

Reimagining Identity and Resistance in Contemporary Postcolonial English Literature

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Abstract

In the world literary scene, the contemporary postcolonial English literature represents one of the most vibrant and politically hot branches, which generate texts that grieve colonial dispossession and celebrate cultural survivance, challenge neo-colonial continuation and speculate on the opportunities of decolonised subjectivity. The paper will sustain a critical analysis of how post-imperial writers, mainly Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Edwidge Danticat, and NoViolet Bulawayo, re-invent identity and resistance in and through the remnant forces of colonialism. Based on the theoretical paradigms of notions of Homi K. Bhabha of hybridity and mimicry, the ability of the subaltern to self-represent, as detailed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Frantz Fanon in his psychopolitics of colonial violence and decolonial becoming, and Stuart Hall in his cultural theory of diasporic identity, the paper proposes that identity in postcolonial literature is not a fixed set of definitions to be reclaimed but instead is a subversive and contentious and continually negotiated field that operates in the in-betweenness between the colonial past and the postcolonial present. Resistance, correspondingly, is shown to operate not only through explicit political opposition but through the more subtle and pervasive strategies of narrative subversion, linguistic appropriation, memory recovery, body politics, and the refusal of metropolitan literary conventions. The paper contributes to postcolonial literary studies by demonstrating that the most significant contemporary postcolonial texts develop a critical grammar of agency that exceeds both the celebratory nationalist teleologies of earlier decolonisation literature and the depoliticising tendencies of certain strands of postmodern theory.

Keywords: *postcolonial literature, identity formation, cultural resistance, hybridity, subaltern agency, diasporic writing, decolonisation*

1. Introduction

The literature that has emerged from the sites of the former British, French, and Portuguese empires over the last seven decades constitutes a body of writing of extraordinary diversity, formal inventiveness, and political urgency. From Chinua Achebe's foundational rewriting of the colonial encounter in *Things Fall Apart* to the millennial fictions of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and the essay-novels of Teju Cole, postcolonial English



literature has insisted on the right of formerly colonised peoples to speak in their own voices, to represent their own experiences, and to theorise their own conditions of existence in ways that challenge the representational monopoly the colonial project attempted to establish over their lives and histories. That assertion is as politically charged and aesthetically abundant in the twenty-first century as it was the first time Achebe wrote it in his scathing critique of Joseph Conrad in 1977 in his work "An Image of Africa" when he wrote:

However, the literary and critical landscape has changed significantly since the first steps of postcolonial writing. The formal independence that was the horizon of aspiration for the generation of Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Raja Rao has been achieved and then complicated by the persistence of neo-colonial economic structures, the violence of postcolonial nation-states toward their own marginalised populations, the dispersal of formerly colonised peoples across metropolitan centres through migration, and the emergence of new cultural formations that resist the neat binaries of colonial and anti-colonial discourse. Contemporary postcolonial writers, writing in this more complex and in some respects more disorienting historical moment, have developed literary strategies for imagining identity and resistance that are more ambivalent, more hybrid, more attuned to internal contradictions, and in certain crucial respects more politically sophisticated than the cultural nationalist aesthetics of the decolonisation era.

This paper examines those strategies through close reading of selected texts and sustained engagement with the postcolonial theoretical tradition. Its central argument is that contemporary postcolonial literature has developed a critical grammar of agency, by which is meant a set of literary and rhetorical strategies through which colonised and formerly colonised subjects can articulate identity and enact resistance in ways that acknowledge the damage of the colonial past without being imprisoned by it, that celebrate cultural particularity without reifying it into an essentialist identity politics, and that imagine possibilities of solidarity and transformation that are adequate to the complexity of the neo-colonial present. Understanding that grammar, and the literary texts in which it is embodied, is not merely a scholarly exercise. It is a contribution to the intellectual infrastructure of decolonisation as an ongoing project.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical frameworks that inform the analysis. Section 3 examines the construction and deconstruction of identity in selected contemporary postcolonial texts. Section 4 analyses the literary strategies of resistance. The particular dimensions of gender, body and subaltern voice are discussed in section 5. In section 6, the authors discuss diasporic identity and the politics of inclusion. Section 7 provides conclusions and implications on the field.

2. Theoretical Frameworks: Locating the Critical Field

The theoretical field of the postcolonial studies is marked with the fruitful tensions between various dominant traditions of intellect which this paper selectively and critically draws on. Frantz Fanon and especially *The Wretched of the earth* and *Black Skin, White masks* give the most probing explanation of the psychological and political aspects of the colonial subjection and the circumstances under which the real decolonial subjectivity can be established. To Fanon, colonialism is not just an economic and political order but a totalising attack on identity, self-image and being of the colonised: the colonial subject is created as a negation, as the constitutive outside of European humanity, in a process which must involve systemic violence against the body, the culture, the language and the psychic life of the colonised peoples. Resistance, to Fanon, should be conducted in this totality: it is not enough to use a native elite to perpetrate political power and leave the cultural and psychological frameworks of colonialism intact.

Genuine decolonisation requires the creation of "new men" and "new women," a phrase Fanon uses not in a gender-neutral way but with a specific attention to the revolutionary transformation of subjectivity that colonial freedom demands (Fanon 36).



Homi K. Bhabha's reworking of colonial discourse theory through the lens of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism offers a more ambivalent and in certain respects more troubling account of colonial power and postcolonial identity. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and the third space have been enormously productive for postcolonial literary criticism, providing theoretical vocabularies for describing the ways in which colonial subjects appropriate and subvert the discourses of the coloniser, occupying an ambivalent position "in-between" cultures that is neither simply compliant nor simply oppositional (Bhabha 36). The figure of mimicry, in Bhabha's analysis, captures the menacing potential of the colonial subject who adopts the coloniser's culture "almost the same, but not quite": the mimicry that is demanded by the civilising mission contains within itself the possibility of mockery, of the exposure of the artificiality of the colonial authority it imitates (Bhabha 86). Bhabha's work has been criticised, with some justice, for its tendency toward abstraction and its neglect of the material conditions in which colonial power operates, but its insights into the performative and citational dimensions of colonial identity remain indispensable for the literary analysis of postcolonial texts.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's foundational question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", poses what remains the most politically charged problem in postcolonial studies: the extent to which those most marginalised by the intersecting structures of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy can achieve representation within intellectual and political discourses that remain shaped by the epistemological structures of the colonial order (Spivak 283). The nuance of Spivak to the answer often taken to be a mere negative is that the subaltern cannot speak and be listened in the prevailing representational formats, that the terms outlining intelligible subaltern speech are those that necessitate a change in the structures in which subaltern speech is barred, and that the task of the intellectual is not to represent the subaltern, but criticize the structures that do not permit the subaltern to speak. These have important implications of postcolonial literary criticism: the retrieval of subaltern voices in texts is not a mere operation of recovery of the archival, but a politics of redress that needs to be sensitive to its own conditions of enabling and perhaps constraining itself.

The cultural theory of identity as developed by Stuart Hall over a collection of essays, such as "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" and "New Ethnicities" offers a more specifically political and less theoretically abstract way of looking at the identity of postcolonial situations. The two conceptions of cultural identity, as a stable essence to be reconstructed and as a production that is never complete, always in process, and always constituted, and always located within, not outside, the representation (Hall 222) are the main difference between two notions about the cultural identity formation that is implemented in this paper. To Hall, diasporic and postcolonial identities are created through the staging of continuity and discontinuity, of similarity and difference, of placement of subjects in historical ensembles that are neither wholly determining nor wholly open. This relational, contextual, and positional (as opposed to essential) understanding of identity offers the theoretical framework of the reading of the complicated identity formations in the texts discussed below.

The original analysis of Edward Said in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* of the interaction between the representation of culture and the imperial power presents the essential critical-historical perspective under which the modern postcolonial textual production has to be deciphered. Said's demonstration that the literary and cultural canon of European imperialism was not merely a backdrop to colonial power but a constitutive element of it, that the novel in particular was deeply implicated in the production of the colonial imaginary that made empire imaginable and desirable, creates the critical imperative for postcolonial literary production and criticism alike: the deconstruction of the representational apparatus of colonialism and the construction of counter-representations that restore the humanity, the complexity, and the historical agency of those whom imperial culture reduced to stereotypes and exotic objects (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 14).



3. Identity: Construction, Fracture, and Re-Negotiation

The representation of identity in contemporary postcolonial fiction is characterised by a consistent refusal of the essentialist models that were in some respects central to the cultural nationalist projects of the decolonisation era. Where the first generation of postcolonial writers was often animated by the task of asserting an African, Asian, or Caribbean identity against the colonial denial of the humanity and cultural value of colonised peoples, contemporary writers have inherited both the achievements and the limitations of that project and have developed more ambivalent, more internally differentiated, and in certain respects more politically honest accounts of what postcolonial identity is and can be.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's fiction exemplifies this more complex understanding of postcolonial identity with particular clarity and power. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the construction of individual identity is shown to be simultaneously a colonial inheritance and a site of potential liberation. Kambili, the novel's protagonist, must negotiate her identity against multiple competing claims: the tyrannical Catholic piety of her father Eugene, a figure whose very name signals his colonial formation; the more fluid and culturally syncretic world of her aunt Ifeoma; and the Igbo cultural practices that her father has suppressed in his own household but that retain their vitality as resources for selfhood. Adichie demonstrates that the construction of identity in *Kambili* does not take the shape of a recovery of a pre-colonial identity but rather a creative negotiation between these various and conflicting inheritances. When Kambili discovers her voice throughout the novel as she learns to speak beyond a whisper, she is not restoring her own pre-colonial self, but creating a new subjectivity that would benefit her situation in history, a new subjectivity that will not be determined by colonial injury but rather than be defined by it (Adichie 15).

This sense of identity as an imaginative bargaining process, not the recuperation of any kind of essence is also the crux of Salman Rushdie, but it functions in quite different aesthetic modes. In his early novels, especially *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie builds up the character of the hybrid subject through a formal inventiveness which is reflected in its thematic interests. The narrator of *Midnight children*, Saleem Sinai, shares the contradictions of postcolonial Indian identity in his very physiology: being born at the time of independence, he is literally made up of the forces that created the independent India, and his body is the map of its history, its optimism, its violence, its fragmentation. The famous phrase, "I had been so-many-too-many things," captures Rushdie's understanding of postcolonial identity as constituted by excess and multiplicity rather than essence and singularity (Rushdie 464). The self in Rushdie is always multiple, always constructed of heterogeneous elements drawn from divergent traditions, always in process, never complete.

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* extends this analysis of fractured postcolonial identity into the post-Cold War period of globalisation, examining the ways in which the identities of characters who move between India and the United States are simultaneously shaped by the residue of British colonialism and the new forms of American neo-colonial power that succeeded it. The novel's structural organisation, alternating between the Himalayan highlands of Kalimpong and the New York restaurant kitchens where Biju labours as an illegal immigrant, creates a formal embodiment of the split consciousness that characterises neo-colonial modernity. Desai's achievement is to show that the hybridities of globalisation are not the celebratory hybridity of Bhabha's postcolonial theory but are produced by the same fundamental asymmetry of power that shaped colonial hybridity: those who move between cultures do not do so with equal freedom, and the cultures they inhabit are not equally valued within the global order that their movement serves (Desai 34).

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* approaches the question of identity through the intersecting optics of caste, colonialism, gender, and class, demonstrating that postcolonial identity cannot be understood without attending to the internal hierarchies that colonial rule both exploited and reinforced. The "Love Laws" that govern Pappachi's household and determine the fate of Ammu and Velutha are simultaneously caste laws, colonial laws,



and patriarchal laws: they represent the fusion of the indigenous structures of social hierarchy with the colonial project of social regulation in ways that make any simple decolonial identity politics inadequate to the analysis of their power. Such formal approach to non-linear, fragmented narrative, where Roy switches between 1969 and to the present of 1993, reflects the understanding that postcolonial identity is made, it is constituted by a relation to traumatic history whose impact still plays out in the present in ways that cannot be simply resolved through a narrative (Roy 52).

Literary Strategies of Resistance

The mechanisms by which the contemporary postcolonial authors act out resistance to and through their literary works are various, complex, and cannot be traced only to the obvious political resistance which an unsophisticated view of the so-called resistance literature would have us believe in. The greatest kinds of writing resistance in the works reviewed here are at the level of form, language, narrative tradition, and representational politics as opposed to at the level of explicit political statement, although the latter is also found and significant.

The site of language is, perhaps the most basic site of postcolonial literary resistance, since it is here that the colonial power invaded the cognitive and cultural life of colonised peoples most deeply, through the imposition of European languages and the suppression of the native ones. The fact that the postcolonial writer writes in English is an inherently complicated, ambiguous, and politicized act: English is the language of the colonial conquest, the one in which the coloniser perceived the cultural supremacy and the political conquest, and the language in which the strongest counters to the former have been raised. Famous defence of the usage of English provided by Achebe was based on conscious appropriation: I believe that English will be able to bear the burden of my African experience, though it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its originary home but adapted to its new African environment (qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 7).

Modern authors have taken this endeavor of linguistic appropriation and transformation with greater sophistication and formal aspirations. Not only is her use of Igbo words, phrases, and even syntactic structures in her English prose more than a gesture of cultural authenticity but it is also a formal argument over the nature of the relationship between language and identity: when the reader, who is not a speaker of Igbo, finds herself in the position of the cultural outsider, at least temporarily they are forced to experience something of the estrangement that the colonised subject felt on the colonial side of the equation. Rushdie does not stop there with his linguistic experiments: the polyglot intertextuality of *Midnight Children*, which pits together allusions to Sanskrit and Urdu literature, Hollywood cinema and English literary tradition, creates a prose style which formally represents the consciousness of hybridisation of the objects of its writing, denying that any one cultural tradition is the authoritative locus of value.

NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* employs the innocent narrative perspective of the child Darling to devastating critical effect, using the gap between what Darling observes and what she understands to create a space of irony in which the violence and dispossession of post-independence Zimbabwe are made visible in their full horror without the distancing mechanisms of analytical language. The novel's first section, set in a Zimbabwe that is never named, represents through Darling's eyes a landscape of radical deprivation and political violence in which children's games constitute both an escape from and a reproduction of adult brutality. The novel's resistance operates through this deployment of narrative point of view: by showing the world through a child's eyes, Bulawayo denaturalises the political violence and economic deprivation that adult discourse tends to normalise, making visible the human cost of the political configurations that produced "paradises" such as Budapest, the name the children give to the suburb of wealthy white residences they raid for guavas (Bulawayo 3).

Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* develops a specifically Caribbean feminist aesthetics of resistance that locates the site of colonial violence and postcolonial freedom simultaneously in the body, particularly the female body. The novel's central figure of the "testing," the ritual vaginal inspection that Sophie's mother Martine



performs to verify her virginity, concentrates in a single practice the multiple oppressions that Haitian women inherit from colonial history: the patriarchal control of female sexuality, the internalisation of colonial surveillance mechanisms by the colonised themselves, and the transmission of trauma across generations through the body rather than through conscious memory. Danticat's achievement is to show that resistance to this complex of oppressions must also pass through the body: Sophie's path to freedom is not an intellectual or political journey but a bodily one, requiring the recovery of a positive relationship to her own physical existence that has been damaged by generations of surveillance and control (Danticat 47).

The formal strategies of resistance in contemporary postcolonial fiction also include the deployment of what might be called counter-archival narrative, the deliberate excavation and re-presentation of histories that colonial record-keeping suppressed, marginalised, or distorted. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, as well as its predecessor Roy, is structured by the process of recovering repressed histories: the history of the hijra people of Delhi, the history of the Kashmir conflict as told by its civilian casualties, and the history of Naxalite resistance of the central Indian region. These recovered histories do not merely insert new content into an already existing structure of narrative; they call into question the temporal and causal structures to which the official historiography makes sense of the past, by asserting that the history of those who are marginalized in the narrative of modernity are neither peripheral histories of that narrative but rather its constitutive parts (Roy, Ministry 67).

5. Gender, Body and Subaltern voice.

This intersection of colonial domination and patriarchal formations of gender has been a primary point of postcolonial feminist literary criticism since at least Spivak, in her intervention in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", and it is an aspect of modern postcolonial fiction that requires long-term critical consideration. The colonised woman is thus doubly marginalised by the representational forms of both the colonial discourse and the anti-colonial nationalism: to the coloniser, she is the feminised embodiment of the inferior culture which gives justification to colonial mission; to anti-colonial nationalism, she is often the embodiment of the authentic cultural values which need to be preserved against colonial erosion, a role that in turn often leads to her continuing subordination to patriarchal domination in the nationalist project (Mohanty 65).

Contemporary postcolonial women writers have worked against both of these representational imperatives with striking consistency and formal inventiveness. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is exemplary in this respect, depicting the Biafran War through the experiences of three characters, Ugwu the houseboy, Olanna the educated woman, and Richard the English expatriate, whose different positions within the social hierarchy of wartime Biafra generate radically different perspectives on the same events. Adichie's narrative strategy simultaneously foregrounds the gendered dimensions of the war's violence, including the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war, and refuses to reduce her female characters to the role of victims of that violence. Olanna and Kainene are fully realised human beings whose political and intellectual engagements with the Biafran cause are shown to be as substantive and as complex as those of any male character. The novel's refusal of both victimhood and idealization in its representation of women constitutes its most significant feminist intervention (Adichie, *Half* 132).

The question of subaltern voice and its representation raises methodological challenges that the most sophisticated contemporary postcolonial writers acknowledge within their texts rather than resolving them through narrative fiat. Roy's construction of Velutha in *The God of Small Things* as a character who is present throughout the novel but whose interiority is never directly accessed by the reader is not a failure of representation but a deliberate formal choice that embodies Spivak's insight about the limitations of subaltern representation. Velutha, the Dalit carpenter who becomes Ammu's lover and is subsequently destroyed by the convergence of caste, colonial law, and communist party politics, exists in the novel primarily as the object of other characters' perceptions and projections. His silence is not the silence of an absence but of a presence that the novel's narrative structure, shaped



as it is by the perspectives of those who occupy positions of relative privilege, cannot fully accommodate. Roy seems to be making an argument about representation itself: that the subaltern's story cannot be told within existing narrative conventions without doing further violence to his subjectivity (Roy 200).

Bulawayo's treatment of gender in *We Need New Names* is organised around the figure of Darling's mother, a woman whose presence in the novel is marked primarily by absence — she is absent when Darling most needs her, working as a domestic servant in wealthy white households, her labour appropriated for the reproduction of the affluent life from which her own family is excluded. The mother figure in Bulawayo's novel becomes a concentrated figure for the gendered dimensions of structural inequality in post-independence Africa: the "freedom" that independence supposedly brought did not extend to the freedom from labour exploitation that shaped the lives of working-class women, whose bodies remained available for the domestic service of the comfortable classes in ways that reproduced the racial and class structures of the colonial era even after its formal ending.

The recovery of the body as a site of both colonial inscription and decolonial resistance is a recurring concern across contemporary postcolonial women's writing. Danticat's Sophie, having experienced the bodily trauma of the "testing," recovers her relationship to her body through a gradual and painful process that the novel figures through the cultivation of a healing garden and through her participation in a sexual phobia group led by a therapist named Rena. This narrative of bodily recovery is also a narrative of cultural re-inscription: Sophie's healing requires not the rejection of her Haitian identity but its re-articulation on terms that are not those of inherited trauma. The body that emerges from this process is not a pre-colonial body restored to its original wholeness but a postcolonial body that carries its history while refusing to be defined by it — precisely the kind of dynamic, negotiated identity that Hall's theoretical framework describes.

6. Diaspora, Belonging, and the Politics of Home

The experience of diaspora, the dispersal of formerly colonised peoples into metropolitan centres, has produced some of the most formally innovative and thematically rich work in contemporary postcolonial literature. Diasporic writing occupies a peculiar position within the postcolonial field: it is produced by subjects who inhabit both the formerly colonised "homeland" and the metropolitan centre, who experience the culture and politics of both from a position of partial belonging and partial estrangement, and who therefore have a distinctive vantage point on the continuing operations of colonial and neo-colonial power. The diasporic subject, as Hall argues, is "the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belonging at one and the same time to several home[s]" (Hall 235), a condition that is both a form of loss and a form of critical privilege.

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* constructs diasporic experience through the story of Saladin Chamcha and Gibreel Farishta, two Indian actors who fall from an exploding aircraft above England and survive through miraculous and symbolically charged physical transformations. Saladin, who has spent his career in England performing English voices for other people's narratives, literally becomes the devil of English racial imagining, his body transforming into the horned, hoofed, foul-smelling creature that the racist imagination projects onto the bodies of immigrants.

This physical conversion is the most long-lasting and potent characterization Rushdie gives to the workings of racist ideology: the immigrant who is made to live up to the imaginations and phobias of the host culture, the formation of an identity through the representational machine of a community both in need of and excluding him. The aspect of satire is obvious but also the understanding of the psychological harm one process can do: the path of Saladin through the novel is a gradual, agonizing rediscovery of an identity that is not England creating him, but his own (Rushdie, *Satanic* 168).

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Desai uses his reflection on the concept of diaspora by contrasting the Anglophile Judge Jemubhai Patel who, having received a colonial education in England, is alienated between the two cultures,



with his grandson Biju, whose own experience as an illegal immigrant is similarly a variation of the same alienation created by the same underlying asymmetry of global power. Desai's achievement is to refuse nostalgia as a response to diasporic alienation: neither the India the Judge remembers nor the America Biju dreams of corresponds to the reality of either place. The novel suggests that the longing for home that animates diasporic consciousness is a longing not for a real place but for a condition of belonging that global inequality systematically denies to those who occupy the wrong position in its hierarchy. The title's "inheritance of loss" captures the novel's central insight: the legacy that the colonial encounter bequeaths to postcolonial subjects, in whatever country they find themselves, is a loss of the full, unselfconscious belonging to a culture and a place that the colonial rupture made permanently impossible (Desai 289).

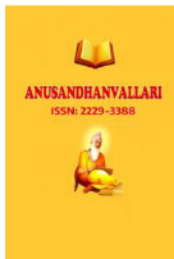
Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, though an earlier text, remains perhaps the most powerful single example of the postcolonial diasporic imagination at work on the canonical text of English literary culture. Rhys's rewriting of *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Antoinette/Bertha, the Creole woman whom Rochester has married for her money and transported to England, where she goes mad in his attic and burns down Thornfield Hall, is simultaneously a recovery of a suppressed history, a critique of the gendered and racialised structures of Victorian narrative convention, and an investigation of the condition of the colonial subject who is neither fully at home in the Caribbean nor fully legible within the English cultural framework that claims to civilise her. Antoinette's madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not, as it is in *Brontë*, the mark of her racial and cultural inferiority; it is the intelligible response of a colonial subject to a situation of absolute powerlessness in which her identity, her history, and her cultural inheritance have been systematically denied and appropriated (Rhys 64). The novel's formal strategy of partial unreliability, giving Antoinette's perspective first but then interrupting it with Rochester's conflicting account, embodies the insight that the politics of colonial narrative cannot be resolved by simply reversing its perspective but require a more fundamental questioning of the conventions that determine whose story is tellable and whose is not.

The question of "home" in diasporic postcolonial writing is persistently and productively complicated by the recognition that the homeland that the diasporic subject remembers or imagines is itself a construction, shaped by nostalgia, by political ideologies of cultural authenticity, and by the very distance and rupture that constitute diasporic experience. Bulawayo's *Darling*, living in the United States with an aunt in a suburb called Destroyedmichigan, experiences the Zimbabwe she has left as both a place of beauty and violence that she mourns and a place of deprivation and political catastrophe that she fled. Her ambivalence toward both locations, neither fully belonging to either, captures with particular precision the doubled consciousness that Hall identifies as the defining condition of diasporic subjectivity. The novel's final image of Darling imagining herself running back across the border into her homeland is not a resolution of this ambivalence but its deepest expression: the longing to return to a home that is simultaneously a place of belonging and a place of pain captures the irreducible complexity of diasporic postcolonial identity (Bulawayo 289).

7. Conclusion

The reading of contemporary postcolonial English literature developed in this paper points toward several conclusions about the current state and future directions of postcolonial literary production and criticism. One is that the most important writings in the tradition have passed beyond, beyond the cultural nationalist essentialism of early postcolonial writing, and beyond the de-politicizing tendencies of some postmodernist approaches to formulate what has been termed here a critical grammar of agency: a repertoire of literary and rhetorical practices of constructing postcolonial identity and acting out postcolonial resistance sufficient to the complexity, the ambivalence, and the ongoing material pressure of the postcolonial condition in the twenty-first century.

The second conclusion is the connection of postcolonial literature and form and politics. The authors discussed in this paper are not so much political writers, i.e., the writers who are, above all, didactic writers, whose political



intervention is carried out, above all, by the use of narrative structure, point of view, language, and genre in a manner that is disruptive to the representational conventions through which colonial power structured knowledge and experience. The politics of the postcolonial literature cannot be discussed outside of the formal innovation: non-linear temporality of Roy, linguistic hybridisation of Rushdie, the usage of the naive narrative point of view in Bulawayo, the body poetics of Danticat are not ornamental decisions, but the political arguments made by the very construction of texts.

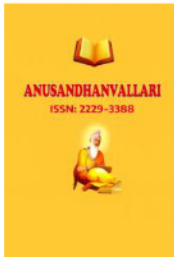
The third conclusion deals with the vital and political importance of gender and the body in postcolonial fiction of today. The most politically sophisticated texts in this tradition show with particular clarity that the decolonisation of identity requires the decolonisation of the body, and that this bodily decolonisation is inseparable from the dismantling of the patriarchal structures that colonialism both exploited and reinforced. A postcolonial literary criticism that does not attend to the gendered dimensions of colonial power and its afterlives will miss some of the most important work that contemporary writers are doing.

Finally, the analysis developed here suggests that the concept of resistance in postcolonial literature requires a more nuanced understanding than the straightforwardly oppositional model that the term sometimes implies. Resistance in the texts examined here is not only a matter of explicit political opposition to colonial and neo-colonial power but of the more subtle, pervasive, and in certain respects more profound strategies of narrative subversion, linguistic appropriation, memory recovery, and bodily reclamation through which postcolonial subjects assert their humanity, their complexity, and their right to be the subjects rather than the objects of their own histories. That assertion, modest as it might seem in comparison to the grand liberationist narratives of the decolonisation era, is in the current moment of renewed global inequality and resurgent nationalism perhaps the most necessary political and literary act.

The contemporary postcolonial novel, at its best, is a form of living resistance to the amnesia that colonial and neo-colonial power requires: the forgetting of what was done, in whose name, and at whose expense. Against that amnesia, writers like Adichie, Roy, Rushdie, Bulawayo, Danticat, and Desai offer not comfort but clarity, not consolation but the more demanding gift of a literature adequate to the full complexity of the world that empire made and that we still inhabit.

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