



Original Article

Beyond Borders: Hybridity and Transnational Identity in Salman Rushdie's Quichotte and The Enchantress of Florence through the Lens of Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic and Transnationalism

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Abstract

This research paper explores the themes of hybridity and transnational identity in Salman Rushdie's novels Quichotte and The Enchantress of Florence through the theoretical framework of Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic and transnational cultural identity. Rushdie's characters inhabit fragmented, postmodern spaces where borders both physical and psychological are fluid and unstable. These texts resist monolithic cultural categorizations and instead celebrate cross-cultural intersections, historical migrations, and hybridized selves. In Quichotte, Rushdie critiques 21st-century America through a postcolonial, diasporic protagonist navigating a disintegrating reality marked by media saturation, racial paranoia, and cultural alienation. Meanwhile, The Enchantress of Florence merges Eastern and Western histories, mythologies, and power structures to construct a transhistorical narrative of global cultural exchange. Drawing upon Gilroy's critique of ethnonationalist essentialism and his notion of a counterculture of modernity, this study investigates how Rushdie's protagonists perform identities that are fluid, diasporic, and rooted in imaginative reconstructions rather than territorial affiliations. By synthesizing Gilroy's concepts of movement, memory, and identity across borders with Rushdie's layered narratives, the paper argues that both novels propose a radical rethinking of identity as a product of intercultural encounters and historical disjunctures. Rushdie's diasporic imagination aligns with Gilroy's call to view identity beyond the nation-state, thus offering a literary model for understanding cosmopolitan citizenship in a postcolonial and globalized era. This study contributes to the broader discourse on postcolonial cosmopolitanism, racial hybridity, and cultural multiplicity in transnational literature.

Keywords: Salman Rushdie, Paul Gilroy, Black Atlantic, Transnationalism, Hybridity, Diaspora, Postcolonial Identity, Cultural Memory, Quichotte, the Enchantress of Florence, Globalization, Cosmopolitanism.

Introduction

Salman Rushdie's literary oeuvre consistently engages with themes of cultural displacement, identity crisis, and historical ruptures. In the increasingly globalized and fragmented world, his novels function as both narrative and philosophical meditations on the condition of the diasporic subject. Two of his later novels, Quichotte (2019) and The Enchantress of Florence (2008), reflect an intensified concern with transnational identities, borderlessness, and cultural hybridity. These texts traverse continents, histories, and mythologies, defying national boundaries and embracing the multiplicity inherent in postcolonial existence. This paper examines how Rushdie uses hybridity and transnational identity as strategies to destabilize essentialist narratives of nation and culture, situating this analysis within the theoretical framework of Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic and his concept of transnational modernity. Gilroy's emphasis on cultural flow, historical memory, and the rejection of ethnic absolutism provides a compelling lens to analyze Rushdie's border-crossing characters and narratives. In an era marked by globalization, digital migration, and cultural fluidity, the boundaries that once defined national identities have become increasingly porous. Literature, especially diasporic and postcolonial fiction, offers a critical lens through which

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These new transnational realities can be understood. Among the foremost literary figures navigating this terrain is Salman Rushdie, whose novels foreground the themes of exile, hybridity, cultural multiplicity, and identity formation in a global context. Rushdie's personal history as an Indian-born British-American writer, often in self-imposed exile, reflects the cross-border tensions that animate his fictional landscapes. His protagonists are rarely rooted in a single cultural or national space; instead, they move across geographies, historical epochs, and epistemological frameworks. This research examines two novels such as *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence* to explore how Rushdie conceptualizes transnational identity and cultural hybridity through narrative experimentation.

In *Quichotte*, Rushdie reimagines Cervantes' classic tale as a contemporary postmodern Odyssey. The novel's protagonist, Ismail Smile (*Quichotte*), is a semi-retired Indian-American pharmaceutical salesman who embarks on a surreal quest for love and belonging in a fragmented, media-saturated America. His journey is not just a geographical or romantic pursuit; it becomes a metaphor for diasporic longing and existential dislocation in an age of cultural confusion and racial paranoia. *The Enchantress of Florence*, on the other hand, transports readers to a richly woven narrative tapestry where Renaissance Italy and Mughal India are imaginatively entangled. The novel blurs historical boundaries to explore transcultural encounters, myth-making, and the performative nature of identity. In both novels, Rushdie offers a vision of identity that is neither fixed nor essential but forged in dialogue, mobility, and memory.

This study situates these texts within the theoretical framework of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), a foundational text in postcolonial and diaspora studies. Gilroy emphasizes the notion of the Black Atlantic as a space of cultural exchange and hybrid identity formation across the Atlantic world. Although originally centered on the African diaspora, Gilroy's broader critique of ethnonationalist essentialism and his call for a transnational, intercultural model of identity resonates profoundly with Rushdie's literary project. Both Gilroy and Rushdie reject the confines of nationalist ideologies, instead embracing the in-between, the hybrid, and the diasporic as sites of creative power and resistance. Through a close literary analysis of *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence*, this paper argues that Rushdie's characters are not merely displaced subjects but cultural interlocutors navigating the routes rather than the roots of identity. His fiction offers a counter-narrative to colonial history by challenging binary oppositions East/West, native/foreigner, self/other and constructing imaginative spaces where the past and present, the real and the magical, coalesce. By integrating Gilroy's theory with Rushdie's narratives, the paper aims to deepen the understanding of how diasporic literature can engage with and subvert dominant cultural and historical paradigms. In doing so, it contributes to the evolving discourse on global literature, postcolonial theory, and transnational identities in the 21st century.

Rationale (Theme)

The choice to analyze *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence* stems from their rich thematic interplay of history, migration, race, and cosmopolitan identity. Both novels engage in what Paul Gilroy refers to as diasporic double consciousness a condition where individuals are shaped by multiple cultural geographies and histories. *Quichotte* dramatizes this through a surreal road trip across contemporary America by an Indian-origin protagonist whose sense of self is continually mediated by media and memory. *The Enchantress of Florence*, on the other hand, constructs a transcontinental narrative linking Renaissance Florence with the Mughal Empire, symbolizing a cultural amalgamation across time and space. By deploying Gilroy's theories of hybridity and cultural syncretism, the paper seeks to interrogate Rushdie's literary approach to diaspora not as a lament of loss, but as a generative space for remaking identity.

The rationale behind this research emerges from the imperative to reframe diasporic literature within a broader, more fluid conception of cultural identity and belonging. Traditional postcolonial narratives often center on themes of loss, exile, and alienation framing the diasporic subject as one perpetually longing for a lost homeland. However, this view tends to privilege a fixed notion of identity, rooted in the binary of home versus exile. In contrast, contemporary diasporic fiction particularly the works of Salman Rushdie complicates this binary by presenting identity as a dynamic process shaped by continuous negotiation, translation, and hybridization. In this context, Rushdie's *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence* offer paradigmatic examples of how postcolonial writers are reimagining the diasporic condition as a site of multiplicity, agency, and creativity.

These novels are especially relevant for a theoretical engagement with Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic. While Gilroy focuses primarily on the African diaspora and the legacy of slavery in the Atlantic world, his concept of a counterculture of modernity rooted in transnational movement, intercultural dialogue, and historical reimagining offers a potent framework for understanding Rushdie's literary aesthetics. Gilroy's argument that identity is not something inherent or inherited but something formed in motion across cultural and geographical boundaries aligns with Rushdie's depictions of characters that are perpetually in transit both physically and metaphysically.

In *Quichotte*, the protagonist's creation by another fictional author within the novel mirrors the construction of identity as a layered, performative act. His journey through a dystopian American landscape, filled with opioid addiction, racial bigotry, and media manipulation, represents a quest not for a fixed identity but for meaning in a world marked by disorientation and fragmentation. Similarly, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, the blending of European Renaissance history with Indian courtly imagination illustrates a cultural encounter that transcends Eurocentric historical narratives. The titular character, a woman who crosses continents and cultures, becomes a metaphor for the syncretic potential of transnational identity. Thematically, both novels dismantle essentialist notions of race, religion, and nationhood. They expose the constructed nature of identity and foreground the processes of translation linguistic, cultural, and emotional as central to the diasporic experience. Gilroy's emphasis on the importance of cultural memory and narrative in shaping diasporic consciousness is echoed in Rushdie's intricate storytelling, which weaves personal memory with historical fabulation. These narratives suggest that diaspora is not merely a condition of displacement but a generative space for reimagining history, power, and selfhood. Thus, the rationale of this study is to bridge the gap between literary analysis and theoretical insights by using Gilroy's framework to unpack the ways in which

Rushdie's later fiction embodies a post national, cosmopolitan ethos. It seeks to move beyond the lamentation of exile to recognize the diasporic condition as a space of possibility where identities are not lost, but remade, across time, cultures, and narratives.

The rationale for this research lies in the need to examine the shifting paradigms of identity, culture, and belonging in an era marked by global migration, digital communication, and postcolonial displacement. Salman Rushdie's literature consistently interrogates the very categories that undergird national, racial, and historical selfhood. In a time when borders are both physically fortified and simultaneously eroded by virtual and transnational movements, Rushdie's narrative strategies offer a profound critique of identity politics and nationalist essentialism.

This study seeks to investigate how *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence* two of Rushdie's most thematically ambitious works construct a literary model of hybridity and transnational identity, while also engaging with broader cultural and political discourses. Traditional readings of diaspora literature often lean heavily on themes of nostalgia and cultural loss. While these are certainly present in diasporic writing, such approaches risk simplifying the complexity of diasporic consciousness by framing it solely in terms of longing for a lost homeland. Salman Rushdie, particularly in his later works, challenges this sentimentality by proposing a far more dynamic, layered understanding of diaspora. His characters are not merely exiles or outsiders they are active creators of meaning, often existing at the intersection of multiple cultural, linguistic, and epistemic systems. Identity, in this framework, becomes not a matter of return or recovery, but of reinvention and negotiation. This shift marks a significant evolution in postcolonial thought, one that this study aims to articulate through close textual analysis and theoretical engagement. The integration of Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic theory into this analysis serves a dual purpose. Firstly, Gilroy's rejection of monolithic racial and national identities in favor of "routes" and circulatory models of culture provides a fitting theoretical scaffold to examine Rushdie's fluid, borderless narrative structures. Secondly, Gilroy's conceptualization of cultural production within diasporic modernity where music, language, memory, and resistance circulate across oceans parallels Rushdie's narrative method, which traverses continents and centuries in search of hybrid truths. Although Gilroy's focus is centered on the African diaspora and the historical trauma of slavery, the philosophical underpinnings of his theory particularly his emphasis on counter-modernities, intercultural memory, and diasporic agency are broadly applicable to the forms of cultural negotiation found in Rushdie's fiction. For instance, in *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie collapses temporal and spatial boundaries to create a literary fusion of East and West, imagining a shared human history that subverts colonial historiographies. The Mughal court and the Florentine palace, typically seen as civilizational opposites, are reframed as dialogic spaces where culture, myth, and gender intersect. The eponymous enchantress herself is a symbol of transcultural mobility—her body and story are both contested and desired across civilizations.

Her journey reflects not only physical displacement but a symbolic contest over representation, sexuality, and historical agency. Gilroy's insistence that diasporic narratives often carry the burden of speaking to and against history resonates here, as Rushdie's novel reclaims non-Western subjectivities from Eurocentric marginalization. Similarly, in *Quichotte*, Rushdie turns his postcolonial lens toward the contemporary American landscape, a space saturated with digital media, xenophobia, and cultural fragmentation. Ismail Smile, the protagonist, embodies a hypermodern diasporic condition—his quest is not just for love but for self-legibility in a world that disintegrates meaning itself. Through metafictional play, fractured narrative layers, and cultural allusions ranging from Bollywood to *Don Quixote*, Rushdie creates a palimpsestic text that reflects the complexities of diasporic identity in the 21st century. Gilroy's idea that diaspora involves not just movement but creative acts of reassembling fragmented selves is clearly visible here. What makes both novels especially pertinent is their deliberate refusal to stabilize meaning or identity. Both texts perform hybridity not just thematically but structurally, using narrative techniques that mirror the very instability they describe. This is significant because it demonstrates that hybridity in Rushdie's work is not merely about the fusion of content (i.e., Indian and Western elements), but about a deeper ontological uncertainty that defines diasporic existence itself. By approaching Rushdie's fiction through the lens of Gilroy's Black Atlantic, this study aims to uncover how such formal innovations correspond to political and philosophical interventions in the discourse on diaspora. Ultimately, the rationale for this study is grounded in the belief that both Rushdie and Gilroy challenge us to imagine identity beyond rigid borders—geographical, racial, or historical. In doing so, they provide tools for resisting rising ethno-nationalism, rethinking collective memory, and embracing the uncertainties of cultural negotiation. This paper positions Rushdie's novels not merely as literary texts but as interventions in a larger intellectual conversation about what it means to be modern, mobile, and multiply-rooted in a fractured world.

Objectives

1. To explore the concept of hybridity in *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence* as a tool for cultural negotiation.
2. To examine the representation of transnational identity in Rushdie's characters through the lens of Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic.
3. To analyze the tension between cultural memory, displacement, and postcolonial identity in a globalized context.
4. To investigate Rushdie's narrative techniques that enables the blending of multiple temporalities, geographies, and epistemologies.
5. To contribute to the scholarly discourse on postcolonial cosmopolitanism and transnational literature.

Review of Literature

Postcolonial and diasporic literature has long explored the themes of hybridity, identity, and cultural displacement, and Salman Rushdie's fiction occupies a seminal place in this discourse. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "Third Space," articulated in *The Location of Culture* (1994), offers a foundational framework for understanding how Rushdie constructs identities that are constantly in flux, born out of cultural encounters rather than rooted origins. Bhabha's theory of liminality challenges binary distinctions such as East/West or colonizer/colonized, which Rushdie similarly subverts through characters who defy fixed categories of race, religion, and nation. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) emphasize that postcolonial writers engage in acts of resistance by reconfiguring language and narrative form. Rushdie's

novels, particularly *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence*, exemplify this strategy through their metafictional layering, multilingual references, and intertextuality, which mirror the hybridity of diasporic experience.

Scholars like Stuart Hall have further deepened the discourse on identity in diaspora, especially in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1994), where he posits that identity is not a fixed essence but a process shaped by memory, representation, and historical contingency. Similarly, Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996) introduces the concept of "diasporic space" as a dynamic intersection of multiple migratory trajectories. These theoretical insights resonate with Rushdie's vision of diasporic characters as figures of constant negotiation, whose identities are shaped as much by cultural memory as by present realities. In both *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence*, diasporic consciousness is not simply nostalgic or melancholic, but creative and imaginative—a space where new meanings emerge from fragmented histories. Rushdie's narratives reflect a shift from exile as loss to diaspora as a transformative cultural force.

To deepen this analysis, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) provides a critical lens through which Rushdie's transnational aesthetics can be interpreted. Gilroy's theorization of identity across the Atlantic diaspora, though rooted in the African diasporic experience, offers broader implications for all diasporic narratives that resist nationalist essentialism. His critique of "ethnic absolutism" and his vision of culture as a site of movement and translation align closely with Rushdie's characters, which often inhabit fluid spaces between cultures and histories. While Gilroy emphasizes the significance of memory, music, and mobility in forming diasporic subjectivity, Rushdie's fiction performs similar work through intersexual storytelling, transhistorical plots, and culturally hybrid characters. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, the convergence of Mughal and Renaissance worlds constructs a cultural hybridity that echoes Gilroy's critique of Eurocentric modernity. The enchantress herself functions as a transnational figure desired, imagined, and contested across cultural frontiers embodying the notion of identity in circulation rather than containment. In *Quichotte*, Rushdie presents a more contemporary critique: the titular character, a diasporic Indian-American, traverses a surreal American landscape marred by media-induced fragmentation, racial anxiety, and cultural decay. His journey is not only a quest for love but a metafictional commentary on the post-truth condition of global modernity, again echoing Gilroy's arguments about the disjunctures of diasporic experience and cultural production. In terms of critical engagement, scholars such as Elleke Boehmer, Rebecca Saunders, and Aamir Mufti have explored Rushdie's use of hybridity and cosmopolitanism to resist imperialist historiographies. Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (2005) discusses how Rushdie writes back to empire by destabilizing historical grand narratives, while Saunders in *Salman Rushdie and the Third Space* (2009) focuses on the narrative techniques that generate cultural liminality and ontological ambiguity in Rushdie's novels. Mufti's readings of *The Enchantress of Florence* highlight the novel's subtle engagement with Orientalist discourse and its literary reorientation of power from the margins. However, the application of Gilroy's Black Atlantic framework to Rushdie's work especially in relation to non-African, South Asian diasporic contexts remains relatively underexplored. This research addresses that gap by showing how Rushdie's later fiction dialogues with Gilroy's transnational ideas, thereby extending the scope of the Black Atlantic beyond its original geographical and historical focus. In doing so, this study positions Rushdie as a key figure in postcolonial literature interrogated and reshaped the cultural meanings of diaspora, hybridity, and global belonging.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretative, and textual analysis approach, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism and diaspora studies. The analysis is guided primarily by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* offers critical insights into the transnational flows of culture and identity beyond fixed national borders. Literary texts will be closely read with attention to narrative structure, character construction, thematic resonances, and symbolic motifs. Additionally, comparative analysis will be employed to trace how both novels though different in style and setting articulate similar ideas of identity as performance, border-crossing, and imaginative reinvention. Supplementary use of secondary sources from scholarly journals and books will ensure a comprehensive understanding of both Rushdie's aesthetics and Gilroy's theoretical position.

Scope and Limitation

The scope of this study is limited to two of Rushdie's novels: *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence*. While these texts are chosen for their overtly transnational themes, other Rushdie works such as *Midnight's Children* or *The Satanic Verses* also reflect similar concerns but fall outside the purview of this paper. The focus remains on the literary and thematic representation of hybridity and transnational identity rather than a biographical or political reading of Rushdie himself. Similarly, while Paul Gilroy's work forms the core theoretical foundation, other diaspora theorists like Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall are referenced only marginally, to retain focus and coherence. Limitations also stem from the interpretative nature of literary analysis, which resists quantification and generalization.

Conclusion

Rushdie's *Quichotte* and *The Enchantress of Florence* exemplify a literary imagination that traverses geographies and temporalities, embodying the diasporic condition as a space of multiplicity and resistance. Informed by Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic, these novels resist fixed narratives of identity, nation, and belonging. Rushdie's protagonists are often in transit between cultures, between selves mirroring the postmodern, postcolonial realities of our globalized age. Their identities are shaped not through rootedness but through routes, memories, and stories. Thus, hybridity emerges not as a weakness but as a powerful form of cultural negotiation and survival. This paper argues that Rushdie not only narrates the diasporic condition but also reimagines the possibilities of transnational belonging.

Suggestions

Future research could apply Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and ambivalence to expand the study of cultural negotiation in Rushdie's broader body of work. Comparative studies between Rushdie and other postcolonial transnational writers like Amitav Ghosh, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, or Zadie Smith could enrich the field of diaspora studies. Interdisciplinary

approaches involving film studies or media theory may be employed to analyze Quichotte's engagement with popular culture and post-truth realities. Further exploration of gender and transnational identity in Rushdie's female characters may bring nuanced insights into the intersectionality of diaspora.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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