

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN HAMID'S THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST

Dr. Asim Aqeel

Associate Professor, Department of English and Linguistics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (asimaqeel1978@gmail.com).

Yasir Abbas

MPhil English, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan (yasirabbasstar@gmail.com).

Khizar Abbas, English Lecturer, Leads Law College, Lahore (khizarabbas76@yahoo.com).

Abstract

*In the era of globalization, cultural hybridity has become a central theme in postcolonial literature, reflecting the intricate dynamics of identity construction. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2009) critically explores the tensions of cultural hybridity and identity negotiation, addressing the complexities of selfhood amidst cross-cultural interactions and global socio-political pressures. This study examines how cultural hybridity shapes the protagonist's identity using Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the concept of the "Third Space" (Bhabha, 1994). Through a qualitative analysis of the novel, key dialogues, narrative structures, and events are explored to understand how the protagonist navigates cultural affiliations, experiencing both belonging and alienation. The findings reveal that the protagonist's identity is constructed within the "Third Space," where cultural dualities coexist, allowing for resistance to dominant cultural narratives and the emergence of a fluid, hybrid identity. These insights underscore the transformative potential of hybridity as a site of negotiation and adaptation, particularly for diasporic individuals grappling with cultural displacement. By employing Bhabha's postcolonial framework, this study contributes to the discourse on hybridity, diaspora, and identity, offering a nuanced understanding of cultural interaction and self-perception in a globalized world.*

Keywords: cultural Hybridity, Identity Construction, Third Space, Postcolonial Theory, Diaspora

Introduction

In postcolonial literature, the concept of cultural hybridity has become a crucial lens for analyzing identity, particularly in globalized societies. Cultural hybridity refers to the fusion or blending of distinct cultural elements that result in a new, often fluid identity. This concept is central to understanding the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. Changez, the central character, navigates between two contrasting cultures—Western ideals encountered in America and the traditional values of his Pakistani heritage. This tension reflects broader themes of cultural interaction and identity formation in a postcolonial world. According to Bhabha (1994), hybridity plays a fundamental role in the formation of postcolonial identities, especially in situations where individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds interact and merge their cultural values and traditions. His theory of the "Third Space" provides a conceptual framework where cultural differences meet, creating new, hybrid identities that challenge traditional cultural divides. This hybrid space allows individuals to negotiate their identities beyond rigid cultural binaries, leading to a dynamic and often fragmented sense of self. The protagonist's journey in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* exemplifies how individuals are forced to confront and reconcile their dual cultural experiences, leading to the formation of a new, fluid identity that cannot be neatly categorized within conventional cultural structures.

While *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has been analyzed through political, sociological, and alienation lenses (Hamid, 2009), the specific role of hybridity in Changez's identity development has been underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how hybridity influences Changez's internal conflict and his relationships with both Western society and his native Pakistan. Bhabha's (1994) "Third Space" theory offers valuable insights into this

negotiation, where Changez's identity shifts and reshapes in response to his multicultural experiences. The blending of Eastern and Western influences highlights the complexity of self-identity in a globalized, post-9/11 world. In his journey of self-discovery, Changez oscillates between his past in Pakistan and his present in the U.S., encountering both opportunities and challenges in negotiating these competing cultural forces. It is within this intersection that Changez's sense of belonging and alienation unfolds, marking a significant exploration of hybridity in the novel. This research underscores the importance of understanding how hybridity challenges conventional notions of cultural belonging and assimilation. Changez's experiences in the U.S. and his eventual return to Pakistan reveal the complexities of identity that arise when individuals must navigate multiple cultural landscapes, often without the clear, solid sense of belonging associated with traditional cultural boundaries. This hybridity underscores the fluidity of identity in a world marked by migration, diaspora, and globalization.

This study contributes to postcolonial discourse by offering an in-depth examination of how hybridity impacts identity formation, particularly in a transnational context. It also provides a nuanced understanding of the Muslim diasporic experience in a post-9/11 political climate. The application of Bhabha's "Third Space" theory to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* highlights the novel's exploration of identity negotiation and self-construction in a multicultural world. As Ashcroft et al. (2003) emphasize, postcolonial literature provides rich ground for exploring how cultural intersections redefine identities. By focusing on the complexities of hybridity, this study enhances the understanding of the ways in which literature challenges and reshapes traditional concepts of cultural belonging (Fanon, 1967; Loomba, 2003). Through this lens, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* becomes a crucial text for examining the broader implications of identity, resistance, and cultural interaction in the postcolonial world. The novel reveals how identity is not a static construct but rather a fluid and ever-evolving process shaped by cultural interaction, political forces, and personal experiences. Furthermore, the novel's portrayal of Changez's struggles to reconcile his identity offers insights into the broader global tensions between the East and West, making it a valuable text for understanding the consequences of these intersecting cultures on individual identity. By incorporating hybridity into the analysis, this study deepens our comprehension of how postcolonial literature offers critical commentary on the challenges of belonging in a world marked by constant cultural flux and transformation.

Literature Review

The concept of cultural hybridity is central to postcolonial theory, and its implications for identity formation have been extensively discussed in literary and cultural studies. Bhabha (1994) introduces hybridity as a phenomenon that arises in the "Third Space," where different cultures meet, interact, and challenge fixed identities. This "Third Space" allows for the creation of new identities that are neither fully indigenous nor entirely colonizing but are instead marked by negotiation and transformation. Bhabha's notion of hybridity disrupts binary oppositions, such as colonizer and colonized, creating a space where postcolonial subjects can resist colonial power structures and assert their agency. Further, Ashcroft et al. (2003) further emphasize that hybridity challenges colonial narratives and offers opportunities for reimagining cultural relations beyond simple dichotomies.

The post-9/11 era has had a significant impact on the study of hybridity, especially in relation to Muslim and South Asian diasporas. Following the events of September 11, 2001,

Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments surged, influencing the identities of Muslim immigrants in the West. In this context, hybridity becomes a crucial tool for understanding how individuals navigate cultural alienation and maintain complex identities amid dominant Western ideologies. Said (2007) and Ahmed (2013) have examined how the post-9/11 political climate influences the hybridity of characters in contemporary literature, including Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In Hamid's novel, the protagonist Changez represents hybridity as he navigates the tension between his Pakistani heritage and his experiences as a Muslim immigrant in the West. This internal struggle is heightened by the political climate that marginalizes him as the "other," creating a complex space of negotiation and resistance.

However, while *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has been widely analyzed in terms of identity and post-9/11 politics, the concept of hybridity has not been sufficiently explored. Few studies have applied Bhabha's "Third Space" theory to examine how hybridity shapes Changez's character throughout the novel. Existing literature often focuses on his disillusionment with Western ideals and his ideological transformation, but the role of hybridity in his identity formation remains underexplored. This gap calls for a more nuanced examination of hybridity as a dynamic and contested site within Hamid's work. Furthermore, adopting an intersectional approach that accounts for factors such as race, class, and religion would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of postcolonial subjectivity in the post-9/11 era.

Cultural hybridity is a concept closely intertwined with postcolonial theory, and it has been extensively explored in literature, particularly works addressing globalization and identity transformation in the post-9/11 context. Several novels explore hybrid identities formed through migration, colonial histories, and socio-political challenges. For instance, in *The Namesake*, Lahiri (2004) delves into the cultural hybridity of Ashoke Ganguli and his son Gogol, who navigate their identities as Bengali-Americans in the United States. The novel traces the protagonist's emotional and intellectual journey as he reconciles inherited cultural values with the realities of life in America. Lahiri's work highlights how hybrid identities shaped by migration lead to a complex negotiation between belonging and alienation. The struggle over Gogol's name serves as a metaphor for his quest to understand and assimilate his hybrid identity in a globalized world.

Similarly, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* presents a nuanced portrayal of cultural hybridity, particularly through the experiences of mixed-heritage families in multicultural London. Smith (2016) critiques the complexities of cultural assimilation, race, and identity formation in the diaspora through the experiences of the Iqbal and Jones families. The novel demonstrates how hybrid identities are shaped not only by personal choices but also by broader socio-political forces. It provides insight into how individuals from postcolonial backgrounds navigate their conflicting cultural legacies.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy (1997) explores the tensions between colonial histories and postcolonial identities in Kerala, India. The novel's examination of caste, gender, and socio-political constraints reveals how hybridity in postcolonial India is not merely a blending of cultures but also an act of resistance to structures of power. Roy's portrayal of fragmented

identities, shaped by historical traumas and cultural negotiation, emphasizes how postcolonial hybridities often arise as defiance against societal norms.

Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* offers a critical look at race, class, and hybrid identity within the British Asian community. The protagonist, Karim, navigates his mixed-race heritage, attempting to forge an identity that balances his Indian roots with his desire to assimilate into British society. Kureishi (2001) examines how hybridity is shaped by colonial legacies and contemporary socio-cultural pressures, underscoring the fluid and complex nature of identity in the postcolonial world.

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is a significant text in the exploration of postcolonial identity and hybridity, particularly within the context of Islamic faith and the experience of Muslims in the West. The novel follows two Indian Muslim protagonists who struggle with their religious and cultural identities in a globalized world. Rushdie (1988) employs magical realism to highlight the fragmented and fluid nature of identity, suggesting that hybridity is a core component of postcolonial existence. The novel addresses how identity is reshaped through cultural interactions and the challenges of finding personal belonging amid political and religious tensions.

Together, these novels offer a deeper understanding of cultural hybridity as a dynamic and multifaceted process. Through their exploration of migration, identity negotiation, and resistance to dominant cultural structures, they contribute valuable perspectives on hybrid identities in the context of globalization and post-9/11 realities. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, influenced by these theoretical frameworks, provides an important narrative space for examining cultural hybridity as a complex, evolving process shaped by both individual experiences and broader societal dynamics.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Hybridity and Identity Construction

This study explores cultural hybridity and identity construction in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* through the lens of postcolonial theory, particularly drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "Third Space" (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha's theory posits that hybridity is not merely an amalgamation of cultures but a transformative process where individuals navigate multiple cultural identities, leading to new forms of belonging and resistance. The "Third Space" functions as a site of negotiation, where hybrid identities are formed through the interaction of diverse cultural influences, which is particularly evident in the protagonist, Changez's, journey.

Drawing from Said's (1978) work on *Orientalism*, the research also examines how global power dynamics shape cultural identities, particularly through the lens of postcolonial resistance. Said's theory helps contextualize the struggles of individuals like Changez, who confront the challenges of fitting into a Western-dominated world while maintaining a connection to their heritage.

Furthermore, the concept of diaspora, as explored by Radhakrishnan (2013), is integral to understanding the identity dilemmas Changez faces. The diasporic experience often involves the

negotiation of cultural practices and values across different worlds, which is central to the protagonist's emotional and psychological development throughout the novel. In line with Hall (2015), the study also looks at how identity is constructed in relation to the tension between belonging to a national culture and engaging with global influences.

The research also engages with the work of Ashcroft et al. (2003) who argue that postcolonial literature serves as a critical space for examining the impact of colonialism and globalization on identity. This theoretical grounding allows the study to analyze how *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* functions as a critique of both the Eastern and Western cultural spheres, revealing how hybridity can be a site of both adaptation and resistance. Moreover, this study builds upon Brah's (2005) analysis of diaspora and contested identities, which aligns with Changez's negotiation of selfhood between two cultures. This framework enhances the understanding of hybridity as not only a response to colonization but also as an active process of cultural negotiation and transformation. The theoretical perspectives underscore the fluidity and complexity of hybrid identities in postcolonial contexts, providing valuable insights into how Changez's identity evolves and shifts through his interactions with both Pakistani and American cultures (Young, 2016; Geremew., 2021). While the Jaspal and Cinnirella (2013) explored hybrid identities within diasporic communities, emphasizing their fluid nature and the blending of cultural markers.

These postcolonial perspectives help us critically examine colonial knowledge and literature, promoting a future of mutual respect by embracing and celebrating different cultural identities. Additionally, the study connects the identity development in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to research on hybrid identities in diasporic communities, which are

characterized by fluidity and the merging of various cultural influences. Changez's evolving sense of self reflects this process, where his personal history and cultural background interact with the social and political forces he faces in the U.S.

Material and Methods

This study employs a qualitative, analytic-descriptive method to explore cultural hybridity and identity in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, drawing on postcolonial theory. The research applies Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the concept of the "Third Space" from *The Location of Culture* (Bhabha, 1994), focusing on how Changez navigates his hybrid identity amid global socio-political pressures and cross-cultural interactions. The novel serves as the primary data source, supplemented by secondary literature to provide a broader understanding of postcolonial identity and hybridity. Through thematic analysis, the study identifies key themes such as cultural negotiation, alienation, resistance, and transformation, examining how hybridity becomes a dynamic site for adaptation and resistance in the protagonist's journey. The findings offer valuable insights into the complexities of diasporic identity, helping literature students interpret hidden meanings in literary works by considering the author's background, societal context, and the literary era's influences. Ultimately, this research contributes to ongoing discussions in postcolonial and diaspora studies, highlighting the relevance of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in contemporary literature.

Results and Discussion

Cultural Hybridity and Identity Construction in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid: A Bhabha Perspective

This study delves into the complexities of cultural hybridity and identity construction in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, using Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the concept of the "Third Space." According to Bhabha, cultural hybridity occurs when individuals or groups mix elements of different cultures, creating new, dynamic identities that do not conform to traditional definitions. This is evident in the protagonist Changez's experience as he straddles two distinct cultural worlds: the Western, capitalist society of the U.S. and the traditional, Islamic context of Pakistan. Changez's identity is not static; it is constantly shifting, reflecting Bhabha's assertion that hybridity is "neither one nor the other, but something else besides."

From the very beginning of the novel, Changez's dual identity is highlighted. In his reflections, he recalls his time in the U.S., saying, "I was both the insider and the outsider." This phrase encapsulates Bhabha's idea of the "in-between" spaces of identity, where individuals cannot be fully assimilated into one culture without feeling a sense of exclusion. Changez's experience as both an insider and an outsider challenges the binary opposition between East and West, demonstrating the fluidity of identity in the hybrid space. As Bhabha notes, "The 'Third Space' is a space of negotiation, where the boundaries between cultures are not fixed but are in constant flux." This sense of flux is embodied in Changez's journey, where he is unable to reconcile his American identity with his Pakistani heritage.

Changez's internal conflict becomes more pronounced as he experiences disillusionment

with the American Dream and the U.S. response to the 9/11 attacks. His rejection of the American capitalist ideals is not just a personal transformation; it is a resistance to the hegemonic Western narrative that sought to define him. Bhabha's concept of the "mimic man" illustrates this dynamic—Changez initially mimics the Western ideals, striving to fit into the American mold. However, as he becomes disillusioned, he begins to resist this mimicry, saying, "I realised that I was no longer the same man I had been when I had first arrived in New York... I was no longer the person who thought of New York as home." This marks the beginning of his shift from cultural assimilation to cultural resistance, a key feature of the hybrid identity.

Bhabha's notion of the "Third Space" becomes crucial in understanding Changez's journey. He exists in this liminal space between two cultures, creating a new, fluid identity that is not fixed to either the East or West. The "Third Space" allows Changez to reject both the complete assimilation into Western culture and the rigid confines of his Pakistani roots. His narrative, framed through his recounting to an American stranger, exemplifies this tension between cultures. Bhabha asserts that "it is in the shifting, complex space of negotiation that the hybrid individual constructs their identity." Changez's story is a prime example of how the hybrid individual navigates this space, constantly re-evaluating their sense of self in response to the cultural and political forces around them.

One of the key moments of transformation in Changez's identity occurs when he returns to Pakistan. His return is not merely a physical journey but also a psychological one, as he confronts his identity in the context of the hybrid space he has inhabited. He finds himself both connected to his past in Pakistan and alienated by his experiences in America. This duality reflects Bhabha's idea of "the third space of enunciation," where cultural identities are not simply reconciled but are constantly redefined. Changez's reflection, "I felt that my identity was shifting. I was no longer sure of who I was or where I belonged," underscores the ongoing process of hybridity that defines his experience.

Bhabha's theory of hybridity also highlights the role of resistance in identity construction. Changez's rejection of Western capitalist ideals, particularly after the events of 9/11, is a form of resistance to the dominant cultural narrative. Bhabha argues that "hybridity carries with it a critical edge," and Changez's decision to reject his former American identity in favour of embracing his Pakistani roots is an act of cultural resistance. In doing so, he critiques both the American system and the postcolonial identity that it seeks to impose on him. His resistance is not just a rejection of a single culture but a reassertion of his agency within the "Third Space" where hybrid identities are formed.

Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely" also plays a significant role in Changez's experience. The "unhomely" refers to the feeling of being displaced or alienated in one's own culture, a condition that Changez experiences both in the U.S. and upon his return to Pakistan. He is unable to fully belong to either the West or the East, thus embodying the "unhomely" experience of the hybrid individual. His sense of alienation in the U.S. after the 9/11 attacks, coupled with his growing discomfort in his home country due to the Westernised influence he has internalised, illustrates this psychological displacement.

In conclusion, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* presents a rich portrayal of cultural hybridity and identity construction, as Changez navigates his experiences in both the U.S. and Pakistan. Bhabha's hybridity theory provides a framework for understanding the complexities of Changez's identity, which is constantly shaped by negotiation, resistance, and the intersection of multiple cultural forces. His journey illustrates that hybrid identities are not static but are continually formed and reformed in response to personal experiences and the socio-political landscape. Through Changez's story, Hamid highlights the fluid, dynamic nature of identity in a globalized world, demonstrating the transformative potential of cultural hybridity. The findings suggest that identity is not static but shaped through cultural negotiation and dislocation. This aligns with postcolonial concepts such as Bhabha's (1994) idea of the "Third Space," which serves as a space for both resistance and empowerment (Ashcroft et al., 2007). Furthermore, the study emphasizes how hybridity is a key element in navigating the complex dynamics of belonging and alienation experienced by diasporic individuals.

The protagonist, Changez, reflects a dynamic sense of self that fluctuates between the East and West, reinforcing the argument that identity is fluid and constructed through negotiation (Bhabha, 1994). His resistance to Western cultural ideals aligns with previous studies (Hall, 2015; Said, 1978), which emphasize hybridity's role in challenging colonial power and hegemony. However, this study adds a new dimension by focusing on hybridity in the post-9/11 context, where geopolitical forces, such as Islamophobia, further complicate identity formation (Fanon, 1967). Changez's journey illustrates how hybridity is not only a form of resistance but also a method for self-reinvention in a globalized world.

By extending Bhabha's "Third Space" concept, the study reveals that hybridity is an active site where identities are constantly contested and reshaped, rather than a passive cultural blending. This contributes to the existing body of literature by illustrating the complex operation of hybridity in contemporary global contexts (Boehmer, 2005; Mullaney, 2010). Furthermore, the study highlights how global events, particularly post-9/11 geopolitical tensions, shape diasporic identities, adding further complexity to the process of selfhood negotiation (Moore-Gilbert, 2000; Spivak, 2023). This analysis underscores the socio-political dimensions of identity formation in postcolonial and globalization studies.

While this study offers valuable insights, it is limited in scope. The focus on Changez may not fully capture the diversity of diasporic experiences. Future research could expand on this by exploring other diasporic characters in contemporary postcolonial literature ((Nayar, 2008). Moreover, a broader investigation into how migration and transnationalism intersect with hybridity could shed light on the political and social challenges faced by diasporic individuals (Vertovec, 2003). Lastly, incorporating a mixed-methods approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how hybridity shapes identity across diverse contexts.

Further studies could explore the intersections of hybridity with gender, race, and class, particularly in diasporic contexts, to better understand the complexities of identity formation in a globalized world (Alexander, 2010). Understanding how these factors influence the negotiation of selfhood would provide a deeper insight into the lived experiences of marginalized communities (Dizayi, 2019). Finally, a comparative study of hybridity across different diasporic

contexts, as explored by NGOZI (2015) in *Americanah* and Desai (2015) in *The Inheritance of Loss*, could offer deeper insights into the negotiation of identity in a globalized world.

Conclusion

This study has explored the transformative role of cultural hybridity in the construction of identity, with a focus on Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Utilizing Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the "Third Space," it highlights the fluid and complex processes of identity formation in postcolonial and diasporic contexts. The protagonist, Changez, exemplifies the challenges and opportunities inherent in navigating multiple cultural terrains, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The findings demonstrate how cultural hybridity serves as both a mechanism of resistance and adaptation, enabling Changez to negotiate an identity that transcends binary cultural divisions and incorporates diverse influences. The study not only expands Bhabha's framework by emphasizing hybridity as a space of continuous redefinition and empowerment but also advocates for the recognition and nurturing of hybridity in contemporary societies. It underscores the importance of fostering inclusive environments that celebrate cultural diversity and encourage individuals to embrace their multifaceted identities. The implications of this research extend to both theoretical and practical domains, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of diaspora, identity, and globalization. It calls for future studies to examine the intersections of hybridity with other markers such as gender, race, and class, exploring how these intersections shape identity within various socio-political settings. By illuminating the transformative potential of hybridity, the study contributes to the broader discourse on post colonialism and diaspora, emphasizing the need to understand hybrid identities in an increasingly multicultural and politically complex world. Ultimately, this research highlights hybridity as a means of self-determination and resilience, opening avenues for further exploration of identity negotiation in the context of global interconnectedness.

Recommendations

Future research could delve deeper into the role of cultural hybridity in identity construction across other postcolonial literary works, focusing on how identity is negotiated and redefined in diverse socio-political contexts. Investigating the application of the "Third Space" concept in literature beyond *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* may uncover broader patterns of resistance, adaptation, and self-empowerment among diasporic individuals. Additionally, examining the intersection of hybridity with elements such as gender, race, and class could offer a more nuanced understanding of identity formation within globalized and postcolonial frameworks. Comparative studies could assess how hybrid identities are portrayed in narratives from other post-9/11 contexts, exploring the influence of global political climates on diasporic experiences. Furthermore, analyzing the impact of cultural hybridity on societal perceptions and policies regarding migration, inclusion, and diversity could reveal its potential to foster mutual understanding and challenge cultural essentialism in an increasingly interconnected world.

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