

**SHALL WE EMBRACE NEWNESS OR, AMBIVALENCE:**

**HYBRIDITYIN CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE FICTION<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article is an investigation and a discussion of cultural hybridity from a transcultural critical perspective. The article, in terms of its critical relevance to the question of postcolonial aesthetics, attempts to comprehend the in between spaces of the migrant/diasporic subject seen through the lens of multiculturalism.

The existence of such spaces where the new and old, the native and migrant, the local and the global coexist problematize standart narratives of hybridity. The two main theoretical points that are made illustrated are that, on one hand, hybridityhas colonial resonances, lacks historicity, struggle and resistance, andit is pervasive. On the other hand, hybridity is a conscious way of being in constant move between points, resisting and challenging dominance and one canon in a community. This mobile spatiality is indeed where the alternative able to exist. Added to these perspectives, I argue that hybridity theories show alack of differentiating between types of hybridities, either historically or geographically. The originality of hybridity should be that it problematizes ‘the moments of change’ in its own kind of reality. The last, but not least, effort to conceptualize hybridity in time and space is to reveal how hybridity enters to our worlds as newness or ambivalence.

**Keywords:** Hybridity, Ambivalence, Newness, Displacement, Migration, Mobility

### **ÖZET**

Bu makale, transkültürel ve eleştirel bir bakışla değerlendirilen kültürel melezliğin alan araştırması ve tartışmasıdır. Çalışma, postkolonyal estetik dahilinde göçmenin/diaspora öznesinin arada kalmış alanlarını kavramaya çalışmaktadır. Yeni ve eskinin, yerli ve göçmenin, yerel ve küreselin birlikte var olduğu bu tür alanlar, melezliğin alışagelmış anlatılarını sorunsallaştırmaktadır. Açığa çıkartılan iki teorik noktadan bir tanesi şudur: Melezliğin kolonyal yansımaları vardır, tarihselliği, çaba ve direnci eksiktir. Aynı zamanda yayılmacıdır. Öteki taraftan da melezlik, noktalar arasında bilinçli şekilde hareket halinde olarak tahakküme kafa tutmaktır. Aslında, bu hareketli mekansallık alternatifin varolabildiği bir alandır. Bu teorilere eklediğim nokta şudur, melezlik çalışmaları tarihi ve coğrafi farkları gözardı etmektedir. Melezliğin özgünlüğü, değişim anlarını toplulukların kendi gerçekleri dahilinde değerlendirerek varolabilir. Melezliği zaman ve mekan üzerinden kavramsallaştırmamızdaki son ama en önemli çaba, dünyamıza yenilik olarak mı belirsizlik olarak mı girdiğini anlamaya çalışmaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Melezlik, Karmaşa, Yenilik, Yer Değiştirme, Göç, Mobilite,

### **INTRODUCTION**

<sup>1</sup> Bu Makale 20-21 Mayıs 2017 tarihleri arasında Saraybosna’da düzenlenen ASEAD 1. Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Sempozyumu’nda bildiri olarak sunulmuştur.

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How would you define yourself culturally? As an ‘Eastern’, ‘White’, ‘Black’, ‘African’, ‘European’..etc. What does it mean to be Turkish, English, Bosnian or Indian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Identities in our modern time spin around a hybrid space, thus it is complicated to define ourselves with the verb “to be” or to achieve an identity that permits to define ourselves. It means that the question of identity is not always about who we are, but what stand we take in and how we react in spaces which are cultural, social, linguistic and political arenas for the becoming Self.

Salman Rushdie who is often labeled as a hybrid migrant writer in postcolonial Anglophone Fiction asks: “How does newness enter the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made ?”<sup>3</sup>

Robert Eaglestone, almost as a response, asserts that hybridity is about “a world in which the self became ‘heterogeneous rather than homogenous, belonging to more than one place, multiple rather than singular, responding to more than one way of being, more than averagely mixed up’”.<sup>4</sup> The great possibility of being mixed up in this sense offers the carnivalesque celebration of ‘newness’ that comes with migration, and the principal status that comes with this displacement.

Displacement has been a necessity for some writers throughout history- such as Joseph Conrad, George Orwell, Robert Louis Stevenson and many others in British Postcolonial fiction- who changed their countries of origin to add a ‘new’ dimension to their existences. Diaspora, migration or exilenoels are possibly these writersown justifications for their mobilities, such as Phillips Carly in “Necessary Journeys”, develops his, which he links to his migrant condition. Phillips explains in the book that the first ‘necessary’ step to become a good ‘black’ diaspora writer in Britain was to travel across Europe and many other countries throughout the world.

He needed to recognize his identity in “all its intricacy belonging not to certain race, but to the human race”<sup>5</sup>. This motivation pushed him to set off on journeys across nation, class and ethnicity. In HomiBhabha’s terms, ‘the hybrids’ who are unsettled migrants, travel for diverse meanings, and thus develop “an evil eye” that opens up a space “in between the protagonists’ two locations.”<sup>6</sup> The ‘foreign’ eye of the migrant individual sees the “Third Space”, which enables Other positions to emerge’.<sup>7</sup> Such a space harbors a kind of emancipation for the postcolonial subject/agent and produces alternatives concerning representations and recognition of the Other.

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<sup>3</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Satanic Verses*, Random House Publishing Group, 2011, p.8

<sup>4</sup> Robert Eaglestone, Martin McQuillan, *Salman Rushdie: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, A&A, 2013, p.2

<sup>5</sup> Caryl Phillips, *Colour me English, Necessary Journeys* Random House, 2011

<sup>6</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

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Our purpose in this article then is to comprehend the theories of hybridity from the voice of several critics and theorists and state lucidly the necessity of differentiating between different hybridities.

#### 1. HYBRIDITY FROM VARIOUS LENSES

Now to detail the topic, I would suggest to start with Bhabha's notable study entitled the 'The Location of Culture'. Bhabha's hybridity proposes to shift the 'location of culture' and identity to the liminal space, that is, outside the dualities of master and slave, centre and margin, Europe and the Third World. This space is naturally far from essentialist or fundamentalist tendencies, and thus the notion of Bhabha is transferred from its biological and racist spheres to the spatial. However, theoretically speaking, 'hybridity' itself is not a new thing as a concept. Similarly, Bhabha's formulation is not completely new as a terminology. In conducting hybridity, though, few studies show the direct relationship between the characteristics of the hybrid and its intricate experience from different perspectives, and from different sociopolitical backgrounds. The potential of the field considerably increases by regarding the geo-political variations of the subject in question. This mobile spatiality is where the alternative is able to exist.

Identity, as one of the main dynamics of hybridity as stated above has been intensively defined in number of ways in academia. Scholars have tried to explore how individuals characterize themselves and negotiate in multiple positionings, at times of conflict between dualities. That's why we will not attempt to redefine it, as we ground this presentation directly on the definitions we have already determined. Instead, we are attempting to place possible 'becomings' geographically, historically and mentally through the lens of a foreign/native/migrant Self in different contexts. In this way, hybridities can produce 'newness' as being identical not just to the postcolonial migrant, but also to the common individual in any society- without totalizing the subjects within.

At this juncture, Stuart Hall points out that our identities are:

*..the processes that constitute and continuously reform the subject who has to act and speak in the social and cultural world. Identity is the meeting point, or the point of future between, on the one hand, the ideological discourses which attempt to interpellate or speak us as social subjects, and, on the other, the psychological or psychical processes that produce us as subjects, which can be spoken.*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Stuart Hall, Introduction: Who needs 'identity'? in Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (ed.). Questions of Cultural Identity. pp: 1-17. London: Sage Publications, 1996, p.5-6

Identity is the meeting point, or the point of future between, but the ‘meeting point’ of identities is not a limitless area. It might indeed be a mechanism that attempts to decode the expanded possibilities that comes of unexpected (literary) combinations. The unexpected conditions in Anglophone fiction created a genre labelled as ‘Magic Reaslim’, enriched with fantastic personalities and plots. Several historical references might come with the revival of historical, mythic or ancient personalities in alternative forms (alternative forms may be animal-humans; the dehumanisation of novel characters) What writers in this field do is that they deliberately misintrepret, mistranslate or misread the myths for a creative purpose. The inventive part of their writing in particular majorly comes from the power they decenter, reshape myths, histories and stories, allowing the reader to link timeless stories between ancient and contemporary, imagination and reality to reconfigure the present space. The skill to change history with all the references to the contemporary is perhaps one of the most interesting part of this category. What also makes the hybrid novels notable – novels which tend to benefit from fantastic elements-is the unfixed and ambivalent nature of the writing materials. It is in this instability and confusion that the authors find the potential for ‘newness’. Pasts and presents, human beings, cultures, societies, ideas rejoice in a kind of hybridity that can be perceived as cultural, mythic, imaginary, spiritual or sexual, while at the same time hybridtexts can embrace all of them, steeping into grand narratives of human history.

However, these ambivalent hybrid forms become also a site of criticism for many scholars in the field. Though many theorists have approached hybridity conceptually as a way of freeing the colonial subject from the hegemony of Western identity politics in the last decades, a considerable amount of names have found hybridity disposable.

Theorists and authors have commonly approached the notion to highlight the mixing of cultures biologically, culturally, ethnically, linguistically and historically. It might also express cultural globalization and diversity, local resistance against power structures. Hybridity, for HomiBhabha, Robert Young, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Iain Chambers or James Clifford, have been defined in a paradigm of purity against authenticity, fixed against mutable identity, all of which harbor blending and mixing of the heterogenous identities. Gilroy objects to use the term ‘hybrid’, as the idea of intermixture presupposes two anterior purities, but there isn’t any “anterior purities”<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, I believe that the intermixture does not necessitate two pure subjects, because we have already accepted that there is none. There are always intercultural aspects crossing each other complexifying the border of identification. We might instead talk on a level that recognizes difference within similarities, or similarities within difference in a shared culture, without an emphasis on purity while thinking of cultural identity.

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 117

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Based on the conceptualization of Bakhtin, hybridity, as an ongoing process, has two forms. According to Bakhtin, organic hybridity is a natural process wherein in all cultures incorporate elements from others as they come in contact with them, while intentional hybridity creates an ironic double consciousness, a “collision between differing points of views on the world”.<sup>10</sup> Organic hybridity is a social reality that we don’t argue in this study. We are attempting to comprehend intentional/ cultural hybridity, which we think, is a productive space from which the possibility is born – within new conceptions of identity.

Bhabha generalizes the concept, stating: “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity”<sup>11</sup>. For Bhabha, organic and intentional hybridity signify both processes that permit a dialogue between two opposites. They both describe innovations of language in means of translation. “Hybridity is camouflage”, he pinpoints. It is a camouflage of the hybridized subject that is transformed by the diaspora, migrant or minority experience on a cosmic scale. The space, though, in which the change takes place is ‘unrepresentable’ in itself (LC:37). Despite the great fruitfulness of his conceptualizations, Bhabha supersedes the Third Space by referring it as ‘unrepresentable’. For him, the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.<sup>12</sup> He seems to idealize the ambivalent plurality of the space. While on the other hand, it shouldn’t be undermined that the discourse of this hybridized space is an instrument/ a sign<sup>13</sup>, which combats domination of a single canon in a linear history.

However, for many critics, such as Paul Gilroy, “creolisation, métissage, mestizaje, and hybridity” are “rather unsatisfactory ways of naming the processes of cultural mutation and restless”<sup>14</sup>. Many more scholars, such as Pnina Werbner, Tariq Modood or Johathan Friedman, link the use of such hybridity to some descriptive formulations. In Werbner’s words, the discourse of hybridity is a form of “moral self-congratulation” or John Hutnyk sees hybridity as a political dead-end that trivializes ethnic politics.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as Werbner points out “The current fascination with cultural hybridity masks an elusive paradox. Hybridity is celebrated as powerfully interruptive and yet theorized as commonplace and

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<sup>10</sup> Kistnareddy, Oulagambal Ashwiny, ‘Hybridity’ in the novels of Ananda Devi, MPhil thesis, University of Nottingham, 2011, p.7-8. Access from the University of Nottingham repository: [http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/11915/1/Thesis\\_fial\\_complete.pdf](http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/11915/1/Thesis_fial_complete.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Bhabha, op.cit

<sup>12</sup> Bhabha, op.cit

<sup>13</sup> “Hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power”, states Bhabha in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817*, *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985) 154.

<sup>14</sup> David Oswell, *Culture and Society: An Introduction to Cultural Studies* SAGE, 2006, p.203

<sup>15</sup> Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, or Cultural Logic of Globalization*, Temple University Press, 2005

pervasive”<sup>16</sup> Since all culture is always hybrid, because of this pervasiveness, discussing hybridity as a concept without historicity and geographical distinction is theoretically useless. Then, the appearance of hybridity as a sign or as a process might signify value, as it discloses instability in the colonizer’s position, with a potential to subvert the space on behalf of the subaltern.

However, the standart of hybridity as Shameen Black writes “appears in guises liberating and radical as well as confining and exploitative”<sup>17</sup>. There exists a paradox in hybridity’s sphere of influence, as Marwan Kraidy puts forward; that is “its extreme openness that allows unpredictable, arbitrary, and exclusionary closure.”<sup>18</sup> Hybridity’s ambiguous status as an inclusionary, colonial, negative term is mostly associated with the subversive purpose of the dominant culture; “the hybrid is likely to be recuperated and absorbed by that very culture.”<sup>19</sup> So in the first place, hybridity has colonial resonances. Since it is born of the attempt to undermine predetermined colonial identities and categorizations, Bhabha insists that the productive capacity of this ‘Third Space’ has a colonial or post-colonial provenance. The postcolonial context penetrates into hybridity, revealing that the colonial discourse is never in control of the dominant. Yet, this discourse, which is regulated by power, is never pure as stated above. Hybridity in this sense might be considered as a ‘neo-model’ of postcolonialism, possibly a “contribution of the field, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth.”<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan’s considers the phenomenon of hybridity as a new model, which will serve as a new category of identification and thus become another means of fixing identity. He asserts: “Although theoretically speaking, it would seem that hybridity functions as the ultimate decentering of all identity regimes, in fact and in history, hybridity is valorized on the basis of a stable identity”<sup>21</sup>. This stable identity more often insists on impurity in such novels in a hybrid narrative form, characters or plot. Impurity is like a central engine, appearing in the form of destruction, pain or disintegration. When affiliating to values such as ‘affirmation’, the narrative averts the potential of struggle and resistance. That’s why there is a problematic approach of unity of the good and evil in these narratives. The emphasis is always on the evil side.

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<sup>16</sup> Pnina Werbner, Tariq Modood, *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, Zed Books Ltd., 2015, introduction, p.1

<sup>17</sup> Shameen Black, *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth-Century Novels*, Columbia University Press, 2010

<sup>18</sup> Kraidy, op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> Bhabha, op.cit

<sup>20</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1995: 183

<sup>21</sup> Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location*, U of Minnesota Press, 1996, p.159

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Timothy Brennan puts emphasis on “the ability to protest and affirm at the same time”<sup>22</sup>. The “necessity of national struggle: discipline, organisation, people-these are words that the cosmopolitan sensibility refuses to take seriously”<sup>23</sup> for Brennan. Neil Ten Kortenaar calls it the “false consciousness of the cosmopolitan”<sup>24</sup> writer. Added to this, Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that “hybridity is revolutionary only when pitted against a stable essence, such as the idea of an imperialist nation.”<sup>25</sup> Brennan’s point on the ability to protest, as well as being a significant point, might be mentioned in case of an ongoing colonization that has been narrated thousand of times before.

## 2. HYBRIDITY THEORIES: THE COURAGE TO WRITE or A MISMANAGED TOTALIZATION?

On the other hand, we know that hybrid writers’ homelands certainly are fictional. What is important here is that they become the voice of many local authors from their countries of origin. Let’s take here the example of India, writers such as Rushdie uncovered “a dichotomy of the contemporary Indian to conform or not to conform to the notion of the new Indianness”<sup>26</sup>.

The authority, the courage and the belief to write and speak, which these writers have given to the ordinary people, is, I believe, one of their biggest achievements in contemporary English fiction. All of the Indian writers who write in English, for example Allan Sealy, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhuri, Pankaj Mishra create a postdiasporic discourse in which all eclectic elements of identity formation partake. This effect is certainly valuable.

Despite everything, for many critics, some of the hybrid authors such as Rushdie pictures a mismanaged, totalized view of the problems in their countries of origin, because the hybridity, which dominates his writings, becomes the voice of ‘all’ the communities experiencing hybridity in this or that way. He voices people that he does not truly know about<sup>27</sup>. Individuals and communities do not experience hybridity in the same way in relation to their political position, from geopolitics to late capitalist relations.

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<sup>22</sup> Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, Springer, 1989, p.166

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Neil Ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text* in *Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children*, p.249

<sup>25</sup> Shameen Black, *op.cit.*, 55

<sup>26</sup> Tapan Kumar Ghosh, Prasanta Bhattacharyya, *Mapping out the Rushdie Republic: Some Recent Surveys*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, p.110

<sup>27</sup> Ella Shotat, 1992 quoted in Khaled D. Ramadan *Peripheral Insider: Perspectives on Contemporary Internationalism in Visual Culture*, Museum Tusulanum Press, 2007, p.79

The problem of agency still remains one of the complex issues of the field. “Who intervenes or exerts resistance in the name of the colonized?”<sup>28</sup>

Ella Shohat argues, in a similar way, that, this kind of hybridity “fails to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political cooptation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence”, totalizing agency for different forms of hybridities.

In a further discussion, we might claim that authors emphasizing hybridity erase the vast gap between exiles, refugees and migrants from a “Eurocentric point of view”<sup>29</sup> and degrading the migrant experiences that are differentiated by class, gender, political background into one “metropolitan migrant narrative”<sup>30</sup>.

For Kortenaar, they defend one kind of hybridity against another, not against purity or heterogeneity.<sup>31</sup> This writing style is possibly a “highly postmodernist textual emphasis”<sup>32</sup> as Aijaz Ahmad and Benita Parry would prefer to name. According to this group of critics, such as Ahmad, Parry and Arif Dirlik, if the postmodern writer neglects class exploitation and the historical and material conditions of a representation, he/she would never transcend monologism nor ends dominance. Arif Dirlik criticises Third World intellectuals who are disregarding the late capitalist tendencies, in the First World, and propound theories that are far from being practical in their countries of origin. For Dirlik, we must read the processes of the enunciation for the colonized subject “neither inside nor outside the history of western domination but in a tangential relation to”<sup>33</sup> the discourse of domination. “Though Bhabha, Spivak and Said, the trinity of postcolonial studies, are too far removed from the lived reality of Third World countries to arrive at the most suitable solution for the feeling of disease that prevails in the postcolonial world”<sup>34</sup>.

In the same course, R. Trousladespecifies that “writers have elitist tendencies, writing from a privilege position and their “narratives of imaginative assimilation”<sup>35</sup> are not helpful for poorer migrants. This distance between idea-imagination and real life politics evokes Edward Said’s words on how culture makes invisible “the actual affiliations that exist between the world of ideas and scholarship, on the other hand, and the world of brute politics, corporate and state

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<sup>28</sup> Anthony Easthope, *Privileging Difference*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, p.52

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Sabrina Hassumani, *Salman Rushdie: A Postmodern Reading of His Major Works*, Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 2002, p.18

<sup>31</sup> Kortenaar, *op.cit*.

<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Aijaz Ahmad remarks that ‘the postcolonial subject in Bhabha’s theory is remarkably free of gender, class and identifiable political location’ (Ahmad 1995: 13).

<sup>33</sup> Arif Dirlik, *The postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*, The University of Chicago, 1994

<sup>34</sup> Prakash, “Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography,” *SocialText*, no. 31/32 (1992): 8 quoted in Arif Dirlik, *op.cit*

<sup>35</sup> R.Trouslade, *Nabokov, Rushdie, and the Transnational Imagination*, Springer, 2013, p.174

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power, and military force”<sup>36</sup>. The author, the writer or the critic needs to intervene in a representation by fighting against the loss of historical memory and developing counter memories ‘misreading and misinterpreting a collective past and present.’<sup>37</sup> However, as Rey Chow in the part of her book entitled *Where Have All the Natives Gone?* encapsulates this view. She writes: “What Bhabha’s word ‘hybridity’ revives, in the masquerade of deconstructing anti- imperialism, and ‘difficult’ theory, is an old functionalist notion of what a dominant culture permits in the interest of maintaining its own equilibrium”<sup>38</sup> Chow and many others, as detailed above, point out that hybridity is hegemonically constructed in the interest of dominant sectors in society, thus shall remain ambivalent with all the variegated vocabulary, of course if not tied up to social change which address inequality.

### CONCLUSION

It is evident that, at some points, if critics threat hybridity merely from the point of power relations and national identity; they seem to disregard hybridity’s potential to create new discourses and existences by dehistoricizing the important events (such as the 9/11 attacks), depoliticizing, and even depersonalizing them. The importance of conceptualizing the hybridized experience lies on its potential to dialogue between sides, and thus, create an understanding of differences against hegemonic identities. The difference from the postcolonial is that hybridity is just concept and do not possess a master and slave sides. Hybridity, as a concept, stands alone and has variations in itself and degrees of influence.

The existence of such spaces-where the new and old, the native and migrant, the local and the global coexist-problematizes standart narratives of colonialism, postcolonialism and neoglobalism. Consequently, migrant writers who have experienced hybridity in certain ways construct their protagonists to inhabit border territories. In their writing, we find a link between politics, literature and society to rethink, rewrite and resculpt the area of study.

It is the representation of the ‘between and betwixt’ position that means something to us. It is where these writers position themselves; ‘at the moments of change’. Change recon figures not only the novel personalities, but also the plot, the elements and the style of the writing, last but not least, the counter discourse it reunifies. The importance in analyzing these theories, I would suggest, is not only about hybrid writers who have to portray the fragmented reflections and multiple echoes of their communities, it is also the reader who is responsible to embrace

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<sup>36</sup> Rosi Braidotti, Paul Gilroy, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

<sup>38</sup> Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* Indiana University Press, 1993, p.35

this change. Diverse representations of nation, home, family will, thus, cross the restrictive boundaries of the subversive.

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