



Exploring Personal and Ethnic Identity in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

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Abstract

Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises*, a cornerstone of the Lost Generation literature, stands as one of his greatest works and a crucial example of his concise yet impactful writing style. The novel vividly portrays the disillusionment and anxiety experienced by the post-World War I generation, serving as a mirror to their collective identity crisis. This study delves into how World War I created disappointment and identity crises in Hemingway's novel, underlining the characters' identity confusion that resonates with readers. *The Sun Also Rises* dissects the manner in which the actions, social relations, and broader cultural background of the post-war period shaped the identities of the characters. The novel grapples with the nature of ethnic identity and the challenges of self-discovery in a turbulent and capricious society.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Hemingway, identity, Lost Generation, *The Sun Also Rises*

1. Introduction

This article delves into the characters' ethnic identity, values, and struggles to adapt to the rapidly changing twentieth-century United States. It hones in on the pivotal events and transformations of that era, such as industrialization and World War I, and their profound impact on American culture (Žalac, 2017). The influx of immigrants during the Industrial Revolution and the influence of contemporary norms triggered a significant shift in social identities in the United States. This period saw the emergence of modern cultural, economic, and social forces, reshaping traditional identities and fostering a more fluid sense of self. Urbanization, technological progress, and the Cultural Revolution are key factors that underscore this identity fluidity.

The Sun Also Rises signifies the perfect relationship between modernity and the lost generation. It proposes that the rapidly progressing modernity and social and moral decline that followed World War I caused a generation of loss (Yanar, 2020). According to Curnett (2000), individuals who contributed to the lost generation movement are denoted as 'expatriates,' who leave their country due to their dissatisfaction with the social life and cultural standards of where they reside. Moreover, Curnett argues that expatriation presented Hemingway with a strong metaphor for addressing the issue of surviving the contemporary, postwar world. These expatriates such as Jake, Cohn, and Brett, are dissatisfied with their environments and with themselves. Due to their disturbance from World War I, Jake, Brett, and Cohn are severely depressed and searching for new notions to adopt.

Ernest Hemingway, an American novelist and short story writer, was popular for his distinctive style and sensational lifestyle. His storytelling ability earned him the 1954 Nobel Prize in Literature. War, love, masculinity, and the human situation are all frequent issues in Hemingway's writing. *The Old Man and the Sea*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and *The Sun Also Rises* are among his best-known novels. Hemingway is famous for his clear-cut, simple style, which frequently imprisons the sentiments and authenticity of his characters' experiences.

Identity is really a human construction, either individually or in alliance with other humans. It is a given; however, it needs construction and—perhaps more importantly—reconstruction. Identity explanation is a construction process. To reserve identification, the clarification is a continuous and frequent process (Mutanen, 2010). Various researchers have stressed that identity is a process regularly intertwined with social activities (Foucault 1984). Social practices shape and largely define how individuals and groups identify and conceptualize themselves (De. Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg 2006).

Immigrants, in their quest for self-identification, often grapple with their ethnic identity as a key source. This dynamic is particularly evident in their storytelling, where the significance of ethnic allusions varies depending on the story's setting. Stories that incorporate ethnic references underscore specific aspects of both the subject's own identity and the identities of others, presenting and evaluating behaviors. Discourses involving disputes often attribute contentious actions to individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, thereby influencing the speaker's perception of their own identity and that of others. Despite the sometimes ambiguous relationship between identity and behavior in personal experience tales, the characters still adhere to social norms. Thus, individual tales contribute to the formation of expectations about how membership in a certain ethnic group might affect behavior in various spheres of life (De. Fina, 2000).

Identities are the outcome of semiotic processes through which humans produce self- and other images for a conversation (op. cit). Due to their anti-essentialist views, social constructionist philosophers like Stuart Hall and Anthony Giddens have significantly affected identity studies as a whole. Various Studies have looked at how people's perceptions of prejudice might affect their identification as ethnically diverse.

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2. Literature Review

Rovit (1979) states that Hemingway was a member of the Lost Generation. *The Sun Also Rises* is ultimately an effort about the loss of one's desires, affections, and existence. He says Hemingway emphasizes the despairing lives of his fictional characters, who live in an uncertain world where they only drink and talk aimlessly. The World War's huge human loss altered the meaning of notions like gender in the minds of socially hopeless, disillusioned, and discontented lost generation members. The generation did not follow the inflexible gender norms and codes of behavior (Yanar, 2020). *The Sun Also Rises* perfectly portrays the life of American expatriates. The story represents people who escape their homeland in an endeavor to find protection in a city with a firm culture, traditions, and morals. However, these people do not feel secure since they consider that everything on earth is meaningless. They are victims of history, and Hemingway does a great job of demonstrating this. AŞCI (2020) explores how an emigrant writer represents the realities of living abroad. The scholar analyzes the views, activities, and talks of the characters and provides evidence about the Lost Generation and expatriate lifestyles. The Lost Generation was also known as the World War I Generation, and the group of immigrants who settled in Paris was sometimes referred to as the Generation of Fire. The members of this group looked for purpose in their lives. They split off and were separated from both the devastated world and the subsequent new world (Rafi, 2012, 3 & Ali et al., 2022). They were unable to connect with the ideals of their neighborhood. *The Sun Also Rises* refers to the intricate racial order and the concept that the white European race was superior to all other races are the goals of racial determinism's theories (Aqeeli, 2022, Afaq et al., 2022).

2.1. Ethnicity

Jake Barnes is portrayed in *The Sun Also Rises* as a confused protagonist who makes efforts to preserve the significance of the meaningless world by finding a balance between pre- and postwar discourses. This marks him as a figure of hybridity, combining many identities so as not to initiate loyalty to a single predominant narrative. Ultimately, Hemingway has Jake look to the Basque peasants—who are both comfortably outside and within the center—as a potential Other to provide meaning to his world. Instead of focusing on the novel's portrayal of this Spanish Other, I would want to examine the marginalization that Jake avoids, particularly with regard to Jews and homosexuals (Traber, 2000).

Karlsson (2014) quotes Merriam-Webster's online dictionary definition of ethnicity: "Ethnicity" comes from the word "ethnic," which means "of or relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background."

The term 'ethnic identity' refers to a complex mental construct that contains a person's beliefs and attitudes about belonging to a definite ethnic group. It also covers the ways in which these attitudes and beliefs change and grow during a person's life (Umaña-Taylor, 2014, & Hassan et al., 2022). Phinney (1989) and (Gul et al., 2023(a)) argue that researchers have often examined ethnic identity. This perspective helps in understanding how people interact and develop with their cultural background to establish and feel their ethnic identity.

2.2. Construction of Identity in the Novel

The research refers to Hamera's (2005) theory of performativity and identity formation and its focus on identity fluidity to understand Hemingway's realization of identity instability. Hamera argues that just as language forms gender identities, the recurrent practice of encoding social customs into the body shapes racial identities.

The Sun Also Rises reveals the situations after the devastating effects of World War I on the characters' minds, who struggle with issues of ethnic identity and identity negotiation. The protagonist, Jake Barnes, is an American expatriate who is trying to make sense of life in Paris.

The novel demonstrates that differences between European and American characters are a major element of ethnic identity. Jake's friends, Robert Cohn and Lady Brett Ashley come from diverse families and find it hard to balance their American identities with the European culture around them. The characters' dealings with social dynamics and relationships are one of the areas where this pressure is most obvious.

Identity negotiation is a major subject in *The Sun Also Rises* as the characters discuss post-war issues of femininity, masculinity, and social stand-up. Jake finds it hard to preserve his sense of self as a man who has experienced both psychological and physical trauma from the war. On the other hand, Brett struggles with her identity as a woman who discards conservative expectations and gender norms.

Overall, *The Sun Also Rises* investigates the nuances of ethnic identity and identity negotiation in a rapidly changing world. It provides a detailed depiction of the difficulties and paradoxes people encounter when figuring out where they fit into society.

Through Jake's character, Hemingway explores the feelings of dislocation and isolation that many emigrants experienced during this time. Jake's incapability resulting from his battle is a physical representation of the emotional and psychological wounds that many people carry with them after the war. Due to his physical disability, Jake has extra encounters related to his identity, containing feelings of inadequacy and emasculation in a culture that profoundly values orthodox ideas of masculinity (Ishtiaq et al., 2021).

Moreover, the novel provides an additional view of identity negotiation through the character of Robert Cohn. Cohn's experiences of discrimination and bias from his classmates serve as a stark token of the problems that

people from understated backgrounds frequently meet while struggling to negotiate social structures and find their place in society.

“Going to another country doesn’t make any difference. I’ve tried all that. You can’t get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There’s nothing to that.” (Hemingway, 1986)

This expression is about the discussion between Jack and Cohn, two friends. Jake recommends going to Africa for hunting, but Cohn says he would rather visit South America. Jake jokes that Cohn may change his mind, but Cohn is persistent in his suggestion.

The excerpt reveals the theme of self-exploration and identity. The character expresses disappointment with the impression that geographical replacement offers a way out a means of escaping one's own identity or inner struggles.

This feeling captures the existential problem the characters are confronted with, particularly the emigrants who were displaced to Europe after World War I. Despite their physical dislocation, they struggle with unresolved individual issues, emotional wounds from the war, and a sense of disconnection from their own identities.

Similarly, the first subject Hemingway represents in the novel is the Jews' stained identity. Hemingway knew about the prevalent bias and antagonism against Jews as a racial and ethnic group in the early twentieth century. He opens the novel with the words Jake utters about Robert Cohn, as he “was so good that Spider promptly overmatched him and got his nose permanently flattened. This increased Cohn’s distaste for boxing, but it gave him a certain satisfaction of some strange sort, and it certainly improved his nose” (Hemingway, 1986, p. 3 Gul et al., 2022(a).

In the selected excerpt, certain elements show aspects of ethnic and racial prejudice. Cohn’s physical change, as mentioned as “got his nose permanently flattened,” made him look, which really contributes to disapproving prejudices about certain ethnic or racial groups.

Moreover, Cohn's reaction to the event is defined using terms that imply he is a more refined or delicate character than Spider, who is represented as the antagonist, such as his "distaste for boxing." The characters' evaluations based on how they react to violence have the possibility to strengthen prejudices that certain ethnic or racial groups are more violent than others. The language that is used contributes to the persistence of biases against certain races and ethnicities.

3. Conclusion

This research emphasizes the importance of critically analyzing texts and media to spot and address instances of ethnic and racial discrimination. By being conscious of how these biases are reinforced in literature and other kinds of communication, we may endeavor to promote more understanding and inclusion in society. This conversation emphasizes how critical it is to face and overcome racial and ethnic discrimination in all of its manifestations to build a fairer and equal society.

The themes of ethnic and personal identification are fundamental to the experiences and interactions of the characters in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. The novel centers on a group of foreigners who are trying to figure out who they are, what they want to do, and where they fit in after World War I in Europe.

A major character, Jake Barnes, is impotent due to his combat wounds and battles with his sense of self. This physical restriction affects his sense of self and his interactions with others, especially with Lady Brett Ashley, whom he loves but is unable to spend much time with. Jake's desire for fulfillment and significance in a post-war society is entwined with his quest for identity.

The Jewish character Robert Cohn serves as a vehicle for more exploration of ethnic identity throughout the book. Some of the other characters treat Cohn unfairly and discriminatorily since they see him as an outsider. His ethnicity affects how he interacts with others and how he feels navigating the European expat community's social circles.

The book explores the nuances of ethnic and personal identity, emphasizing the ways in which these factors may affect a person's relationships, sense of self, and position in the world. Hemingway addresses issues of alienation, disillusionment, and the quest for authenticity in a world that is changing quickly via the struggles and conflicts of his characters.

Overall, "The Sun Also Rises" presents a complicated picture of ethnic and personal identity, provoking readers to consider the difficulties of individuality, belonging, and the influence of prejudice and societal standards on one's sense of self.

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