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## SPIRITUAL HIBRIDITY OF NATIVE AMERICAN IN LOUIS EDRICH'S *THE ROUND HOUSE*: POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

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### ABSTRACT

Louis Edrich is a contemporary Native American writer who writes *The Round House*. The novel portrays the complexities of individual and cultural identity, focuses on the exigencies of marginalization and cultural survival, which happened to Native Americans, as well as concerns about spirituality and the hybrid form of religion, known as spiritual hybridity. Spiritual hybridity appears to be common practices for Native Americans after the arrival of European and the massive spreading of Christianity. This study is conducted to probe the representation of the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans. The novel is examined using Bhabha's theory on Hybridity. The dialogue and narration in the form of words, phrases, and sentences in the novel are treated as a data source representing the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans. The analysis results in the representation of the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans, which can be considered as their defense against Christian hegemony. Besides, the representation of spiritual hybridity, as a form of third space, occurs due to a mixture of religious beliefs committed by Native Americans after experiencing religious oppression or discrimination. Spiritual hybridity can be concluded as a new pattern of the struggle and resistance of Native Americans to fight for their tradition. Nowadays, spiritual hybridity for Native American remains a form of resistance towards Christian hegemony.

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### INTRODUCTION

The spreading of religion is filled with a lot of suspicion and criticism because it always disputes cultural understanding that has been

established for a long time ago. Religion is used as a medium to control others. As stated by Althusser (2014) that religion can be the ideological apparatus to dominate other people (p. 136). Such experiences happened to Native

Americans after contact with Europeans. However, long before the European arrival and settlement period— despite not structurally — Native Americans have had a well-established culture, such as literature, history, and religious belief. Those elements are parts of the landscape of Native Americans. According to Vernon (1999), since their arrival, Europeans have been prohibiting Native Americans to maintain their traditional ways of worship (p. 75). Her statement is in line with Axtell, who said that Europeans challenged the authority of religious leaders and banned Native Worship, penalizing and jailing those who continued to practice their traditional ways of life (Axtell, 1986, p. 227).

The relation between both Christianity and Colonization among historians, anthropologists, and culture researchers is still debatable. However, some perspectives on this debated relation explain that Christianity is viewed as the religious arm of colonialism. Both of them have almost the same mission that goes hand in hand. According to Gray (1982), Christianity and colonialism is one package; missionaries convert the colonized and colonizers civilize the colonized (p. 71). Loomba (2005) also states that Christianity can be used as an ideological instrument to build a myth, perspective, or doctrine that makes colonized people submit to the colonial power (p. 32-33). Christianity is the only justification used to exploit Native American tradition. However, the focus of Christianity is to spread the teaching of Jesus Christ. The colonial power was thus planted inevitably followed by Christian missions.

On the other hand, colonization has produced the emergence of heterodox communities, instead of spiritual uniformity, due to their obscure identity or spiritual

hybridity. Cox (in Sommers and Harushimana, 2016) states that spiritual hybridity is a common practice in many colonized societies (p. 56). This statement is in line with Tore (2009), who writes that spiritual hybridity is a cultural mixture of spiritual and religious belief systems and practices (p. 536). It comes as a result of the European invasions and colonization of the American continent. It then makes their faith and religious practices to mix. Thus, spiritual hybridity can be said as a form of resistance or as maintaining Native American cultural heritage towards colonization.

On the other hand, the term “*spirituality*” has an important role for Native Americans, as an outlet to express their religious visions in reaching a higher dimension. Martin explains that spirituality stood at the center of Native American societies before European colonization and has continued. Their spirituality can affect their daily lives, including how they cook, tell stories, organize their village, and marry. It means what Native American has done can carry extraordinary significance to their religious meaning. However, the importance of spirituality can change due to the hybridization of their spirituality with the Christian faith.

Moreover, *The Round House* by Louis Edrich is chosen as a material object. The novel carries an issue of spiritual hybridity that has not raised attention because many scholars tend to focus on exploring the discriminations experienced by Native Americans. Furthermore, the colonization discourse towards Native Americans is still widely discussed. However, the recent study focuses on the spiritual hybridity experienced by the characters in the novel. With its richness of the portrayal of the characters that cannot be

found in other novels telling the similar topic, the material object is expected to give more understanding about the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans. Henceforth, this study aims to reveal the spiritual hybridity of Native America and the factor that drives or influences them.

This research is conducted under American Studies, precisely the Post-Nationalist point of view. This new approach towards American exceptionalism is to criticize the cultural imperialism and its exclusion of many different cultures that have been marginalized by traditional American studies (Rowe, 2000, p. 23). Post-Nationalist focuses on two aspects; revising cultural nationalism and criticizing American exceptionalism. It means Post-Nationalist tries to consider other nations that are not only America, but they are historically crucial to the American social, political, and economic development. At its best, Post-Nationalist tries to cover many different social systems and cultural affiliations of the United States, rather than treating such cultural differences as discrete entities. Post-Nationalist discusses the interaction and intersection of different cultures and the core of this study is the importance of marginalized groups. Moreover, Postcolonial studies, as one of the parts of Post-Nationalist, also focus on the marginalized and minority groups, while also analyzing the cultural hybridity that occurred historically among many cultures constituting or shaping America's identities. Hence, postcolonial studies in the Post-Nationalist American Studies paradigm is in line with the theme of this study.

The foreground of postcolonial studies, according to Stayers, refers to the opposition or resistance of colonized societies. The form

of resistance can be done by various things, one of which is by using religion. Religion becomes a media that bridges the colonized groups against the domination of the colonizers because it provides a platform for expressing spirituality (Stayers, 2009, p. 851-852). Indeed, spirituality can be used to reject a hegemonic of a particular religion because it requires a belief that significantly provides power in its internalized forms. The resistance of the hegemonic religion is expressed by performing spiritual hybridity.

Further, the study needs another theory to analyze the spiritual hybridity performed by Native Americans. In general, the term 'hybridity' means a new transcultural form within the contact zone as a result of colonization (Aschorf, 2007, p. 108). Hybridity has been extended to refer to the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities. By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic, and political impacts on both the colonized and the colonizer, it has been regarded as the replication of assimilationist policies by masking or 'whitewashing' cultural differences. In a simpler assertion, the emergence of hybridity within the cultural sphere can eliminate the authenticity of that culture. It also can change and remove all hierarchical strata. It happened due to all have blended without authenticity. Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority. It does not merely indicate the impossibility of defining its identity, but to represent the unpredictability of its presence (Bhabha, 2012 p. 163). The existence of hybridity creates what Bhabha Callas 'third space' which is the function is to displace the histories that constitute it, and sets up a new structure of authority, new political initiatives (Bhabha, 1991 p. 211). The emergence of 'third space' is

a consequence of the culture clash where there is a negotiation. The negotiations include cultural interest that wants to be articulated and fought for by each party involved in the 'third space.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Sense of Multiple Religious Belonging**

The story tells that Joe's family consists of a wife named Geraldine Coutts and his Father is Bazil, who works as a Tribal judge. Joe is a thirteen years old Chippewa boy who lives with his family on a reservation in Minnesota. He and his family are characters that have blood Native Americans but converted as Christian. They prefer to choose to be Native Christian rather than Native American religions. However, it does not necessarily make the life of Joe peaceful. He and his family face a difficult situation after his mom Geraldine Coutts was raped by someone in the sacred place that calls "The Roundhouse". For Joe, he has a sense of multiple religious belonging, which implicitly influences his spirituality.

I have blood Indian who was baptized and undergone confirmation (Edrich, 2012 p.13)

My family doesn't hedge about things. Though Catholic, my aunt was not one to let the butter melt in her mouth. When she spoke, answering me, her voice was quick and cool. (Edrich, 2012, p.8)

As Catholic depicted in the novel, Joe's portrayals can be assumed that the spreading of Christianity in the reservation is widely recognizable by Native Americans. There is no such conflict that can lead to cleavage among Native Americans in the reservation. Although Joe is seen as a Christian who is devout in his religion, he cannot escape from the influence of indigenous Native American traditions. It can be seen in "Every time I got a pitying or

curious look from another kid or a teacher that day, I touched the stone Cappy gave me" (Edrich, 2012, p. 10). His fervent baptize and worship are not fruitful, for his need is incompatible with Christianity. The multiple religious belonging of Joe arises when he cannot handle the problem that is faced by him and in Christianity cannot provide safety what Joe wants. Despite all his striving to devoutness and whatever Joe tries to worship fervently. He still operates within the reference system to Native religious beliefs because Christianity is not the only way to solve his problem. The stone that Cappy gives is taken from a tree struck by lightning, grown in a sacred place for the Chippewa tribe.

Moreover, the sense of multiple religions was felt by Joe as colonization, which was experienced by Native Americans. Besides, the purpose of the multiple religion, Joe could obscure the importance of religious identity. According to Cornile (2002, p. 3), the simultaneous belonging to various religions implies discrimination and self-sufficiency, precisely what needs to be left behind. It is because Native religion and Christianity are ideologically regarded as a distinct tradition that cannot be combined into one faith. Moreover, Christianity is a monotheistic religion that claims absolute and exclusive truth in all domains of existence.

On the other hand, the sense of multiple religions that Joe has done can be seen as a resistance strategy of his Christian identity. In line with Roberts (2010), it states that necessity breeds creativity as disempowerment experiences lead to new uses of religious and spiritual resources. The masking of one tradition in the guise of another can be a resistance strategy (Roberts, 2010, p. 44). The sense of double religion was experienced by

Joe, a Native American who placed his identity more inclined to Native American tradition.

Moreover, multiple religious belonging is experienced by Native Americans as a colonized subject and Christian as the colonizer also implicitly experiences it. It is due to the effects of colonization between Native Americans and Christianity. Joe is not the only one who more relays on Native American tradition and Linda, a white Christian woman raised by Betty Wishkob in Chippewa Family. She is involved in Native American tradition, which is known as “sweat lodge”.

My real family came to my rescue, got me on my feet again, she went on. And Geraldine too, of course. Also, Doe Lafournais put me through their sweat lodge. That ceremony was so powerful. Her voice was wistful. And so hot! Randal gave me a feast. His aunts dressed me in a new ribbon dress they made. I started healing and felt even better. (Edrich, 2012, p. 81)

Multiple religious belonging was experienced by Native American as colonized and Christian, one of is Linda. The mixing practice and faith between colonizer and colonized influence each other. In line with Werbner's (2001) statement, in colonial encounters, the colonized people are not the only ones subjected to colonizer ways. Nevertheless, they are also transformed into colonized people (p. 136). Examined from this point of view, the effect of colonization ruined the values of colonial authority. The authority that was previously the full right of the colonizer has turned into a boomerang for them.

Moreover, the colonizer's authority indicates that Native American knowledge, which most colonialists are called backward or

seen to challenge scientific truth and its benefits, is questioned or considered a myth. The paradigm has been refuted. In this respect, it does not mean to abate science, which is promoted as objective, quantifiable, and the foundation of “real” knowledge creation. However, a science which is exalted by colonizer sometimes does not work properly.

### **Spiritual Hybridity of Native American**

The elements of religious belief depicted in the novel can become the basis of liberating postcolonial space. Brooks (2003) explains that Native Americans continue to struggle for self-determination through Christianity, either in assimilation or hybridity. It is in this way as an act of self-determination and an expression of sovereignty (p. 55-56). It is in line with Gonzales (2002) who argues that native spiritual hybridity may be viewed not as a casual or mechanical blending but as a tactic of native resistance (p. 122). By doing Spiritual hybridity, Native American protects their continuance of indigenous faith practices. They are not entirely under the control of Christianity, represented as European hegemony in the Native American community.

Joe and his friends, Randal and Cappy, carry out the ritual of Native Americans, which is called “sweat lodge”. This ritual is intended for prayer and healing. It looks easy for them to perform it. Joe showed continuous effort to maintain his religion, although this ceremony is not part of his religion as Christian.

On ceremony nights they'd leave a feast put up neatly in two big plastic coolers alongside the garage. Farther back, nearly in the woods, the sweat-lodge dome of bent and lashed-together saplings, covered by army-surplus tarps, humidly waited, gathering mosquitoes. Cappy had already

made the fire. The rocks, the grandfathers, were superheating in the middle. Our job was to keep that fire going, hand in the sacred pipes and the medicines, bring the rocks to the door on long-handled shovels, close and open the flaps. We'd also throw tobacco into our fire when someone in the lodge yelled for it, to mark some special prayer or request. On crisp nights it was a good job— we'd sit talking around that fire, staying warm. Sometimes we'd secretly roast a hot dog or marshmallow on a stick even though the fire was sacred and one time Randall had caught us. He'd claimed we'd taken the sacredness out of the fire with our hot dogs (Edrich, 2012, p. 22)

The faith of Joe towards Christianity is uncertain because his attitude is more inclined to Native American religion. Despite the dominance of Christianity in the Native American community, it cannot guarantee its followers always to obey the rules that have been given. This improbability also shows that there is no superior culture unexceptionally for Christianity too. It is only the sense of belonging of one identity to other cultures. Besides, the spiritual hybridity that was performed by Joe is to change and remove all hierarchical strata. Hybridity intervenes in exercising authority, not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity, but to represent the unpredictability of its presence (Bhabha, 2012, p. 163). It happens because all have blended into the new one, Bhabha named the third space.

Moreover, Spiritual hybridity is a form of the third space which arises because of a mixture of religious beliefs committed by Native Americans after experiencing religious oppression or discrimination. In that space, it gives meaning and cultural identity that always contains traces of other meanings and identities and has colonial or postcolonial

provenance (Aschorft, 2007, p. 54). Spiritual hybridity refers to the meanings and identities of Native Americans, in which all cultural statements and systems are reconstructed within.

“What about the church?” said Edward. “Would it help if Clemence took her to church?” You know what I think about it. “I don't think Geraldine would find comfort there, after all these years”.

We all knew that my mother had stopped going to Church after she returned from boarding school. She never said why. (Edrich, 2012, p. 47)

It is in line with the explanation of the third space, which mentions that the emergence of the third space can reconstruct the system and the cultural statement. For Christianity, the Church helps human beings perform their great life-task, which must realize some individual, personal ideal (Fairchild, 1896, p. 221). He also adds that Church is one of the holy places used for ritual practices and mediates the relationship between individuals and God, and offers peacefulness for Christians (Fairchild, 1896, p. 222). However, Joe's mother Geraldine, a Native American who has been baptized as a Christian, did not find comfort there. This realization is contrary to what Christians believe generally. The cultural statement about the Church has been shifted and reconstructed. The change occurred due to hybridization so that it was possible to bring up a new meaning to how Church functions. Besides, this can also shift the paradigm of Christianity that the Church is not the only holy place that can provide human spirituality. It was proven by what happened to Joe's mother, Geraldine.

On the one hand, the sacred place of Native Americans, called *The Round House* gives the peace needed by human beings. The feeling which everybody can feel it although

they are not holding the tradition of Native Americans as their faith. "But when I reached the roundhouse, the sun fell like a warm hand on my shoulders. The place seemed peaceful. There was no door." (Edrich, 2012, p. 36). What was going on Joe's feeling about who is a Christian can be related to the term of third space since the cultural statement of the Church is shifted. It is in line with Bhabha who explains that the intervention of the third space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference are not fixed, destroys the mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as integrated and stable (Bhabha, 2012, p. 54). The sacred place of Native Americans, which was initially mocked by Christians at the beginning of his arrival in the Native American society, is not useful. Instead, it becomes a place that gives comfort to them.

Furthermore, the process of hybridity in Native Americans is paradigmatic of all Native American resistance to dominating discourse in which that is part of the natural form of colonial discourse. Following Bhabha who states:

Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative as well as a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal so that other denied knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority - its rules of recognition (Bhabha, 2012, p. 162)

It shows that Native Americans free themselves from Christian hegemony by involving themselves through hybridization of Christian culture. Instead, the more dominant authority is split and bringing up new space for

Native Americans to reverse the effect of the hegemony.

Therefore, religions are sometimes used to differ and divide individuals and groups based on their backgrounds and religious heritage (Kim-Prieto, 2016, p. 260). This assumption gives rise to the concept of a binary system among the people, which causes a recognition that leads to superiority and inferiority about each of their religions' identity, and it happened to Native American religion and Christianity. Christianity looks more convinced rather than Native American religion because of the historical background and historical record of Christianity. As Bhabha puts that colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce (Bhabha, 2012, p. 122). In the name of history, Christianity would be able to achieve a hegemonic hold over Native Americans. It then caused hybridization among both of them in which Native American adopts Christianity. Native Americans develop new venues in order not to overcome the tribal authority with Christianity and new ways to articulate the spiritual values of their traditions. They can trace the values of their ceremonial.

The Roundhouse had been used for ceremonies. People pretended it was a social dance hall or brought their Bibles for gatherings. In those days the headlights of the priest's car coming down the long road glared in the southern window. By the time the priest or the BIA superintendent arrived, the water drums and eagle feathers and the medicine bags and birchbark scrolls and sacred pipes were in a couple of motorboats halfway across the lake. The Bible was out and people were reading aloud from Ecclesiastes. Why that part of the Bible? I'd once asked Mooshum. Chapter 1, verse 4, he said. One generation passeth away,



and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever. We think that way too. Sometimes we square-danced, said Mooshum... (Edrich, 2012, p. 36)

The situation portrayed above is Native Americans prohibited from worshipping or performing a ceremonial for their ancestral in pre-1978. They are forcibly removed from their aboriginal homeland, and their ceremonies are not permitted, and the people were forced to adopt various subterfuges so that ceremonial life could continue (Deliora, 1991, p. 1). In the same way, he added that the adoption was mentioned, such as elaborating Native American old belief with Christianity ultimately can be taken as a hybridizing of their spiritual. It provides the terrain for elaborating selfhood strategies – singular or communal – that initiate Native American spiritual identity signs. Those all have been done by Joe's grandfather, Moshum, to maintain Native American tradition. Spiritual hybridity is a process to estrange Christian identity any immediate access to the spirit of Native Americans.

Besides, Moshum told to Joes as a form of camouflage that results from the mimicry process in Native American society. They read the Bible loudly where the snippets of the verse have similarities with Native American beliefs. The verse reads, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4). The message of snippets of the verse, according to Pingleton, is life should be enjoyed whether it is good or not, and the only one which cannot be controlled and compared by people is the power of nature (Pingleton, 2017, p. 60). It is similar to most Native Americans' belief that nature is the most powerful and part of Native American spirituality.

The Postcolonial studies further discuss spiritual hybridity influences caused by cultural hybridity and mimicry. One of the most apparent mimicries done by Native Americans is embracing Christianity. This kind of process cannot be achieved if there is no cultural hybridity that happened before. Furthermore, the process of mimicry will never bring equality because it is only an imitation that cannot entirely the same as what was imitated. Bhabha states that colonial mimicry desires a reformed, recognizable Other, a subject of almost identical difference, but not quite (Bhabha, 2012, p. 122). Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.

Moreover, the process of mimicry gives space for Native Americans to create a camouflage, which is the function is not only to harmonize beliefs among Native Americans with Christianity but also against dogmas that Christians spread to Native Americans. Following Bhabha, he explains that camouflage is the effect of mimicry, whereas it is harmonizing with the background and against it (Bhabha, 2012, p. 172). Besides, Native Americans, as the mimic man, claimed a certain identification with Christianity, which would not be a fixed and standalone identity because mimicry only exists by relating Native Americans to the original—Christianity. The mimic man only acted out a performance of repeating, duplicating, or mocking. So, the results of imitation never become a new identity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Spiritual hybridity is represented as a new phenomenon for Native Americans after the arrival of Europeans. The representation of the



spiritual hybridity of Native Americans shows that the probability of a mixed-faith between Christianity and Native American religion. Moreover, the spiritual hybridity representation of Native Americans not only maintains their culture but also goes against the dogma and the hegemony of Christianity. Their disempowering experiences influence them to practice spiritual hybridity as they have long lived under the colonizing Christian tradition. Besides, spiritual hybridity, as a form of third space occurs due to a mixture of religious beliefs, is committed by Native Americans after experiencing religious oppression or discrimination. The experiences of disempowerment lead Native Americans to create new uses of religion and spirituality. The masking of one tradition in the guise of another can be a resistance strategy. In short, spiritual hybridity can be concluded as a new pattern of the struggle and resistance of Native Americans to fight for their tradition.

Furthermore, the spiritual hybridity of Native Americans as a form of their self-defense protects their continuance of indigenous faith practices, which have been passed down by their ancestors. They are not entirely under the control of Christianity, which is represented as European hegemony, because they can change and remove all hierarchical strata and social stigma that has been experienced by Native Americans. It happened due to all have blended into the new existing one spiritual hybridity.

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