

CRITICAL CROSSINGS

Hybridity's Fissures and Ruptures

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Abstract

The papers in this special section at once undertake and undermine the discourse of hybridity, at once to recognize the strength of its rhetorical force and critique the limits of its explanatory power. Rather than viewing hybridity as a kind of floating signifier in all its ambivalence as many postcolonial studies have been noted to have undertaken, the papers explore its conditions of possibility in the context of the materiality of the historical situation and specifically in the concreteness of the authors' inscription in history and the worldly particularity of literature, literary form, and criticism. As a category, for a number of years now, hybridity has seemed indispensable for the renewed examination of the formation of the canon, the development of forms, modes of writing, or adaptation of texts in the exploration of its "subversive" possibilities. Apart from its literary inflection, hybridity studies have dealt with the transcultural amalgamation of diverse dimensions focusing variously from the racial to the religious, often interrogating cultural dynamics. But both as a literary trope and discursive category, among the issues that might bear emphasizing is that hybridity as a post-colonial condition has been so often decontextualized as if the experience were homogenous in its assumed universality, rather than heterogeneous in its particularity.

Keywords

1965 Coup, adaptation, anti-hybridity, Carlos Bulosan, hybridity, hybridities, Im Hwa, komiks, Lu Xun, New Order, syncretism

INTRODUCTION

Hybridity has been a familiar trope generally deployed as a discursive category in the humanities and social sciences, or in their disciplinary in-betweenness called cultural studies, which, of late, has been often associated with globalization studies. Particularly in literary studies, its discursive productivity, attracting both commendation and controversy, has been framed within postcolonialism which has been concerned with the contradictory legacies of colonialism (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 18).¹

As a category, it has seemed indispensable for the renewed examination of the formation of the canon, the development of forms, modes of writing, or adaptation of texts in the exploration of its “subversive” possibilities.² Apart from its literary inflection, hybridity studies has dealt with transcultural amalgamation of diverse dimensions focusing variously from the racial to the religious, often interrogating cultural dynamics. But both as a literary trope and discursive category, among the issues that might bear emphasizing is that hybridity as a postcolonial condition has been so often decontextualized as if the experience were homogenous in its assumed universality, rather than heterogeneous in its particularity.³ A related issue has been the equation between hybridity and syncretism as if they referred to the same idea.⁴

The papers included in this section hope to contribute to literary studies by way of a critique of hybridity discourse from different national literatures from Asia, an attempt at what may be called provisionally as critical hybridity, focusing not just on its standard motifs of textual fusions, ambivalences, and paradoxes which have dominated postcolonial studies. In these papers, addressed are those informing motifs, too, only to highlight their othered underside—the textual contradictions, bifurcations, fissures and ruptures, including its “performativity” and epistemic violence that may not be so neatly fused into a “Third Space” but in other perhaps multiple spaces even within a “continent.” From the examples of Im Hwa (Korea), Lu Xun (China), the phenomenon of adaptation, the history of critical polemics in Indonesia, and the case of Carlos Bulosan as an Asian American, such motifs are viewed in relation to their contextual and historical grounding from colonialism and its aftermath, oppression under a dictatorship, its legacy and reincarnations under neoliberal globalization, and to a people’s revolution struggling to write their own national narrative. It is hoped that such a critical crossing of geographies, traditions and modernities, media, histories, languages, or nationalities from these Asian perspectives, thus revisiting the problematic notion of hybridity as fusion which has underpinned hybridity studies like a kind of categorical imperative, will have continued to become a productive intellectual project that underscores

what E. San Juan Jr. calls the resistant imagination beyond postcolonialism that sometimes escape mainstream hybridity studies (2).⁵

HYBRIDITY/ANTI-HYBRIDITY/HYBRIDITIES

“Im Hwa, Hybridity, and the Anti-Colonial Politics of Modern Korean Literature” by Jinhyoung Lee discusses how Im Hwa characterized modern Joseon literature as a result of the hybridization of pre-modern Joseon literature and modern Western literature, thereby devaluing, in effect, the perceived influence of Japanese literature on modern Joseon literature.⁶ By this, according to Lee, Im Hwa insisted that as modern Joseon literature sought literary modernity, it was oriented toward the “serious novel” as its exemplary literary genre, as well as imbibed “immaculate individuality” as its spirit—qualities which were consistent with what was regarded as modernity in Western literature. In the context of the late colonial era, Lee posits that Im Hwa’s formulation, implying literary hybridity, revealed a firm anti-colonial politics. That is to say, discursively produced in the intersection of the language of the colonized and the colonizer, literary-critical hybridity produces cracks in the presumed self-containment and purity of the colonial regime by exposing the existence of heterogeneous and contradictory elements within the colonial regime itself, suggesting possibilities for anti-colonial alternatives. The paper shows that Im Hwa’s exposition of modern Joseon literary history has been criticized by Korean scholars because, allegedly, by emphasizing excessively the influence of modern Western literature on its formation and development, it was believed to have failed to recognize the uniqueness and superiority of Joseon literature. However, significantly, this paper by Lee shows the anti-colonial politics integral to Im Hwa’s exposition of literary history through the lens of hybridity. As the paper suggests, while Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of hybridity could be said to focus on the otherness within the Western authoritative discourse in the first world, Im Hwa’s argument regarding it shows that, for the colonized nations in the third world, hybridity could be useful to seek the locus of resistance to the imperialist authoritative discourse’s attempt at purification or unification under a colonial regime, through the example of Im Hwa.⁷ For him, the paper concludes, this locus may be found in the hybrid space of modern literary history. In this regard, the authoritative discourse is rendered vulnerable in the face of the other discourse which could not be purified or unified.

“The Construction of Modernity in Pre-Independent Indonesia and its Ensuing Manifestation in Critical Discourse and Literary Theory” by Paulus Sarwoto traces the development of critical discourse in Indonesian literature in view of the relative discursive position of the “West” and the “East” from the colonial period to the New Order era. Hybridity, in this context, is an uneasy locus between tradition and modernity. The development of this discourse and its manifestations in

Indonesian literary theory, Sarwoto explains, began with a postcolonial debate on the construction of Indonesian modernity, specifically, towards which center it was going to be oriented. The bifurcation between western-centric discourse, on the one hand, and traditional orientation, on the other, characterized the earliest intellectual debate in 1930s. This rupture in critical positions, however, would take a different turn in 1960s when the tension became one involving social realism versus liberal humanism in the context of Indonesian political history. Eventually, the banning of leftist ideology and teaching after 1965 would set the stage for the unchallenged traditional humanist outlook in literary-critical discourse in Indonesia during the Suharto regime. The paper argues that the present hegemony of traditional humanist approach in Indonesian consciousness is rooted in its distinctive historical development. The downfall of the New Order in 1998, as Sarwoto tries to prove, marks the emergence of yet another set of fissures consisting of two major contradictory strands of this development: the one oriented towards the exploration of sex and sexuality, and its opposite, towards stronger Islamic identity politics.⁸ The concept of modernity formulated since the 1930s and the responses from time to time have informed the changing political landscape of Postcolonial Indonesia, producing yet other bifurcations. In this context, Indonesian critics are challenged to fathom the complexity of the national situation in relation to the emergence of these new distinct and separate trajectories. The paper tries to provide an exposition of the historical foundation upon which these new developments have evolved rooted as much in the syncretic cultural dynamics but problematic alliance of the East and West in the project of modernity as by the contradictions in Indonesian politics, history and society.

“Cultural Capital and the Tale of Two Lu Xuns” by Yang Ke revisits the history of reception to the national icon, Lu Xun, in China, who may be said to bear the collective memory of the nation’s history of struggles as a people, and the ruptures in the country’s literary-critical history.⁹ As the paper asserts, from the start as a young writer who had studied in Japan, his use of vernacular Chinese in his works enabled the Chinese nation to understand the severity and urgency of the national crisis. His modern works were imbued with a kind of symbolic power to enable a much-needed social change, welcomed by the intellectuals and the literati of his day after their publication in the 1920s. It might be said that they were evaluated and interpreted by the readers according to the standard of their time because, later, after the “social” function of fiction was detached from its “pleasure” function as if they were discreet and self-contained functions, in the service of effective propaganda to influence the Chinese masses, “revolution” became the main theme of fiction and other literary works since the 1920s. The representations of the Chinese revolution varied thematically due to its different cultural and historical contexts: It could be about nation-building during the Republic of China, or the fight for socialism and communism after the founding of the People’s Republic of

China, or generally dealt with subject matters that emphasized literature's ability to reflect social concerns and political ideologies. The result was, as Yang elaborates, the transformation of Lu Xun into a symbol of power and prestige until the 1990s. But it also set in motion a bifurcation in the reception to Lu Xun between the symbolic power of his works' modern aesthetic and political implications as may be gleaned from the shifts in the representation of his works in Chinese textbooks. In a sociological sense, at the height of his symbolic power, Lu Xun, wittingly or unwittingly, provided the Chinese government the sociopolitical and linguistic pedagogical tool in Middle school and High School Chinese textbooks. However, by the beginning of the 21st century, the role and stature of Lu Xun changed. The change may be discovered in the understanding of the relationship between literature and politics, two dimensions of his works that had been taken apart throughout the political history of China. Although both functions may be viewed to be symbiotic, a tension existed in the way the works apparently began to be re-evaluated in Chinese history even as they also fought for dominance in terms of normative judgment. But in China, politics has long dominated literary discourse. The use or uses of Lu Xun's works may be illustrative, as the paper argues. Therefore, the symbiosis between literature and politics is marked by a tension resulting in a negotiated space wherein the canonicity of Lu Xun in the history of Chinese literature lies. This "Lu Xun" has been used to transmit intentions and preferences; therefore, the ways of teaching and reading also become ways of being. The ups-and-downs of Lu Xun's works in the past century were mainly about the play of dominant forces and institutions in society. By installing Lu Xun's authority as legitimate and persuasive, "Lu Xun" became a kind of cultural capital that can be passed on.

In contemporary parlance, this phenomenon might be referred to as a kind of critical disjunction between what might constitute culture, on one hand, and capital, on the other, rhetorically, at least. After all, Lu Xun's modernity is a combination of internal and external forces, local/vernacular elements and foreign influences, across textual and contextual considerations. But Lu Xun's example in the history of the reception to his works in China constituted a bifurcation less as a case of hybridity as fusion than contradiction as rupture.

"Reading Carlos Bulosan/Documenting the Filipino Diaspora" by Jeffrey Arellano Cabusao sheds light on the diasporic scope of both Bulosan's literary imagination and the literary scholarship, produced over the span of nearly six decades, on Bulosan's diverse body of writing.¹⁰ Considered one of our most significant Filipino writers of the twentieth century, the paper asserts that Bulosan's writings have transformed how the American literary canon in the United States and the formation (and radical potential) of the Filipino diaspora are conceptualized. Bulosan, himself a member of the first wave of Filipino migrant workers (the

Manongs) in the United States, began to theorize in his writing (poems, short stories, novels, letters, essays) the development of a Filipino diaspora (the global dispersal of Filipino migrant workers). In addition, Cabusao argues that Bulosan's literary aesthetics and radical literary imagination anticipate (and subsequently problematize) the notion of hybridity as a mode of so-called postcolonial agency. This paper, based on the author's editorial introduction to *Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt*, reflects upon the function of hybridity (and how it is problematized) in Bulosan's classic *America Is in the Heart* (1946). *Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt* is the first anthology of essays on Carlos Bulosan's work and life by pioneering scholars in Filipino American Studies, American Studies, and Philippine Studies. This anthology—which includes rare, out-of-print documents—provides students, instructors, and scholars an opportunity to trace the development of a body of knowledge called Bulosan criticism within the United States and the Philippines. To illustrate the development of interdisciplinary scholarly methods/approaches that honor and advance Bulosan's historical materialist diasporic literary imagination for the twenty-first century, this editorial introduction features chapter eighteen of *Writer in Exile/Writer in Revolt*—a dialogue developed by the author with Asian American scholars Marilyn Alquizola and Lane Ryo Hirabayashi on their groundbreaking interdisciplinary research on Carlos Bulosan's activities as a writer/activist during the Cold War period.

“Pelikulang Komiks: Towards a Theory of Filipino Film Adaptation” by Joyce L. Arriola asserts that by all accounts, the practice of Filipino komiks-to-film adaptation in the 1950s seemed to have been problematic as a concept of hybridity. It is for the reason that the phrase “pelikulang komiks,” though referencing the fusion of the iconographic and literary potential of two popular media, leads to a bifurcation of sorts. As Arriola explains, while the target text (film) is expected to be faithful to its source text (komiks), there were always different affects in the 1950s in terms of altered atmospheres, milieus, setting, endings, characterization and contexts. Although two texts are seen to be in dialogue, they sometimes lead to opposite results and functions that may be attributed to the slightly different audience for the komiks and cinema; the different iconographic culture and imaginaries; and, the different modes of experience that may be associated to reading and viewing. I am speaking only of formal issues above. The media culture is another issue. Arriola argues that komiks and film, both borrowed media arts reached their zenith (at least one of those notable peaks) in the 1950s, when the Philippines was excited to urbanize; to try out a more commodified lifestyle; to romanticize eras past; and, to experience every sort of cultures in their tiniest spheres. There was, as one scholar puts it, a sort of “superabundance.” In its excitement over the new, it was fixated to a notion of the nation via the popular (à la David Forgacs/Antonio Gramsci). That notion of national-popular is supposed to be hybridity in a most conflicted sense since it is a mediated form of nationalism, what Homi Bhabha would refer

to as both narrativized (therefore unofficial; anti-totalizing) and pedagogical (because co-opted by the state and achieved through forced consensus by the culture industry).¹¹ This bifurcation caused by this hybrid concoction (pelikulang komiks), she posits, is the consequence of the postcolonial identity-seeking cultural formations that came about at the height of the much-hyped “Decade of Philippine Nationalism,” a concept which has been premised on liberal impulses that have led to an impasse in succeeding decades in pursuit of nationalist project. Behind all the American importation, attempts at borrowing, appropriation, merging of elements, and recycling of genres lies the shadow, with the doubleness of a specter and the bifurcation of the spectacle and spectrality, that mark adaptation’s hybridity as fissure between komiks and foreign film genre becoming Filipino.

CONCLUSION

The papers in this special section at once undertake and undermine the discourse of hybridity, at once to recognize the strength of its rhetorical force and critique the limits of its explanatory power. Rather than viewing hybridity as a kind of floating signifier in all its ambivalence as many postcolonial studies have undertaken, the papers explore its conditions of possibility broadly in the context of the materiality of the historical situation and specifically in the concreteness of the author’s inscription in history and the worldly particularity of literature, literary form and criticism. As Marwan M. Kraidy states, hybridity “requires a relational, processual, and contextual approach to hybridity from a critical perspective—hybridities, each as a particular localized practice, as opposed to a singular hybridity conceived as an all-inclusive sociocultural order.”¹²

Still, for all the transgression of cultural borders professed in its name, hybridity is not a zero-sum game; on balance, non-hybrid figures or elements that perhaps defy hybridization are ignored or silenced, as may be inferred from the mutations of bifurcations that underpin the specific historical dynamics described by the papers in this special section. Without assuming an originary space of unadulterated purity, apropos, it might be asked: What happens to those forces that resist fusion akin to the case of a source text in need of translation, as it were, whose affect, for example, resists or is unable to cross over into the target text, caught neither in the interstices of binary thinking nor in the third space that hybridity has claimed for itself?

Notes

1. In the famous passage from *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha states, "When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival." In this passage, one recognizes that the meaning of hybridity at the core of Bhabha's intellectual work, is as slippery as it is necessary, conceptually exciting as well as baffling.
2. "Hybridity in Contemporary Postcolonial Theory" by Anjali Pabhu, for example, revisits the "radical" claims for hybridity of postcolonial theory. She states, "In theoretical discourse, hybridity has spawned a variegated vocabulary.... Although skeptical about the validity of an exuberant type of hybridity that, it is claimed, poses an effective challenge to oppressive forces of an increasingly globalized world, I am interested in exploring what, if any, beneficent hybridity holds for a radical conception of agency. The term "radical" means quite simply here that agency, in this conception, must be tied to social change in which some inequality or justice is addressed" (1–2).
3. Such universalizing impulse associated with hybridity discourse has not been lost even to its major practitioners in postcolonial theory like Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin who have said that "The assertion of a shared post-colonial condition such as hybridity has been seen as part of the tendency of discourse analysis to de-historicize and de-locate cultures from their temporal, spatial, geographical and linguistic contexts, and to lead to an abstract, globalized concept of the textual that obscures the specificities of particular cultural situations" (118–119). In *Post-colonial Studies The Key Concepts*. Second edition, Routledge 2007. pp. 118–19.
4. Flora Veit-Wild, for example, argues that syncretism and hybridity seem to be deployed interchangeably in hybridity discourse. She argues for their separation, preferring to distinguish "between syncretism as applying to the literary product (which represents a fusion of elements of different yet still recognizable origins) and hybridity as a completely new new subject-position and consciousness arising out of such a fusion" (28).
5. San Juan sees postcolonialism within which hybridity discourse falls, "Post colonial theory, is, to my mind, more than a cultural or literary phenomenon limited to those who have undergone the colonial experience." From this perspective, it is arguable that hybridity is not limited to postcolonial experiences.

Moreover, in "Critical Perspectives on Hybridity and the Third Space," Amar Acheraïou states "Critics of hybridity theory in academia range widely and can be schematically divided into three distinct categories. The first category includes scholars who completely reject hybridity discourse, deeming it entirely useless. This type of criticism usually consists in denying that the theory of hybridity has any conceptual value, albeit without providing substantiated, convincingly argued claims. The second category comprises scholars who adopt an intermediate critical

position which broadly approves of hybridity discourse, but who nonetheless occasionally embark on mild criticism of this discourse, albeit without profoundly questioning its conceptual and empirical potential. This intermediate critical approach is useful, in a way, but also limited, as it tends to maintain the theoretical and ideological status quo. The third category consists of scholars who are bitterly critical of both the identity and ideological orientations of postcolonial studies. This somewhat radical critical trend usefully draws attention to shortcomings within the theory of hybridity by confronting hybridity theory with the material context which it often eludes. This type of criticism can be seen as productive, in the sense that it creates a dialogical space whereby a constructive discussion of the identity and role of postcolonial hybridity theory can take place.”

6. Im Hwa was born in 1908 and died in 1953.
7. Following the categories set up of Amar Acheraïou mentioned above, Lee’s paper may be said to be productive in its deployment of hybridity discourse by assigning to hybridity a dynamic and transformative role for both discourse and agency.
8. Indonesian President Suharto coined the term “New Order” as he rose to power in 1966 through a violent coup, by which his dictatorship, from 1966 to 1998, would be known.
9. Lu Xun, a major author in modern Chinese Literature, is one of the most best-known, if not the best-known, worldwide, among modern Chinese authors. He was born in 1881 and died in 1936.
10. Carlos Bulosan was a Filipino fictionist and poet in English who migrated to the United States when he was a young man. He was born in 1913 and died in 1956. Most entries in encyclopedias and anthologies cite his famous work, *America Is in the Heart*, among his other major works, dealing with life in the Philippines as a boy and in diaspora as an adult.
11. Homi K. Bhabha states, “What I want to emphasize in that large and liminal image of the nation . . . is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live in it” (*Nation and Narration* 1).
12. Marwan M. Kraidy, Hybridity in Cultural Globalization. *Communication Theory*, 12 (3), 316-339. https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1334&context=asc_papers.j.1468-2885.2002.tb00272.x. Accessed on 5 Jan.2018.

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