

POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON MALAY BATU BARA ORAL NARRATIVES: INSIGHTS FROM ENGLISH LITERARY THEORY

Doni Efrizah

Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi (UNPAB), Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: defriz19@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates how Malay Batu Bara oral narratives express cultural identity, morality, and resistance through the analytical lens of English postcolonial theory. Addressing the lack of research applying postcolonial literary frameworks to Indonesian oral traditions, the study aims to reinterpret local oral texts using key concepts from Bhabha (hybridity, mimicry) and Spivak (subaltern voice) to understand how these narratives negotiate cultural power. A qualitative comparative design was employed, drawing on twelve Batu Bara oral texts including *pantun*, *gurindam*, *ritual* verses, and folktale fragments supplemented by interviews with five cultural informants. These were compared with selected English literary works exhibiting parallel moral themes. Data were analyzed using thematic coding and cultural semiotics to identify symbolic patterns and interpret how postcolonial concepts function within the local narratives. Findings indicate four specific moral and cultural patterns recurring across the oral texts: ecological harmony, respect for social hierarchy, communal ethics, and moral sincerity. These values are articulated through metaphor, performance, and collective expression, revealing how Batu Bara narratives function as moral counter-discourses that embody subaltern agency and cultural resilience. The cross-analysis demonstrates a form of “moral hybridity,” where local ethical worldviews intersect with and reinterpret English postcolonial concepts. The study contributes theoretically by positioning Malay oral literature as an active epistemological space within postcolonial discourse and practically by offering a model for integrating indigenous oral traditions into comparative literary pedagogy.

Keywords: *comparative literature; cultural morality; hybridity; Malay Batu Bara oral literature; moral hybridity; postcolonial theory; subaltern voice.*

1. Introduction

English literary studies have long been concerned with how literature represents power, culture, and identity. Within this tradition, postcolonial theory has emerged as a vital framework for interpreting the cultural consequences of colonialism and its ongoing influence on identity formation. As Purwarno and Efrizah (2025) note, the evolution of English literary thought from Shakespearean humanism to postmodern pluralism provides

an essential intellectual background for understanding how postcolonial perspectives extend and challenge canonical interpretations of culture and identity. Pioneered by figures such as Edward Said (2020), Homi K. Bhabha (2019), and Gayatri Spivak (2021), postcolonial perspectives from English literature reveal how colonized societies negotiate domination, hybridity, and resistance through narrative expression. However, while postcolonial theory has been widely applied to English and colonial texts, its potential for interpreting local oral traditions remains underexplored. This gap provides the starting point for the present study.

The Malay Batu Bara community in North Sumatra, Indonesia, preserves a rich corpus of oral narratives, including folktales, *hikayat* (classical narrative chronicles), and *pantun* (quatrain-based oral poetry), that encapsulate values such as *budi* (moral character), *maruah* (honor/dignity), and *gotong royong* (communal cooperation). These oral traditions serve as cultural texts that transmit ethical principles, collective memory, and identity. Yet, despite their richness, such traditions have rarely been analyzed through literary-theoretical approaches, particularly within postcolonial frameworks derived from English studies. Consequently, there remains a gap in how these indigenous narratives are understood within the global framework of literary and postcolonial discourse.

Previous studies have offered valuable yet limited insights into Malay oral literature. Yusuf (2019) investigated moral education in Malay folktales, while Hasanah and Rahman (2021) examined oral storytelling as a medium for preserving local wisdom. Mahyuddin (2022) explored symbolic meanings within the *tepung tawar ritual* (a Malay blessing ceremony), and Rahim (2023) analyzed the narrative motifs in Sumatran oral traditions. Although these studies contribute to cultural understanding, they have not addressed how such oral narratives negotiate identity and resistance through the lens of postcolonial literary theory. This absence defines the research gap that the present study seeks to fill.

This study aims to analyze how identity, morality, and resistance are represented in Malay Batu Bara oral narratives through the application of English postcolonial perspectives. By engaging with the concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and resistance (Bhabha, 2019) and the notion of the subaltern voice (Spivak, 2021), the study explores how these oral narratives negotiate between indigenous identity and external cultural influences. The analysis focuses on narrative structures, character representations, and symbolic expressions that reflect the community's negotiation of cultural power and continuity.

The novelty of this research lies in its cross-cultural application of English postcolonial theory to indigenous oral literature. Whereas most postcolonial analyses center on written English texts or colonial-era narratives, this study extends the framework to an oral cultural tradition, thereby bridging literary theory and local cultural practice. It highlights the universality of postcolonial ideas while validating local narratives as legitimate literary texts worthy of critical interpretation. Accordingly, this study specifically asks: how do English postcolonial literary concepts particularly hybridity, mimicry, and the subaltern voice reinterpret the representations of cultural identity and resistance in Malay Batu Bara oral narratives?

This research is significant both theoretically and culturally. Theoretically, it demonstrates the adaptability of English literary criticism in examining oral traditions beyond the Western canon. Culturally, it contributes to preserving and recontextualizing the Malay Batu Bara heritage by positioning it within a global conversation on postcolonial identity. The following sections present the theoretical framework, data and method, comparative analysis, and interpretive discussion, leading to the study's implications and conclusion. Ultimately, the study underscores the idea that English literary theory can serve

not only to interpret Western texts but also to amplify non-Western voices that resist cultural marginalization.

2. Literature Review

Postcolonial literary theory, rooted in the English literary tradition, offers a powerful framework for analyzing the intersections of culture, identity, and resistance in formerly colonized societies. Initially grounded in the works of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, it critiques how imperial discourse constructs the colonized subject. In recent developments, postcolonial studies have expanded beyond English texts to encompass oral, indigenous, and performative traditions (Postcolonial Studies, 2023; Umar, 2024). This shift reflects an ongoing decolonial turn in literary scholarship, emphasizing the necessity of interpreting non-Western cultural texts through theoretical lenses that challenge Eurocentric hierarchies of knowledge (Masood & Aqeel, 2025).

Bhabha's (2019) concepts of hybridity and the "third space" are particularly relevant in this context. Bhabha argues that cultural identity is not fixed but continually negotiated within spaces of contact between the colonizer and the colonized. Hybridity produces new, syncretic identities that both resist and reinterpret dominant cultural narratives. Recent scholarship reaffirms hybridity as a dynamic site of creativity and resistance, especially within postcolonial societies that experience cultural overlap and adaptation (Umar, 2024). In the context of Malay Batu Bara oral narratives, hybridity manifests through the blending of Islamic, Malay, and local animistic traditions, revealing how oral storytelling becomes a medium for negotiating cultural continuity amid change.

Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern further deepens this analysis by questioning who is permitted to speak and whose voices are marginalized within dominant narratives. Spivak (2021) and later scholars such as Dhari (2024) highlight the ethical challenges of representing subaltern subjects in both academic and literary discourses. In Malay Batu Bara oral traditions, subaltern perspectives often emerge through the voices of commoners, women, or mythical figures who articulate moral critique against authority or social inequality. Such instances demonstrate how local voices function as counter-discourses to social hierarchy, extending Spivak's theoretical concern into lived cultural practice.

Equally significant is the narrative and performative dimension of oral traditions. Scholars in oral literature studies emphasize that oral storytelling functions as both an artistic and sociocultural act, carrying collective memory and moral values (Oral Tradition, 2023; Cochrane, 2023). In Malay Batu Bara culture, oral narratives such as folktales, *pantun*, and *ritual* stories do more than entertain, they preserve philosophical notions of *budi* (moral character), *maruah* (honor/dignity), and communal ethics. While these studies affirm the social role of oral texts, they often stop short of theorizing their literary significance within global frameworks, a gap that this study aims to address. Furthermore, as Efrizah (2023) notes, linguistic elements such as accent and tone play a crucial role in shaping communicative identity among Batu Bara Malays, reinforcing how oral performance embodies cultural values. Complementing this, Efrizah et al. (2025) demonstrate that address systems and politeness strategies in Batu Bara Malay interactions mirror the community's social hierarchy and moral ethics, both of which also inform the narrative and performative dimensions of their oral literature.

The integration of postcolonial theory with oral literature analysis has gained increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Masood and Aqeel (2025) demonstrate that indigenous storytelling traditions across Asia and Africa often encode resistance to cultural

domination through symbolic and narrative strategies. Similarly, local studies in Indonesia such as Hasanah and Rahman (2021), Mahyuddin (2022), Rahim (2023), and Efrizah et al. (2025) show that Malay oral traditions are crucial for maintaining cultural continuity and expressing identity, yet these studies rarely employ theoretical perspectives from English literature. These works provide valuable cultural insights but remain descriptive; none explicitly bridges English literary theory with local oral practices. This study fills that gap by employing postcolonial analytical tools to reinterpret Malay oral ethics and identity.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives establish the foundation for the present study. Postcolonial theory provides the critical framework for examining how cultural identity and resistance are articulated; hybridity explains the fluid and transformative nature of cultural expression; subaltern theory foregrounds marginalized voices within narrative structures; and oral literature theory situates storytelling as both a cultural and literary act. By synthesizing these frameworks, this study positions Malay Batu Bara oral narratives as postcolonial texts that reveal complex negotiations of identity, power, and heritage. Accordingly, these theories collectively guide the study's analytical lens, shaping how Batu Bara oral texts are read, interpreted, and contextualized within English postcolonial discourse.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative comparative literary approach within the scope of cultural literary studies, a branch of comparative humanities that interprets literature as a cultural system of meaning. The aim was to explore how Malay Batu Bara cultural values are represented, interpreted, and recontextualized through English literary perspectives, particularly by examining the intersection between local oral traditions and global literary interpretations. A comparative qualitative design was chosen because it enables systematic analysis of similarities and differences across two distinct cultural-literary systems while preserving the contextual integrity of each tradition.

3.1 Research Design

The research adopted a comparative qualitative design within postcolonial literary hermeneutics, integrating cultural hermeneutics and literary semiotics as analytical frameworks. This approach was selected because the study seeks to interpret moral and identity constructions across two narrative traditions oral and written which requires cross-cultural comparison rather than isolated textual analysis. It allows for interpretative exploration of meaning within texts, as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), where the researcher serves as the primary instrument in analyzing cultural and textual representations.

The comparative aspect was used to examine the similarities and contrasts between the cultural values embedded in Batu Bara Malay oral literature and their resonances or reinterpretations in selected English literary texts that reflect parallel moral or philosophical ideas. Within this framework, the postcolonial hermeneutic approach enabled the researcher to interpret the texts through critical awareness of cultural hybridity, subaltern voices, and decolonial resistance, as articulated by Bhabha (2019) and Spivak (2021).

In this process, the researcher maintained reflexivity, acknowledging her position as both an interpreter and cultural outsider familiar with English literary theory. Reflexive notes were used to monitor interpretive bias and ensure cultural respect in analyzing Batu Bara oral expressions.

3.2 Data Sources

The data consisted of two main types:

1. Primary Data – Selected *Batu Bara Malay oral narratives*, traditional poetry, and cultural expressions (such as *pantun*, *gurindam* (moral couplets), and symbolic rituals). These were collected through documented transcriptions, local literature archives, and ethnographic notes. Approximately twelve oral texts were purposively chosen based on thematic relevance (identity, morality, resistance), linguistic authenticity, and accessibility through Batu Bara cultural archives and community storytellers.
2. Comparative Texts – Selected English literary works (novels, poems, or essays) that contain parallel cultural or moral themes, such as respect for nature, social harmony, and communal ethics. Works by authors such as Rudyard Kipling, William Wordsworth, and postcolonial writers like Chinua Achebe and Salman Rushdie were analyzed for comparative cultural insight. These authors were chosen because their texts articulate moral or postcolonial concerns colonial contact (Kipling), moral harmony with nature (Wordsworth), postcolonial resistance (Achebe), and cultural hybridity (Rushdie) which align with the thematic concerns of Batu Bara oral traditions.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered through library research, document analysis, and interviews with cultural informants and local Malay scholars. The library research covered journals, literary anthologies, and ethnographic documentation. Five local informants (aged 45–70), recognized as storytellers or cultural custodians, were interviewed using purposive sampling to ensure depth of cultural interpretation. The interviews provided cultural interpretations and contextual understanding of Batu Bara Malay values, particularly symbolic elements and moral teachings embedded in oral expressions.

Documented transcriptions were obtained from regional cultural centers and family-held manuscripts, while ethnographic notes were produced during local cultural performances and community gatherings. Ethical approval was sought informally from community elders through consent statements prior to recording or transcription.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis applied qualitative textual analysis and cultural semiotic interpretation. Following the model of Barthes (1977) and Hall (1997), the analysis focused on the symbolic and representational meanings within both sets of texts. The process followed several steps: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading; (2) thematic coding to identify recurring moral and identity motifs; (3) cross-textual comparison of symbolic structures between English and Malay texts; and (4) interpretation through postcolonial and semiotic frameworks.

Thematic coding was employed to identify recurring cultural motifs, moral lessons, and aesthetic expressions. Key themes included communal morality, resistance, identity negotiation, and hybridity. These were then interpreted through the lens of comparative cultural literary criticism, highlighting how English literary perspectives can illuminate or contrast with Batu Bara Malay worldviews.

Throughout the analysis, the researcher maintained a reflexive stance, acknowledging that interpretive insights were shaped by an academic background in English literary theory and intercultural studies. This reflexivity ensured awareness of positionality and interpretive bias in analyzing cross-cultural texts.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Validity

To ensure the credibility of interpretation, this study employed triangulation by combining textual, cultural, and theoretical validation. Textual triangulation involved cross-verifying oral and written texts; cultural triangulation included consulting multiple informants; and theoretical triangulation entailed comparing interpretations across postcolonial, semiotic, and hermeneutic lenses. Member checking was conducted with local cultural experts to confirm interpretations of the Malay texts. Feedback from these experts was incorporated into revised thematic coding to improve cultural accuracy.

Theoretical triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing findings with existing frameworks in cultural literary studies and postcolonial criticism. The interpretations were also validated through intertextual analysis across English and Malay sources to maintain academic rigor and objectivity.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All cultural data, including oral narratives and rituals, were cited respectfully, ensuring that cultural heritage and local intellectual property were acknowledged. The research followed ethical standards of cultural sensitivity and informed consent, especially when dealing with living traditions and community informants. Institutional ethical clearance was not required because no vulnerable participants were involved; however, written and verbal consent was obtained before documentation, consistent with research ethics in qualitative cultural studies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Findings

The comparative interpretation between Batu Bara Malay oral literature and selected English literary texts revealed four overarching moral and cultural values recurring across traditions: harmony with nature, respect for hierarchy, moral sincerity, and communal ethics. These values, though universal, are shaped differently within each literary system: collectivist, performative, and symbolic in Malay oral tradition; individualist, introspective, and textual in English literature.

In Batu Bara oral forms such as *pantun nasihat* (advisory *pantun*), *gurindam* (moral couplets), and *ritual* verses from *tepung tawar* (blessing ceremony), moral values are transmitted through metaphor and repetition, shaping social ethics within a communal worldview. For instance, the *pantun* line “*Air tenang jangan disangka tiada buaya*” (Do not think still waters have no crocodiles) functions both as cautionary wisdom and as a moral signifier of humility and awareness.

In contrast, English literary texts by Wordsworth, Achebe, Rushdie, and Kipling articulate moral awareness through narrative conflict and character reflection. Wordsworth’s *Lines Written in Early Spring* (1798) conveys the human moral failure to coexist harmoniously with nature, while Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (2016) portrays the tragic consequences of colonial disruption on communal ethics.

Thus, findings demonstrate that both literatures encode morality through symbolic systems, Malay oral art externalizes ethics via collective metaphor, whereas English texts internalize it through personal experience and moral reasoning. Together, they form a dialogic bridge of cultural interpretation consistent with Bhabha’s (2019) notion of the *third space*, where moral meanings are hybridized across traditions.

4.2 Representation of Harmony with Nature

In Batu Bara Malay oral expression, nature is personified as both teacher and mirror of morality. The verse “*Kalau padi makin berisi, makin tunduk ke bumi*” (The fuller the rice, the lower it bows) exemplifies how humility and wisdom are drawn from natural metaphor. Such proverbs and *gurindam* (moral couplets) not only convey ecological awareness but also spiritual humility, connecting human behavior with natural balance.

Field interviews with Batu Bara elders revealed that natural imagery in *pantun* often arises from agricultural life like rivers, rice fields, and sea winds symbolizing patience, perseverance, and respect for divine order. This worldview aligns with an ethics of sustainability and gratitude, encoded within poetic brevity.

In English Romantic literature, Wordsworth similarly elevates nature as a moral force. In *Tintern Abbey* (1798), he writes:

“A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

This illustrates nature as a moral and spiritual guide, echoing the same humility expressed in Malay oral verses. Yet the difference lies in subjectivity: for the Batu Bara community, morality is socially enacted; for Wordsworth, it is individually contemplated.

From a semiotic lens (Barthes, 1977; Hall, 1997), both literatures transform natural signs into moral signifiers. In the Batu Bara context, rice, river, and tree symbolize patience, endurance, and gratitude; in English Romanticism, daffodils and rivers mirror the self’s moral awakening. These overlapping symbols demonstrate how ecological imagery becomes a shared ethical language, one rooted in collective ecology, the other in introspective spirituality.

Therefore, this study interprets “harmony with nature” as both a local moral code and a transnational ethical metaphor revealing how indigenous environmental ethics can enrich postcolonial readings of English literature.

4.3 Social Hierarchy and Respect in Communication

Respect for hierarchy and social harmony forms the ethical backbone of Batu Bara oral tradition. The saying like “*Yang tua dihormati, yang muda disayangi*” (Respect the elders, cherish the young) reflect not mere politeness but the moral architecture of social order. These utterances encode intergenerational responsibility and communal obedience to elders as spiritual guardians.

Ethnographic data collected from ritual performances such as *tepung tawar* (blessing ceremony) confirm that respect is enacted symbolically through gesture, as sprinkling water and rice flour signifies purification and social blessing. This ritual semiotics reinforces cultural authority and communal unity, showing how oral ethics function as social governance.

In contrast, English literature treats hierarchy through moral allegory. Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (2019), though colonial in tone, presents moral lessons on loyalty, duty, and leadership through the animal kingdom. Mowgli’s respect for Baloo and Bagheera reflects obedience to moral order, while defiance toward Shere Khan represents rebellion against corrupt authority. This allegory parallels the Malay notion that respect maintains harmony but also invites critical negotiation when authority loses moral legitimacy. Through Hall’s (1997) framework of representation, both systems can be read as semiotic codes of social ethics: in Batu Bara oral art, authority derives from lineage and sacred wisdom; in English texts, it is tied to governance, individual conscience, and moral choice.

The comparison reveals a dual understanding of respect as communal devotion and as moral reflection, each operating within its sociocultural epistemology.

4.4 Moral and Communal Ethics: A Comparative and Theoretical Synthesis

Batu Bara oral tradition foregrounds communal ethics as the moral center of life. The saying "*Berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing*" (We share burdens, whether heavy or light) encapsulates empathy, cooperation, and mutual aid. In oral performance, such verses are sung collectively, creating what Turner (1982) calls "*communitas*," a performative unity where ethics and emotion merge. This collective mode of moral expression reflects the community's worldview that virtue is realized through togetherness rather than individual achievement.

In contrast, English literary works often portray morality as an internal and individual struggle. For instance, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the disintegration of the Igbo moral order under colonial influence mirrors the collective fragility of Batu Bara ethics in facing modernity. Similarly, Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* (2019) reinterprets exile as moral dislocation, where identity and ethics are negotiated between belonging and estrangement. These parallel experiences show that both traditions grapple with the tension between moral rootedness and cultural change.

Through Bhabha's (2019) concept of the *third space*, these moral worlds intersect, forming a hybrid ethical imagination. The rhythmic pantun of Batu Bara and the introspective narrative voice in English literature function as dialogic media where ethical awareness takes shape through cross-cultural reflection. In this sense, Malay oral ethics are not merely localized moral codes but dynamic interpretive systems that converse with global literary moralities.

From a semiotic perspective (Barthes, 1977), the Malay verse relies on indexical signs such as nature, kinship, and ritual as moral referents, while English texts employ symbolic narrative forms such as character, conflict, and irony. Together, they reveal that moral understanding operates through different semiotic systems but shares the same universal pursuit of ethical balance.

This comparative reading thus reframes morality not as a dichotomy between East and West but as a dialogic continuum, an intercultural conversation between collective and individual ethics that enriches postcolonial moral aesthetics.

To illustrate this dynamic, a conceptual diagram (see Figure 1) may be inserted, mapping how Batu Bara oral ethics (communal, performative, metaphorical) interact with English literary ethics (individual, introspective, symbolic) within the shared interpretive field of postcolonial hybridity.

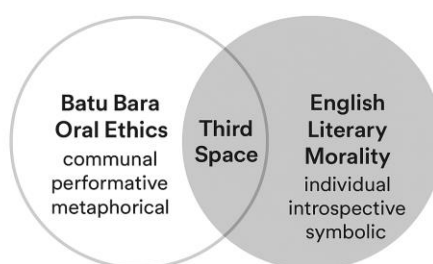


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Cross-Cultural Literary Ethics

4.5 Cultural Interpretation through English Literary Lens

Applying English literary theory to Malay oral narratives opens a productive interpretive exchange. Concepts such as character archetype, narrative symbolism, and moral allegory help articulate latent meanings within pantun and ritual speech. For instance, the *pantun*:

*"Bunga cempaka di tepi kali, (Magnolia blossoms by the riverbank)
Harum baunya sepanjang masa; (Its fragrance lingers through all time)
Baik budi tidakkan mati, (Good character will never perish)
Walau jasad kembali ke asa," (Even when the body returns to its origin)*

Embodies the moral permanence of virtue, akin to Wordsworth's reflection on moral immortality in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* (1807).

By situating Malay oral ethics within English moral frameworks, the study reveals the dialogic potential of cross-literary interpretation how Western concepts like allegory or hybridity can illuminate, but not dominate, indigenous wisdom. Spivak's (2021) *subaltern voice* provides further insight, showing that oral poetry acts as a decolonial voice resisting epistemic marginalization. In Batu Bara, every oral performance asserts identity and agency, turning poetic recitation into moral resistance. This reading transforms English literary tools into cross-cultural instruments, expanding their interpretive reach beyond canonical boundaries. Likewise, Malay oral tradition challenges English literary theory to reimagine morality as communal and performative rather than purely textual.

Thus, the English lens becomes a bridge, not a filter, transforming intercultural reading into a form of ethical translation where meaning is constantly negotiated, hybridized, and re-signified within Bhabha's third space.

4.6 Analytical and Cultural Implications

The findings reveal that moral hybridity emerges as the central insight of this study, where the dialogic encounter between Batu Bara oral ethics and English literary thought produces a new intercultural moral discourse. Rather than positioning Malay oral wisdom as the object of Western interpretation, this study reframes it as a coequal epistemology, one that speaks back to global literary theory through lived ethical experience.

First, this analytical model demonstrates that indigenous oral traditions possess conceptual and philosophical depth equivalent to canonical English literature, thereby challenging the Eurocentric hierarchy of knowledge. The comparative framework between pantun ethics and postcolonial narrative introspection establishes a balanced interpretive exchange, proving that both oral and written forms articulate human moral consciousness through different semiotic systems.

Second, the study contributes theoretically to postcolonial hermeneutics by advancing the idea of "moral hybridity", a synthesis where collective ethics and individual conscience intersect in the third space (Bhabha, 2019). This hybrid zone allows local moral codes to be re-signified within global literary theory, producing a plural yet coherent understanding of virtue, resistance, and identity.

Third, the findings offer practical significance for literary pedagogy and intercultural literacy. By integrating Batu Bara oral narratives into English literary analysis, students and scholars can explore ethical universality through plural traditions, recognizing that decolonial knowledge is not oppositional but dialogic. Such engagement encourages critical empathy,

fostering awareness that morality, like culture itself, thrives through translation and negotiation.

Ultimately, this research affirms that postcolonial literary study must move beyond textual critique toward moral dialogue, where the spoken and the written, the local and the global, coexist as mutual interpreters of human ethics. The hybrid moral imagination revealed in this study redefines postcolonial literature not as a geography of difference but as a shared space of ethical creativity.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that Malay Batu Bara oral narratives and English literary traditions converge within a shared moral imagination while retaining distinct aesthetic and historical forms. Reaffirming its objectives, the research examined how postcolonial literary perspectives particularly Bhabha's hybridity, mimicry, and Spivak's subaltern voice reinterpret the moral and cultural representations in Malay oral narratives. The analysis newly demonstrates that moral hybridity serves as the key interpretive outcome, where collective oral ethics and individual literary introspection intersect in a dialogic moral continuum. Through Bhabha's notion of the *third space*, this study shows that intercultural meaning emerges not from domination but negotiation: the Batu Bara oral tradition re-signifies English moral tropes through performative empathy and communal ethics. For instance, the *pantun*'s collective moral rhythm contrasts yet converses with the solitary ethical conflict found in English narratives such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Imaginary Homelands*.

Theoretically, this research extends postcolonial literary studies by positioning indigenous oral traditions as coequal epistemologies rather than passive cultural data. It challenges the Eurocentric hierarchy of textual authority by proving that oral performance embodies complex moral philosophy and symbolic sophistication. Methodologically, the qualitative comparative and semiotic approach proved effective in tracing intercultural correspondences, though it also faced interpretive limits due to the performative nature of oral data. Practically, the findings offer a pedagogical model for integrating local oral traditions into English literature and cultural studies curricula. Teachers may adapt the comparative moral framework to design intercultural literature modules that emphasize dialogue between Western and indigenous worldviews. Similarly, future researchers can extend this model to digital storytelling, performative archives, or comparative ethics across Southeast Asian oral heritages.

In sum, this study contributes to decolonial literary scholarship by bridging English postcolonial theory and indigenous oral heritage, redefining world literature as a shared moral dialogue and a platform for intercultural education.

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