

Article

Postcolonial Hybridity as Theme and Technique: Reading Levy, Rushdie, and Adichie

Dr. Vishnupriyan T

Assistant Professor of English, KIT – Kalaignarkarunanidhi Institute of Technology,
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India;
drvishnupriyaneng@gmail.com | <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8001-1480>

Accepted version published on 5th September 2025

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17060295>

Abstract: Hybridity is recognised in postcolonial literature as a vital concept for understanding diasporic identities. Diasporic subjects attempt to reject fractured, fluid identities shaped by migration, displacement, and colonial legacies by challenging Homi K. Bhabha's theories and critiques. The study presents hybridity as both a thematic focus and a narrative technique through close analysis of several works from South Asian, Caribbean, and African diasporic literature, including Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. These texts oppose essentialist ideas of identity and national allegiance by illustrating the complexity of cultural negotiation, memory, and belonging. The paper concludes by proposing that postcolonial literature offers a valuable framework for rethinking belonging as a relational and dynamic process that supports inclusive and decolonial perspectives on identity in the globalised world.

Keywords: belonging; cultural identity; diaspora; hybridity; migration; postcolonial literature

Introduction

Being changes exponentially under the weight of a colonial past, especially for the diasporic communities that histories of migration, displacement, and cultural negotiation have shaped. Postcolonial literature remains one of the strong methodologies through which the complex ways diasporic peoples negotiate fractured, hybrid, and continuously negotiated identities can be explored. At the centre of this inquiry lies the idea of hybridity, which resists essentialist, monolithic constructions of

identity and instead reveals the panoply and ever-evolving character of cultural belonging.

With Bhabha's conception of hybridity being regarded as a "third space," whereby identities are put into an ambivalent and, simultaneously, contesting, contradictory, and negotiated space not pure or fixed in time and space, we gain an operative framework to understand that most diasporic identities inhabit transitional spaces between tradition and modernity, homeland and host land, the past and the present. Hybridity foregrounds the agency of diasporic subjects in fashioning novel articulations of culture and belonging, thus permitting us to step out of the binary models entrenched in colonial discourse, which went so far as to bifurcate coloniser/colonised, native/foreigner.

This manuscript thoroughly examines the lived experience and a lens in all postcolonial literature from the lens of issues of the diasporic authors on the search for belonging amid cultural plurality. It looks at the fields comprising language, memory, and cultural identity as arenas for renewal and resistance through narratives of the South Asian, Caribbean, and African Diasporas. It shows how diasporic texts resist mainstream narratives and offer a rethinking of fluid, relational identity, and in doing so, question fixed conceptions of home and nation. The investigation also dwells on how hybridity continues to act as a mechanism and an instrument of literary production that validates the pluralised experience and fractured histories of the diasporic presentation of subject actors, in addition to being thematic. In so doing, it draws a connection as to how postcolonial literature lends itself to larger decolonial projects by overturning colonial epistemologies and offering a platform for cultural reclamation. As the article stresses, diasporic literature, by way of hybridity and belonging, offers a space for both individual and collective reinterpretation, giving identity a complex, inclusive, many-dimensional, and empowering approach.

The study really puts forth the argument that literature, focusing on the complexities around hybridity, retains the power to bring forth the tensions and possibilities present in the diasporic condition while fostering further discussions in the area of postcolonial theory and diaspora studies. The ultimate purpose of this treatise is to argue that, rather than mirroring, postcolonial literature does act in shaping diasporic identities by offering new narratives that contest normative ideologies and create space for alternate forms of cultural belonging.

Hybridity: Theoretical Foundations and Critiques

Hybridity lies at the heart of postcolonial theory because of the ground-breaking theorising of Homi K. Bhabha. In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), hybridity is reframed as a space of cultural ambivalence and negotiation. Hybridity, as posited by Bhabha, besides being a mixture of cultures, is a sort of "third space," where indigenous and colonial cultures meet and begin producing new and emerging identities. This third space disallows the reification of conventional categories and provides an opportunity for new expressions of culture based on the disruption of colonial binaries, such as colonizer/colonised or self/other. Hybridity, therefore, is a form of resistance against

colonial power precisely because it exposes contradictions within colonial discourse and allows the marginalised to express agency. With hybridity, however, the meanings of such engagement are continually contested and are never settled. Thus, linguistic hybridity, such as code-switching, creolization, and the adaptation of colonial languages to articulate indigenous experiences, acts as a challenge to linguistic imperialism. Alien Hybrid has, however, found opponents. The uncritical praise of hybridity, according to Aijaz Ahmad, can indeed mask unequal power relations still present in postcolonial configurations. Ahmad points to the danger of calling hybridity simply cultural mixing unless the material forces and political forces behind colonial oppression are sufficiently dealt with, along with its enduring consequences upon those who suffer from it. Dipesh Chakraborty likewise warns against the possibility of using hybridity as a means to depoliticise postcolonial struggles by obliterating histories of economic exploitation, forced displacement, and violence. Some critics regard the danger of ascribing a generic status to hybridity, which inadvertently mutes the distinct particularities of various historical and cultural contexts. Thus, the concept may seem irrelevant or inapplicable to communities whose identity is constructed through other social relations than colonial hybridity. Furthermore, to avoid simplistic or homogenising accounts, feminist postcolonial critics stress that the meaning and use of hybridity must be firmly tied to gender and intersecting identities. While the criticisms are important to note, when handled with care and contextual sensitivity, hybridity remains a viable essential tool for analysis. It allows readers and scholars to appreciate the highly layered and dynamic nature of the diasporic identity, which derives from multiple historical and cultural sources. Hybridity talks about how identity is contested, dualistic, and fragmented across time and across space, rather than being just so fixed or unidimensional.

In pop culture and literary use, hybridity doubles as an artistic strategy, allowing authors to manipulate generic form, language, and narrative structures in order to depict the vibrancy of diasporic subjectivities. Diasporic authors become carriers of the conflicts and creative potentialities involved in cultural negotiations by operationalising hybridity on paper through intertextuality, code-switching, and a fusion of cultural referents. Hence, hybridity is both a theory and a lived reality, providing a window through which the connotations of diasporic identities go through mutations and transformations while denying any reductive categorisation. It understands the transitional states functioning as spaces that diasporic entities inhabit and in which belonging is never entirely denied but always makes the name of the in-between more fluid.

Diasporic Identities and the Search for Belonging

Displacement and the unwavering search for belonging in strange and oftentimes hostile environments are the two aspects that make up the diasporic experience. There had been creative forces acting between the memories of the homeland and the realities of life in host societies, creating a sort of liminal existence which muddled the ideas of cultural and national belonging, and this, in turn, helped define diasporic identities. This tension results in hybrid identities merging multiple, sometimes conflicting cultural allegiances.

According to Hall's theory, the diasporic subject is often torn between "roots and routes" as they negotiate their place in a world affected by transnational flows, exile, and migration. Thus, belonging is not just located in a precise geographical conception but also resides deeply in culture and emotion and is bound up with forms of social life, language, and memory. There have been numerous diasporic literatures that explore these themes, revealing the manner in which people contend with cultural dislocation, estrangement, and adjustment. Authors such as Salman Rushdie, Jamaica Kincaid, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have undertaken this work of critiquing the complexities of diasporic belonging. *Midnight's Children* by Rushdie provides a layered narrative of migration and Partition, where the protagonist's identity is fractured and remodelled through history, politics, and language. Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* focuses on the psychosocial effects of colonial legacy upon identity by narrating an account of personal alienation felt by a Caribbean girl in her pre-teenage years on both the island and England.

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has skilfully explored the factors that influence the changing diaspora due to race, nationality, and gender. The challenges of the hyphenated identity struggle in any context with existing racial hierarchies and the cultural expectations are perfectly depicted through the experience of the principal character. The story written by Adichie shows the necessity of diasporic individuals to constantly reconsider who they are with regard to shifting social situations. These stories revolve around the idea of the role of language used as a marker of identity and belonging. This is in order to capture either side of the cultural hybridity expressed in their works or persons; that is, diasporic writers tend to employ hybridised forms of language, whether through code switching or English and vernacular/creole interchange. This is a linguistic hybridity that challenges the monolingual and monocultural norms by pretending alternative epistemologies and ways of being. Memory, both individual and group, plays a very significant role in the development of diasporic identities. There is a necessity to adapt and fit into new environments, which is often juxtaposed with upholding the cultural traditions via stories, rituals, and remembrance. This is how the interaction is a dynamic process that forms diasporic belonging, not as a permanent state.

The concept of a bounded nation-state as one centre rendering a sense of belonging only is challenged by the diasporic literature that has complicated the meaning of home. Instead, it is the idea of belonging that is characterised as multiple, relational, and circumstantial, where the diasporic communities, transnational relations, and hybrid cultural expression get involved. Such a redefinition of belonging allows an inclusion of identity that appreciates diversity and opens space to challenge existing nationalistic rhetoric. Diasporic literature is a constructive process that moulds diasporic identities on top of simply responding to realities of cultural negotiation on dispossession. It provides a platform to marginalised people to express their experiences and dream about new opportunities in gaining political and cultural representation.

Cultural Hybridity in Selected Literary Texts

Postcolonial literature has a rich tapestry that can treat the theme of cultural hybridity and its performance as narrative and linguistic practice. The section framed the dynamism of hybridity by examination of several diasporic texts that claim the complexity of identity, memory, and belonging delivered by the diasporic subjects. In these readings, it is made clear that these hybrid identities do not succumb to simplistic definitions and that they negotiate with a number of cultural systems, often incorporating innovative aesthetic strategies that capture the creative nature of diasporic experience as full of fractures and imaginings.

One of the most famous examples of hybridity is present in postcolonial literature in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Both the historical and the religious mythologies of Western, Islamic, and Indian cultures, together with the touch of magical realism, undermine the linearity in the narrative structure of the book. This combination of incompatible elements of culture constitutes the idea of the third space by Bhabha, where rigid identities are washed away and replaced with new hybrid ones. The hybridity used by Rushdie in language is also exemplified as he uses Hindi idioms, Indian vernaculars, and English as well as a new language that does not conform to monolingual standards of literary expressions. Irrespective of being caught in the crossfire between immigrant London and the Indian subcontinent, the shifting identities of the protagonist represent the challenging negotiations that are considered divergent cultural fragmentation and diasporic belonging. The transgressive nature and content of the novel are an extension of how it also challenges colonialism through the marginalised voices and other histories it elevates.

In *Small Island* (2004) by Andrea Levy, the portrayal of the British-Jamaican hybridity is well-addressed in the post-war period. The novel brings out how race, class, and colonial history converge in the construction of diasporic identity by using the migration of the Windrush generation to Britain as a backdrop. With the help of multiple perspectives, the story by Levy presents the differences in the experiences of the British characters whose lives intersect with those of the Jamaican migrants. It is this narrative multiplicity in British post-war identity that underlines the hybrid nature of this identity created by the Caribbean diaspora. The book brings forth the resiliency and proactivity of such diasporic subjects trying to forge a sense of belonging as well as critically examining the British multiculturalism promises through exposés on active racial discrimination and social integration.

By means of its multifaceted representation of the Nigerian immigrants in the United States, the novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Americanah*, 2013) provides an insight into the multi-layered issues of cultural hybridity within the African diasporic context. Ifemelu, the protagonist, lives in Nigeria and America, and the challenges and contradictions of diasporic identity that may be strongly impacted by gender and race, and nationality. The story by Adichie undermines the American patterns of racial paradigms by focusing on the heterogeneity of black experiences and the permeable character of national borders in terms of identity. The language used in the novel, including internet blogging, the Nigerian English language, and American vernacular, indicates how hybridity in language can be applied to express resistance as well as

negotiate identity. The ideas of Ifemelu about hair, social norms, and cultural expectations demonstrate where cultural hybridity and negotiation take place in daily activities.

Along with these popular works, there is a huge number of other diasporic writers who apply the idea of hybridity to explore the concept of belonging and identity. Such is the case with *Home Fire* (2017) by Kamila Shamsie, which shows how the precarious bargains of belonging under forces of Islamophobia and national security discourses, hybridity emerges in the negotiation between the British and the Muslim identity. One more indication of the interplay of the diasporic literature with foreign literary traditions, which is used to display the hybrid identity, is the intertextual references of the novel with *Antigone* by Sophocles. Simultaneously, the broken identity and association with the colonial history of Jamaica in the 1987 novel *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff also subverts the Eurocentric history through the expression of Caribbean hybridity in the main character.

The fragments presented in these literary works show how hybridity can be employed as an effective theme, narrative, and political intervention. The diasporic writers create textual spaces that reflect on the fragmented but dynamic realities of the diasporic identities through a fusion or combination of languages, cultural signs, and allusions to history. Therefore, literary hybridity allows for to display of alternative epistemologies and solidarity and serves as the literary form of resistance against nationalist exclusivity and cultural essentialism.

The hybridity of the texts in those pieces focuses on the roles played by history and memory in shaping the diasporic identities. Myths, stories, and aspects of culture are often transmitted between generations with the hybrid touch incorporating local customs with colonial and diasporic influences. This social mixing of recollections has the potential of developing new forms of belonging that traverse national boundaries and linear histories at once. The foregoing narrative techniques not only reflect cultural hybridity but also play a role in the creation and maintenance of hybrid cultural memories at a diasporic literary level. The concept of cultural hybridity in the literature of diaspora is multi-faceted as it challenges settled perceptions of what and where we appurtenant. The selected readings demonstrate the complexity of negotiation of historical and cultural specifics, which could be easily achieved through the use of hybridity as a creative and political strategy by the diasporic subjects. These works endorse new types of cultural performance and rearticulation, which disregard colonial histories of cultural despair to envision more open ways forward and embrace contradiction and multiple identities.

Conclusion

This paper considered the complex interplay between hybridity and belonging as far as diasporic identities are learnt in the postcolonial literature. Theoretical consideration of hybridity, as well as a close consideration of literary texts, makes it obvious that diasporic identities are not fixed, uncontested and fixed but are fluid, contested, and negotiated instead. One such concept in the understanding of the

interactions of people and communities with the complex consequences of colonialism, migration, and cross-cultural encounter is that of hybridity.

The theory behind hybridity advanced by Homi K. Bhabha presents identity as a third space of enunciation, which involves an interaction between multiple influences that produce emerging forms of novel culture. Nonetheless, the critiques of hybridity caution scholars to remain conscious of the past violence and power imbalances that shape these relationships. As a critical discourse, hybridity brings to focus the agency of individuals between the worlds and brings insights to the tensions and potentials of the diasporic subjectivities. As has been indicated in this paper, diasporic literature constitutes an indispensable part of the performance and enunciation of hybridity. Diasporic writers challenge the essentialist conceptualisation of identity and belonging by highlighting displacement, negotiation of culture, and memories. Their narratives portray the role that language, memory, and culture play in the formation of identities that cannot be kept in two categories so easily. Magical realism of Rushdie and crisp social commentary of Adichie are only two among the literary works that demonstrate that hybridity as a subject and a means can encapsulate the fractured yet innovative realities of diaspora life.

The exploration of hybridity in diasporic literature contributes to wider decolonial agendas in its challenge of colonial epistemologies and in its greater inclusion and pluralism of concepts of culture and identity. In dislodging hegemonic histories and opening up space to underrepresented pasts, such accounts facilitate a relational authority to analyse a non-nationalist, exclusivist reconstitution of belonging. This paper claims that hybridity and belonging go hand in hand in postcolonial literature. With regard to diasporic subjects, the dynamic of belonging is mediated through hybridity, and it is through how the individuals can negotiate their cultural locations in a manner that marks both empowering and ambivalent ways of belonging. This long-term, multifaceted negotiation, which is a process and an outcome of colonial legacies, is also an expression of diasporic creativity. It would be concluded that the profound nature of identity formation in postcolonial and a globalised world is disclosed through a discussion of hybridity in diasporic literature. It makes readers, scholars, and educators confront their racial prejudices, inviting them to think outside black and white boxes when thinking about culture. Diasporic writers offer invaluable knowledge of the cultural negotiation and belonging that make up our contemporary lives as they stretch the limits of literary writing. In further research, the role of hybridity in diaspora, its interaction with such factors as class and gender, as well as sexual orientation, can be explored, and the impacts of digital diaspora on the emergence of new forms of hybridisation can be considered. By staying on top of those dynamic cultural processes, postcolonial studies can reinforce its commitment to decolonial epistemologies and stimulate more open and international debates about identity, memory, and belonging.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data sharing policy does not apply to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Works cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.
- Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Verso, 1992.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Cliff, Michelle. *No Telephone to Heaven*. Virago Press, 1987.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222–237.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *Annie John*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985.
- Levy, Andrea. *Small Island*. Headline Review, 2004.
- Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. Viking, 1988.
- Shamsie, Kamila. *Home Fire*. Riverhead Books, 2017.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Magnus Publishing and/or the editor(s). Magnus Publishing and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.