


Chapter 8

Borders and Belonging: Negotiating Identity and Cultural Hybridity in Diasporic Spaces

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the complex negotiation of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity in diasporic spaces through a postcolonial lens, focusing on *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It examines how migration, both legal and illegal, disrupts cultural identity, producing fractured subjectivities shaped by nostalgia, racism, and historical colonial legacies. Drawing on theories by Fanon, Crenshaw, Brah, Bhabha, and Rushdie, the chapter investigates how performative elements like food, language, and names become sites of both resistance and assimilation. It highlights the enduring influence of colonial structures on transnational belonging and identity formation, revealing the intersections of race, class, gender, and nationality. Through the lived experiences of migrant characters navigating liminal, racialized geographies, the chapter critiques how postcolonial subjectivities are formed and contested in globalized yet unequal contexts.*

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INTRODUCTION

Migration, at the basic level, has for the longest time been understood as a constitutive attribute of all species. Demographic flow from one place to another has been a matter of survival for all species, not just a feature of modernity specific to humans, where cultural identities and social spaces are governed by human laws and edicts. From Lee's (1966) theory of migration, written post-World War II in the era of globalization and rapid modernization, to the multiplicity of contemporary trends (Castles et al., 2005), the scholarship for migration itself has seen tremendous evolution. These evolving interdisciplinary approaches show that migration cannot be understood simply through macro structures like states, law, and global economy; rather, micro-level attention is required towards the challenges- physical, personal, psychological, and social-faced by the migrant communities. Focus must shift from the economic and political debates of immigration across borders to the lived experiences of migrants, and their negotiations with belonging, identity, community, and cultural acceptance in host societies.

Postcolonial scholars have further underlined how migration is not just an act inspired by economic needs, but also has deeply historic and cultural effects inseparable from colonial legacies of empire, racism, trauma, and global inequality (Hall, 2015; Brah, 1996). As Hall (2015) argues, diasporic identity is never fixed but always in process, constructed through memory, nostalgia, and difference. Brah's (1996) concept of "diasporic space" similarly underscores that belonging is negotiated across multiple locations, contexts, subject positions, and histories, where none feels at 'home'. This space of negotiation, constructed through contrasting and contesting power dynamics, marked by loss and transformation, conflict and submission, creates new identities—what Bhabha (2021) describes as the third space.

Emotional responses to displacement often trigger acculturation, where individuals from different cultures come into contact with the diaspora, and adopt elements of the alien culture—language, food, social habits—sometimes hiding or degrading their own heritage to gain acceptance. Such trade-offs or instances of abandonment reshape migrant's cultural and psychological identities. A migrant is hence an individual, standing at the border of two culturally distinct spaces, acquainted and alien to both (Murniati, 2020). The identity of a migrant is reconstructed through either assimilation or by maintaining strong social roots and connections in a foreign land, alongside lived experiences and cultural expression (Ganguly, 1992). Borders consequently become the sites of both geographic and symbolic division, where separation is national as well as psychological, social, and cultural. Migrants exist in this liminal space of negotiations, a condition that literature articulates as the diasporic experience.

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