder's character theory.

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