



## Identity in the Postmodern Psychosocial Context: A Study of Nicola Yoon's *The Sun Is Also a Star*

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### Abstract

This textual analysis of Nicola Yoon's novel, *The Sun Is Also a Star* theorises the contentious issue of the transcultural identity of teenage immigrants in the postmodern psychosocial context. The study contributes to the heated discussion on identity formation in biracial and diasporic young adult literature by using Erikson's concepts of psychosocial relativity, identity formation and identity crisis, and Jean Baudrillard's concepts on postmodern identity. This article contends that in an effort to maintain one ethnic identity by erasing her previous Jamaican identity in Trump's era in the United States, the protagonist Natasha experiences anti-Black racism, discrimination, and biracial identity formation. Conversely, another character in the novel, Daniel relishes dynamic identities to fit in the USA. However, his biracial identity results in an identity crisis. Thus, Yoon's novel validates a postmodern condition, where teenagers' multiple identities are regulated on the basis of ethnicity and their struggle for independent identities remains futile. Hence, the study shows that the USA does not allow biracial people to experience or adapt to Americanness easily.

**Keywords:** adolescence; cultural identity; identity crisis; psychosocial relativity; postmodernism

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## Introduction

Increasing trends of biracial or multinational families' immigration to the USA and their endeavours to settle there with an autonomous identity have become a burning issue in teenage fiction. For instance, the protagonist of *The Sun Is Also a Star* (2016) attempts to establish her identity in the promised land of the USA, but she finds it hostile. The socio-political and historical understanding of this land furnishes the readers with the intricacies of why people dreamed about it and how it crushed the dreams of the folks who went there. To contextualize my analysis, redefining the concept of the American dream is crucial. For the British, the USA was the land of unfathomable raw resources and infinite potential. At the same time, for the Germans, it was a place to settle down peacefully after leaving their poor, war-torn land. Despite these individual versions, three important common factors- opportunity, hope, and merit- were taken as sacred tenets of the USA (Marchand 167). These tenets were condensed in The Declaration of Independence as liberty, life, and the pursuit of happiness for all. Unfortunately, a lot of Americans were refuted by these doctrines of freedom by the powerful elite of the USA for their benefit (Williams 102). This hypocrisy and injustice had been justified with the help of the Bible for centuries to realize the coercion and slavery. Williams, therefore, contends that the Bible's offer "to obey your earthly masters" was taken as a clear indication of social inequality and white racial supremacy as well as the justification of the oppression and subordination of all those who were less powerful (103).

Emerging in the 70s and 80s, Young Adult (YA) fiction deals with various challenges for adolescents. The hallmark of this genre is that the characters ensure personal efforts. These novels are of reasonable length and are told from the first person's perspective. They furthermore surmount the contemporary issues that young adults face in society. Written for teens, YA literature covers the detailed spectrum of lifespan (Vanderstaay 2). The novel under study also provides a detailed account of immigrants' lives, their issues in the host country, and when they are sent back to their homeland. Daughter of a Jamaican immigrant family, Natasha experiences bewilderment about her identity, dangling between the new world where she was born and the world of her forefathers that Natasha's parents left behind to work in the film industry in the USA. They came to the USA as illegal immigrants and started both a family and a career. Natasha, a seventeen-year-old teen and the vibrant protagonist of this novel is trying to construct an independent self, a pure American identity in the host culture of the USA. However, she fails to do this because of her ethnic identity or as an immigrant from another land. The novel also manifests the example of Daniel, a talented, diligent, and confident doctoral candidate at Yale University, who accepts multiple identities yet gets frustrated and faces loneliness in the USA (Yoon 35).

For traditionalists and modernists, the search for individuality, self, or identity has remained a monolithic task. As an extension of modernism, or as Ihab Hassan calls it, "continuity and discontinuity" from modernism, postmodernism- a post-war phenomenon, is characterized by de-centeredness of meanings, the autonomy of every individual, endless potential of human co-existence in diverse cultures, periods, and

ideologies (Haraway 90). The postmodern approach, being abstract, does not prioritize conventional methods as effective tools for analysing and questioning ideologies and traditions. However, in the postmodern context, identity and self have multiple dimensions. Self is in contrast with the other, and semantically too, the self can only be found not in itself but when compared with the other or from the other's perspective; in this way, it is relational. Due to these reasons, identity in the postmodern period is considered fluid. On the other hand, identity has become more complex in the USA because of the white racial hegemony and the ethnicity and culture of immigrants (Rattansi 56).

Erikson characterizes adolescence as the stage when individuals are busy discovering their identities. It is a stage marked by confidence in some and complexity in others. Biracial teens in the USA face complex issues as they battle for their racial identities. Young adult literature introduces these teens to an identity crisis in the first place by placing their protagonists in the same complex setting as they face in real-life situations, just as Ron Mallon articulates, "the idea of racial identity is important because it helps to shape behaviours towards one's identity, towards other members of the same race, and towards other races, and ethnicities either in a majority or in the minority" (12). In this way, the depiction of this biracial issue in literature helps determine readers' identities. Yoon's novel *The Sun Is Also a Star* represents the patterns of behaviours that influence the character's feelings when their identity is crushed. These behaviours start from their own family's commentary on their biracial get-up and continue in the form of bullying at school, voices at the market or public places, and reactions from the people of their community.

Identity is further defined under several concepts, including uniqueness, individuality, singularity, self, character, and so on. The definition of the self invariably requires the presence of the other, whereas, while conceptualizing identity construction, Erik Erikson defines it as 'Psychosocial Relativity' present in the sense of personal sameness and historical continuity. He is of the view that communal change and personal growth are integrated parts of each other, and the same is the case with an identity crisis in a person's life and modern-day tragedies in historical evolution because both communal change and personal growth are defining characteristics of each other (Erikson 53). I contend that Nicola Yoon's narrative exemplifies a postmodern condition, where teenagers' identities are controlled and regulated based on ethnicities, and their enterprises for autonomous identities remain futile; subsequently, they have to live with their relative psychosocial identities, which are fluid and multiple while 'role confusion' leads towards the formation of 'negative identity'. I use the theoretical frameworks of Erikson's psychosocial theory and Baudrillard's postmodern identity to analyse the complexities of identity formation and othering in Nicola Yoon's novel *The Sun Is Also a Star*. These frameworks illuminate the ways in which characters like Natasha and Daniel negotiate their identities amidst socio-political challenges and cultural complexities, offering insights into broader themes of immigration, racial identity, and the pursuit of autonomy in contemporary young adult literature.

## Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Concepts of Identity and Immigration in *The Sun Is Also a Star*

Time and again, Yoon's narrative has been taken as a story of a fateful encounter of entwined love and friendship. Epstein, took the novel in the same terrain of a love story along with the second issue of harsh policies of immigration (1). Furthermore, Scot took the novel as a charming book of adolescents' love stories- Natasha Kingsley and Daniel Bae, who are destined to meet each other and make love (01). Marie Clair views the novel as a compelling story full of life for those people who know about the American Dream and want to enjoy the prospects that this land offers. Further, it is a story of adventure, which Natasha and Daniel take together for the whole day, so it is a Young Adult classic (Clair 02). The work also reveals the strength of positive thinking which leads to trust and faith in fate. Furthermore, one more reviewer, Ayesha Abraham, noted the subject matter of debunking the myth about gender's perfection in particular subjects, like girls good at arts and bad at mathematics and science, but it is reversed in the novel. Further, Daniel is interested in poetry, while Natasha, a science student and perfect at Physics does not like poetry. Additionally, she takes the story as the construction of the real world (Abraham 1).

Zohreh Gharaei and Shirin Shahangiz's study included two Persian translations of Nicola Yoon's young adult novel *The Sun Is Also a Star*. The selection of this novel was based on its themes, which include God, identity, fate, love, morality, and relationships. Along with linguistic analysis, these authors conducted a socio-cultural and ideological analysis of the themes and their realization in translation, since these concepts are value-laden and rooted in the political, ideological, and moral value systems of each society. In order to carry out this investigation, the authors have found the components of cultural identity in the novel by using Holliday's framework. Thus, the two authors have examined the two Persian translations of this novel while using a cultural approach to translation and have determined the elements that were primarily impacted by manipulative techniques (Gharaei and Shahangiz 3).

Nadira Ayu Ninggar and Frans Sayogie's study illustrates the hierarchies of needs that one of the main characters in Nicola Yoon's *The Sun Is Also a Star* faces as she attempts to meet some of her needs both before and after her impending deportation. Natasha is an undocumented immigrant. These authors apply Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to examine this novel. They have used reading and marking various passages from the novel as a technique of data collection for this study. Analysing the data using Abraham Maslow's five stages of the hierarchy of needs, these researchers conclude that Natasha can meet all of her needs, both before and after the deportation. As a result, even though Natasha faces challenges in meeting her safety needs—she is an undocumented immigrant facing deportation, so she worries about returning to her home country—she manages to do so once she arrives and begins her new life in Jamaica, ultimately realizing her dream of self-actualization. These researchers come to the conclusion that safety, love, and belonging needs are the ones that Natasha tries to satisfy the most based on her motivation for satisfying her needs (Ninggar and Sayogie 29).

Being an adolescent text, it is a bildungsroman as well, like, Nsiah-Baudi, NPR books staff, from writer's interview and the novel deducts many of the autobiographical details: the writer was a student of science, and interested in fate and science (how ironic-being two paradoxical fields). For Yoon, immigration is an optimistic and daring promise. It is just happiness to her, for which one has to die hard, and she puts the same happiness and promise in immigration in her character, Natasha. In her interview, Yoon explains that she loves to write every kind of love, whether it is love for the family, art, studies, profession, or friends and that love will not get away from her stories. It is also central to her other ongoing writings (Nsiah 01).

According to Stuart Hall, identity while linked with the idea of immigration, is a construction of the reconciling and struggling activity in which the individual battles with the discourse of power and imagines its identity within this power (45). The subject or individual is always the idea of 'other,' for which Hall's continuous involvement with the idea of nationhood takes a final shape (Zhang 17). Unlike Hall's view that nationhood continually shapes identity, Yoon's character Natasha insists on identifying solely as American. Therefore, rather than focusing on cultural or diasporic identities, the current study addresses the postmodern psychosocial context.

This literature review underscores a noticeable gap in the examination of identity within the context of Erickson's psychosocial theory and Baudrillard's postmodern ideas of identity. By employing these frameworks to analyse *The Sun Is Also a Star*, this study seeks to fill this void and provide a valuable addition to current scholarship on identity formation in literature.

## Research Methodology

In this qualitative research, I apply Erik Erikson's 'psychosocial development' theory to analyse identity formation with his other concepts of psychosocial development, psychosocial relativity, identity crisis, ratio, and negative identity. Further, it negotiates with the ideas of Jean Baudrillard on postmodern identity to have a more comprehensive analysis of the novel. Erikson believes that adolescence, which is the fifth stage of development, is the critical time for the development of identity. This time is crucial because it leads to "identity achievement" or "role confusion" (Erikson 68). Identity achievement leads to a commitment to social norms and standards, while role confusion ultimately brings negative associations and ruined behaviours. I also draw upon Erikson's concept that a child expresses his/her right to develop an identity, and losing one's identity leads to neurosis (50). Erikson further writes that identity shaping starts at birth and goes on throughout life, yet the adolescence is the time when it gets stable.

According to Erikson, identity construction is very patriarchal and hegemonic because subjects want to have an identity of the person in power. Based on Freud's description of cultural identity (Freud 56), he believes one cannot get rid of it because it explains the cultural aspects of one's personality. Erikson expands the horizon of its definition that it is something rooted in the centre of the person and that of the communal culture. The interplay between these two identities is what he calls 'psychosocial relativity'

(Erikson 35). Further, he used the term ‘identity crisis’ during wartime to explain the loss of a sense of personal sameness or fixation on identity and historical coherence or continuity, as adolescents were battling not only for society but themselves. So, their ego identity was lost. Ratio and negative identity are the obstacles to identity development. The ratio is a disproportion between the values of, for example, trust vs. mistrust. At the same time, a negative identity is snobbish and an arrogant denial of the roles assigned by the family, society, or community. It is a solid response to the lost identity that one wanted to obtain. It happens when one is not successful in making choices. I draw on Erikson’s insights into the feminine dimensions of personality, emphasizing care, nurturing, and peacekeeping (38). Erikson adds to his experiences about Blacks in the USA stating that their treatment leads to depression, psychological distress, trauma, and sometimes taking a negative identity. People of diverse origins find it challenging to understand their perspectives (Erikson 25).

To theorize the concept of diaspora, I refer to Cohen, who summarized the term as “positioned between nation-states and traveling cultures in a sense that they dwell, in the physical sense, in a nation-state, but travel in a spiritual sense that falls outside the nation-state’s space/time and zone” (Khan 4). However, the characters in Yoon’s novel, such as Natasha and Daniel do not want to see themselves as diasporic characters but under a single identity that is American in its entirety. Hence, this aspect has not been developed and debated. On the other hand, the concept of Postmodernism and the discussion of identity stability are closely related. This broad range of theories revolves around Lyotard’s well-known term “incredulity toward meta-narratives” (Lyotard xxiv). Postmodernists contend that modernity has failed as a project and that no one body of knowledge or source can legitimate itself as a standard by which all other bodies of work are judged or defined. It is clear that this modernity has a significant impact on how we typically think about the world. In a postmodern context, we can no longer theorize society into uniform identities that can be totalized in a grand theory or meta-narrative. From a postmodern perspective, identity is fluid and dependent on one’s historical and cultural context, as opposed to the self, upholding a stable core of identity. The very possibility of self-identity is threatened by this conception of the self.

To enhance the discussion on identity in the postmodern context, I further juxtapose Erikson’s framework with Jean Baudrillard’s ideas on postmodern identity, aiming to offer a more nuanced analysis of the novel under consideration. Baudrillard claims that suspension and deterioration of identity is a recent occurrence. Meaningful social identity theory is impossible in the postmodern era because historical processes have undermined identity stability. Rigid identity and meaning are destroyed as global capitalism expands and modernity’s referents—truth, purpose, and meaning disappear. There are no longer any references to the equation of ‘real’ contents, production, meaning, affect, substance, history, or the entire list (Baudrillard 125). I apply Baudrillard’s critique to examine how the novel’s characters navigate a postmodern landscape where identity is an empty vessel, transiently filled with meaningless content. Although postmodernity has rendered the concepts of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ meaningless, Baudrillard does not view this as a particularly good or bad development. It does, however,

essentially negate the effectiveness of theoretical and political action. As a result, many postmodernist texts declare the end of meaning, history, theory, and other concepts. For many postmodernists, the breakdown of identity makes theory and meaningful political action impossible. From this perspective, postmodern identity is simply a reaction of late modernity that fails to seriously engage with the central problem of our time, rather than a liberating and revolutionary new way of rethinking about society. By engaging profoundly with both Erikson's and Baudrillard's theories, I aim to provide a comprehensive and critical analysis of identity formation in the novel, emphasizing how these theoretical frameworks illuminate the characters' complex journeys.

### **Struggling Identities: Immigration and Discrimination in *The Sun Is Also a Star***

Immigrants establish their roots in a new land for which they sacrifice their connections with their kinsfolks, their language and cultural identity, and experience separation from their native land and culture. They either assimilate into a new culture or live in between, but complete integration into the host society becomes undue anxiety. Racism or racial discrimination is one reason. Racial predisposition and the notion of identity are not only limited to the United States; instead, it is present in non-white people as well. It is also a patent aspect that the first generation wants to keep their roots intact, so they are contented with their previous cultural identity. In contrast, the second generation is not pleased with this phenomenon, and they want to shed their previous identity to take up entirely the identity of being American. Despite various conspiracy theories loitering behind the concept of identity, like post 9/11 time and "Trump's zero-tolerance policies for immigrants separating their families, which Congressional Research Service called, were cruel, unconstitutional and violated international human rights law" (Kandel 4), young immigrants' problems are in a dire need to be addressed. In Yoon's novel *Natasha's voice* highlights it when she says, "I sincerely say that I belong to America" (59), as she makes every effort to get nationality and American identity. Contrary to her notion about the States, Ezra Klein notes that every other ethnic group except white is bullied, attacked, victimized, and discriminated against and they are left voiceless (66). It is a sheer violation of the promissory note given at the time of the Declaration, which was a promise that "all men, either black or white, would have an undistinguishable right of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" (Kandel 33).

*The Sun Is Also a Star* presents such examples where characters struggle for identity against the native people and the minorities. The novel has two immigrant families, one from Korea and the other from Jamaica; however, white Americans are suppressing both. Dejectedly, these two ethnic minorities are not free from prejudices, and the Korean family humiliates the Jamaicans to mollify their integrity while living in America. It is necessary to add that the "high unemployment rate, political insecurity, and military dictatorship caused massive numbers of Koreans to immigrate to the United States in the 1960s through the early 1980s" (Houchins 3). Whereas, Jamaicans migrated to the United States due to natural calamities, political power imbalances in the 19th century caused by

Great Britain, and invitations from American investors seeking Jamaican labour for tropical agricultural fields (Walker 176).

In *The Sun Is Also a Star*, several immigrant characters face the issue of identity in the American environment. However, Daniel's elder brother, Charles Jae Won Bae, also called Charlie, is shown with the slightest struggle for the American identity; instead, he is pleased with his previous cultural identity given to him on the land of his ancestors. In the USA, he has internalized from his elders that Americans will not accept him as their primary native. This process of self-adjustment in the previous identity is what Erikson refers to as role confusion and throughout the novel, Charlie exemplifies 'role confusion'. He is keen in his studies, as his Harvard admission letter shows. But he is confused and dejected about the stereotypical attitude of Americans, he is not much sombre about his studies at Harvard, so he is expelled due to his bad grades. Yoon narrates this through the perspective of Daniel, who says, "Charlie, my brother surprised my parents, friends, and the entire gossiping Korean community of New York" (3). Daniel, in this reference, points towards Charlie's confused role that surprises everyone in the surroundings.

The question of "what Charlie is" has ruined his behaviour. In Daniel's words, he has negative associations: "he is unkind, arrogant, and worst of all. He is a bully. He is an asshole, an inveterate, and incorrigible one" (Yoon 6). The atmosphere of the USA has made him such a character. He does not want to assimilate even if that land allows him to. He wants to live with his ways, "to settle into the skin that was always going to be his own" (Yoon 12). Erikson's theoretical markers inform further that "role confusion" leads to a "negative identity," where one is not bound to obey anyone but instead has an angry or snobbish excuse for everyone, either family, society, or community. So, within role confusion, Charlie has developed a negative identity, and he is not ready to listen to anyone, whether it is his family asking about grades, his eviction from college, or his peers asking about being absent from school. Along with faith, immigration is an act of compromise for Min Soo and Dae Hyun, Charlie and Daniel's parents. They know the cultural significance of the names and that the name carries the history of ancestors. Moreover, names are identity markers. Nevertheless, after a long conversation, she needs clarification about one particular and fixed identity. She learns and comes to terms with how fluid identities will work, so she names her children American and Korean accordingly. As the first generation, Korean parents want their children to know their background history and the present culture and fulfil the postmodern marker of identity being fluid and multiple.

Adding more to the concept of immigration and then the exploitation of immigrants, I add the point of view of the protagonist of this novel, seventeen-year-old Natasha, an efficient girl whose parents immigrated illegally to have an improved life by joining the vocation of acting in the USA. They wanted a better future for their children, so they tried assimilating into American culture and being a part of that land. However, they suffered because of being biracial; as Natasha says, "It was anger, depression, disappointment, and dejection that this land has awarded to immigrants" (Yoon 4). In her formative period, she is also exposed to extreme poverty, one more obstruction to chasing her future. Their Jamaican accent is also impeding the way of obtaining American identity



(Yoon 5). The whole narrative pins down in detail Natasha's struggle for American identity, which she says, she is adding to the efforts done by her parents. Natasha's parents dreamt of a better career, and she struggled for an independent identity. Upon close observation, her insistence on loyalty to one nation, modernity, and being American appears traditional, stagnant, and prejudiced. She does not embrace multiple identities but instead contends for one that she deems superior and universally accepted. Natasha does not fulfil the notion of cultural identity rooted in one's inner self, personal experiences, and observations (Freud 76; Jung 56; Marcia 25). However, in the case of her observation of American culture and Natasha's associating herself with the same culture, Erikson's view of "psychosocial relativity" becomes relevant, where two centres interact, the centre of one's self and that of the communal culture (56).

Racial prejudice is embedded in the roots of the United States (Banaji et al. 82). Khan's study also explores how the USA operates under the mask of racism (91). Often depicted as a melting pot of cultures and peoples, the USA has a complex history marked by racial injustice and discrimination. Despite strides forward, both past and present realities reveal that racism persists within the nation (Addison 34). Even minorities of different ethnicities are not free of this racist prejudice. *The Sun Is Also a Star* shows that Korean Americans are biased against Blacks. There are a series of incidents happening to Daniel's girlfriend, Natasha. He is developing a relationship with Natasha; she asks for coffee without sugar while out for tea. Daniel is habitually judging her personality from her food choices. Coffee, being black and then without sugar, brings to his mind a joke related to race, which he is about to utter, but stops himself. Similarly, while going to his father, Daniel thinks that his father will be distraught, angry, and confused after seeing her (Yoon 91), and his mother will not be happy. She is angry when she sees Natasha's Afro hair, but she also adds that he has his own choices, which are his to make (Yoon 93). Later on, when he goes to the store, it is noticed that Charlie, working there, calls her a "shoplifting customer" (Yoon 102) first, and then he says, we have thousands of customers like this in a day in this shop. He does not miss any chance to demean Natasha. Then Daniel's father brings a relaxer and a black and white tub for her hair. "Do not grow your hair long," he advises (Yoon 104). After experiencing all this, Natasha utters that identity makes you suffer; she calls it a tragedy. It is painful inside, but she is happy apparently. It is racism, and it is shared here. She says it is life, and in the end, "we all will die" (Yoon 106). Her continuous and long-time utterance manifests pain, agony, and dejection.

### **A Sustained Connection with the Distant Land: The Case of Yoon's Character Natasha**

In Yoon's novel, Natasha's inner self/centre is more inclined towards the USA. It can be fairly said that being young, she is desperate for an American identity when she convinces the immigration officer in the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services "building to guide her to find a way to stay in America" (Yoon 5). She does not like constant transformation as it happens in 'Postmodern Identities' as Baudrillard also notes that "identities in postmodern era are radically fluid and empty vessel without ultimate meanings" (112). Like Baudrillard, postmodern anthropologist, James Clifford

also challenges essentialist views of identity, arguing instead for a more unsolidified and fashioned understanding of identity. Clifford emphasizes the fluidity, diversity, and interpersonal nature of identities, shaped by cultural interactions and local contexts (96). Instead of the point of view of the cultural theorist and anthropologist, Natasha wants a sustained connection with this distant land, which is no longer alien to her. However, at home, she says, “I am losing the only place I call home” (Yoon 17). Due to her deportation, she talks about her education in the USA, her native peers, her parents’ savings for better education, community life, and her identity, which is “not to fit in anywhere” (Yoon 18). She further utters that she will be a stranger in the country where she was born – Jamaica. She considers herself unfamiliar with Jamaica, therefore, she does not want to go there. She is dejected and does not talk to anyone. Having grown up in America, she is struggling with her identity, which is her cultural identity also since she has lived and experienced American culture. This whole process is what can be called a frustrating experience in psychosocial modification. Her long struggle for one fixed (American) identity remains futile as she is deported to Jamaica. Baudrillard also opines that the quest for a stagnant identity in contemporary times is an ineffective endeavour since identity is a place of struggle, where an individual negotiates between acceptance and resistance to societal prospects and norms (99).

Natasha has been standing in the queue for the last seven days for the immigration officer’s mercy to grant her citizenship, and ultimately, American identity (Yoon 33). Her struggle is for a permanent self, a permanent American identity, which postmodernism rejects, as this epistemological perspective takes identity as an ongoing process. By struggling to attain Americanness only, Natasha was trying to do what Baudrillard observes as, “never to be oneself, but never to be alienated: to enter from the outside into the form of the other” (112). Baudrillard’s idea that identity is never a given—it is a fabrication, a production, and a practice of the self in a specified social milieu is again relevant in the context of Natasha when she battles for one permanent American self. In the postmodern context, identity in the realm of simulation is a series of signs and codes, continuously dispersed and reproduced (Baudrillard 102). By not following the idea of fluid identities, Natasha puts her culture in fragments while rejecting her Jamaican identity, and this cultural fragmentation, Fredric Jameson takes as the result of technological and economic development (23). As a science student, Natasha prefers advancement and evolution over roots, where she perceives is no development and progress (Ned 243). Thus, it can be said that Natasha is unable to put herself in ever-changing historical conditions as Michael Luntley also observes, if we place the self in actual historical circumstances, we would place it in things that are contingent and ever-changing. As a result, the self would also be evolving all the time. It would not have a consistent identity and would always be changing (184).

For a lengthy questionnaire at the office of Attorney Fitzgerald, Natasha answered that she would be an optimistic, hardworking, and patriotic citizen of the United States. “America is my only home in my heart” (Yoon 83), “and nationality will sanction me what I want” (Yoon 83). I sincerely say that I belong to the USA. For Natasha, who is being uprooted from that particular place she recognizes as home, it is the social and

psychological deprivation that American society is inflicting on this adolescent. She states, “no one cares about the psychological danger” (Yoon 176). Her heightened sensitivity to her surroundings is tarnished by the laws formulated by the power institutions of that country. It is isolation and social deprivation that can also impact her mind, as Erikson has believed that if the youth can face this crisis, he or she can associate the self with others (76). There is a sense of individuation or self-actualization, and one can adjust anywhere easily. Nevertheless, if an adolescent is unsuccessful in coping with the scenario, he/she becomes socially isolated, leading to extremism and emotionally immature (Erikson 78). Similarly, Natasha was socially isolated when she was deported. She felt herself with no identity, socially deprived, isolated, and dejected. Hence, in this whole proliferation of one desire, she gets alienation and dissatisfaction, or what Erikson calls ‘role confusion’.

### **American Dreams, Anti-immigrant Policies, and Identity Issues**

Yoon’s character Natasha, whom her mother calls Tasha, tells Daniel that dreams never come true. She cites her father’s four years of struggle to be an actor in America, which went in vain. Even though “we are born for the same purpose and try for the same to fulfil them, everybody wastes their lives chasing them” (Yoon 87). That is why Natasha tells Daniel that the USA is not a “Melting Pot” (Yoon 67). The term melting pot was considered national, thinking that people from all ethnicities would be turned into Americans (Jacoby 20). Moreover, Natasha explains, “It is better to call it a divided metal plate, which has divided sections for meat, starch and veggies” (Yoon 94). The USA is not ready to give her identity due to multiple factors, including accent, skin colour, and lacking wealth. That is why her parents, especially her mother is frightened that American society will harm their daughter, which exploits their rights, bodies, and blood, but otherwise are fearful of the colour black (Yoon 96). Along with slavery and genocide, racism was a structured institution and a leading threat in the USA by giving the name of domestic terrorism. Social and legal privileges were for white Americans only (Alexander 45).

The above discussion implies that seeing one as thoroughly American, as Natasha does, is an imprudent thought that comes to any biracial living in the USA. Instead, multiple identities should be acknowledged and strengthened. In the postmodern era, nations are diverse as borders have been erased (in fact they are just porous instead of open, and in the case of Blacks, completely shut) and cultures are free to amalgamate. Baudrillard rightly points out that “gone are the referential of production, signification, substance and real contents (120). Since postmodernism rejects the concepts of stable identity and categorization, it celebrates the idea of collapse in historical progress. In the case of the USA, these Blacks or biracial can only be accepted by whites if they are affluent, which is not the case often, and this claim can also be taken as a postmodern condition validated by Baudrillard idea again that “the more prestigious one’s commodities (cars, clothes, houses, and so on), the higher one’s standing in the realm of sign value (196). Like Baudrillard, Clifford also analyses how power dynamics shape identities and experiences. Baudrillard, within cultural theory, examines how power influences the construction of reality and identities in contemporary societies, highlighting their fragmented and conditional nature. Clifford, through anthropology, similarly emphasizes the impact of cultural contexts and

interactions on identity formation, underscoring its fluid and contingent nature in diverse social landscapes (99). Hence, I can say, though immigration on a vast scale makes the USA diverse, to come and survive in a new land and to scuffle for the adjustment of the whole family, to get an identity, and to be a part of that society, especially, when one is not affluent, is to demean oneself, face hard times, and get dejection. So, *The Sun Is Also a Star* manifests the extensiveness and dismalness of these immigrant issues on the host land. The narrative maintains that the immigrants, particularly the adolescents, should be viewed not merely through a political lens, but also as individuals deeply connected to the land, passionate in their relationships, and rooted in familial bonds.

Identity becomes a hurdle in Daniel and Natasha's relationship at first, but they accept each other. Natasha does so because Daniel is American, and he accepts her because he believes her identities are multiple, not stagnant but plural. Then citizenship stands in the way of these two lovers, as Natasha says, "I am an undocumented immigrant, I'm being deported. Today is my last day in the USA. Tomorrow I'll be gone" (Yoon 145). As the novel has been written in the wake of Trump's desensitizing anti-immigrant strategies, many teenagers suffered the dilemma of cultural gaps, domestic issues, college and future careers. Trump's administration implemented rigorous policies to control illegal immigration by tightening border security and introducing a zero-tolerance policy to refugee admissions. To deter the immigration flow, his administration separated thousands of children from their parents which was taken against the humanitarian considerations (Kelly-Widmer 806). So, as an immigrant's daughter, Yoon contributed to bringing immigration reforms. Moreover, cultural boundaries are collapsed in postmodernism, yet borders were closed in Trump and the post-Trump era. The Trump administration had substantially decreased immigration to the United States, discouraging both skilled and unskilled immigrants from coming to the country and prompting those already there to consider leaving (Kaba 320). President Trump became a violent advocate of immigration measures, pursuing the most extreme immigration program of any modern president, with upsetting effects on noncitizens of colour. In this regard, the novel provides a critique of immigration policies that induce anxiety among people in the United States and around the world. This systematic racism can be dismantled by a careful review of the immigration laws to control racial injustice.

Daniel also favours the point of view of his parents about the American Dream when he is in the office of the interviewing officer. He is a teen who relishes multiple identities, but the American atmosphere does not allow him to practice them freely. For example, he navigates between his Korean-American identity, subject to his parents' dream of becoming a doctor, and his personal aspirations as a romantic poet. He elucidates to the officer that his parents are immigrants. They came here for a better career and future for their children. They worked for a long time for his and his brother's advanced studies to get American Dreams. How can one leave college for a better future and become a starved artist? "I will become a doctor" (Yoon 221). Daniel's desire to practice multiple identities experiences societal barriers and people's attitudes that restrict his ability to embrace multiple identities without confronting scrutiny. This tension in Daniel's

character puts forward a challenge within a wider social context for cultural identity and acceptance in the present USA.

Furthermore, Daniel's mother, Min Soo wants to marry her sons to beautiful Korean Americans. She is not willing to accept any other ethnicity. Charlie has also developed his curiosity, so he is behind Korean American girls. However, it does not matter to Daniel whether someone is Korean American or African American. While sitting for coffee, Daniel and Natasha speak about their identities, the burning issue for teens. Here, she regrets her being born in Jamaica when Daniel reveals that he was born in the USA. In the same sitting, she also talks about a time machine to obliterate her past and save her future in the USA (Yoon 57). All the time, she has one thought that she will be deported tomorrow. Otherwise, she mentions that when Attorney Fitzgerald shows her some hope that she will win and stay in the USA, she says, "I do not want to listen to anything relevant to leaving" (Yoon 68). This issue of migration is quite challenging for youngsters when they have developed a strong affiliation with one land and home. That is the reason, she mentions, why she is not ready to take a new start. It was hard enough to move here when they first left Jamaica. She does not want anything new anymore (Yoon 70).

However, Daniel has accepted fluid identities. Whether he tells himself from Korea or the USA does not matter to him. He adds that his parents want to see him as American and the others call him not American enough. So, he says "I struggle with my identity" (Yoon 118). When they are in a hotel room, the waitress mentions that this country takes everything from them. "You have to take up their language, so you bade goodbye to your language. Your children are no more yours, and you do not like your cultural food" (Yoon 120). This all is done to adopt American identity, which, even after doing all this, is not in your hands. What you find in the end is the centuries-old overt rhetoric of deportation. Daniel understands that total assimilation will be harmful, and in the same way, keeping home identity intact is also indigestible for Americans. He knows that immigration has some historical and socio-political issues behind it. So, it is better to locate harmony somewhere in-between (Camarota et al. 234). In this way, he also supports the postmodern view of identity, where it remains destabilized and decentred, and one enjoys its multilayers of empowerment and individual freedom. In contrast, Daniel does not like his brother Charlie who has Korean friends, eats Korean foods, and studies Korean literature at school; in this way, he prefers his cultural identity and does not want to adopt any values from American culture.

Along with his parents' happiness over maintaining his Korean identity, they are saddened and confused when their dreams about Charlie's studies do not come true. They feel bad for Charlie (Yoon 4). Dreams are of central importance in everyone's life, and for immigrants, they become their life and ultimate destiny. Similarly, the writer of this novel dedicates her book to her parents while putting dreams as central to one's whole life, but only then when it is learned how to catch them and fulfil them. Dreams are of paramount significance in this novel as well. For many, the USA was dreamt of as the land of many opportunities and trying luck. It was also called the Promised Land when decimated people across the regions, especially of East America after the 'Great Depression', migrated to

West California, where due to rain, the situation was better. The land was fertile, and farm workers had maximum opportunities. People went to that Promised Land with the dream of finding jobs but were exploited by the people of that region (Shindo 23). While putting in the theoretical context, as explicated by Erikson, it is not 'identity achievement' but 'role confusion' that Charlie has achieved, so he is not committed to fulfilling the social standards of the land.

Furthermore, the American attitude towards biracial people has ruined Charlie. He hates himself. He mocks people. He is uncertain about everything that Erikson calls 'ratio', where he finds an imbalance between cultural values and national duties. He is not comfortable with whatever he is practicing. He does the same to other ethnicities that America is doing to him; like in Natasha's case, he does not spare even a moment to mock her. As he speaks, "Should I call her Afro, Black, or African-American?" (Yoon 180). It is his snobbish and pitiless racist attitude that prompts him to hurt anyone. It is what he has learned from America. He also attacks his brother when his father mentions that "America has taught you to attack your family" (Yoon 175). While Daniel believes that the USA teaches you to plan, think for the future, and get ready to achieve it; he is an optimist in whatever he has planned for himself, his studies, and his future life.

Keeping in view the scenario of the dreams of her father, Natasha does not believe in dreams. She knows what has happened to the dream of her father, who is still struggling to fit into the American acting culture. Sometimes, he works on accents; at other times, he tries to make himself fit for a specific role. That is why she argues with Daniel and says, "Do you think the universe just exists for you and your passion, and for all those who are like you- dreamer type?" (Yoon 148). In her frightening anxiety, she claims that it is not like a dreamer's world. We are put into this universe to evolve, grow, and survive, which is the only fact. Natasha seems entirely shocked by the experiences happening at the moment to her. She is facing an 'identity crisis' at that time, which Erikson enunciates as a series of internal conflicts where one is lost in the fixation on identity. Her ego identity was lost when she was deported. She dreamt of making her future in the USA but remained unsuccessful. She says she does not want to be part of the future that the land of Jamaica will offer her (Yoon 234). This issue of immigration is ugly at the family level as well, when Natasha sees her parents having a hot argument over dreams when her mother reminds him of his promise/dream of living a happy life, and, in response, he talks about his dreams, in which he has become unsuccessful in getting a career.

The novel has shown examples of the democratic USA being hostile to biracial people, especially young adults. They are subject to a racial slur. They are judged on their ethnic backgrounds. Identity for these biracial people is a complicated phenomenon, as noted in this text in the case of Charlie, Natasha, and Daniel's identity. Daniel and Natasha experience a continuous gaze when they are out in the market. Though Daniel remarks that he is ready to face these stares throughout his life, he wants a yes from Natasha's side. On their way out, Daniel is grieved due to Natasha's deportation and takes it as a lifetime disappointment. "I can tell what dejection is" (Yoon 246). She further considers that her whole world has died out, as the USA failed to give her identity during her extended stay of ten years, or, in other words, all her efforts went impractical. Her identity is

asymmetrical or anti-structured in which one becomes doubtful and ambiguous even about one's own identity, or one exists in a state of nowhere (Khan 320). As Natasha has been deported, she has to acclimate to the Jamaican ways of surviving here, the Jamaican accent, and her friends. Later, over time and being distant from the land she considered her home, she learns to love the country where she has taken birth (Yoon 254). In this way, the young girl who made every possible effort to flee her cultural values and traditions came back to accept them.

## Conclusion

This analysis has revealed that, despite its reputation as a Promised Land, the USA does not fully embrace biracial or diasporic individuals. Generally, it is economic, political, or ideological backgrounds that favour a small number of immigrants to be accepted there with autonomous identities; otherwise, the rest of the biracial and diasporic people could only be regarded as the "other," living in-between, disordered, and confused in the USA. Examining the Trump era, I have identified heightened anti-Black racism and discrimination, which have profoundly affected biracial identity formation. As the threat of deportation became common during Trump's era, it has been deduced that amid Natasha and Daniel's existential debate about the universe and their story of love comes the actual issue of deportation due to the debasing and biased policies of the government, who thinks that for people of colour, there is no place in the USA. Yoon's narrative impartially imparts a lesson to teenage readers, that the psychosocial challenges of identity crisis and the harsh realities of deportation have far-reaching impacts. These include disruptions in education, friendships, and relationships, leading to a future fraught with intense anxiety in an uncertain world. It has been found that after a series of steps of battling for her identity, Natasha is not accepted in the atmosphere of the USA, where she lives with multiple identities, and later on, she is deported to the territory from where she came. In so doing, Yoon depicts the predicament of present-day humanity ensnared in high and low, Black and white, racism and ethnicity instead of life, humanity, and individuality. Furthermore, through this analysis, I have validated my contention put forward at the beginning of this article that Yoon has significantly contributed to the young adult genre by foregrounding the experiences and voices of first- and second-generation immigrants grappling with identity. Future research should continue to explore these themes, particularly through the lens of intersectionality, to better understand the complex interplay of race, ethnicity, and identity in contemporary society.

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