

Theorizing Hybridity through African literature: Bridging the Gap between Individuality and Sociality

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This paper explores the concept of hybridity in African literature. Hybridity has recently become a key concept for debates on culture and identity formation. Homi K. Bhabha defines hybridity as “a problematic of colonial representation ... that reverses the effects colonialist disavowal, so that the other “denied” knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority.” Bhabha, like many postcolonial and post-modern theorists, argue that hybridity, as an expression of ambivalence and fluidity represents an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power (Robert J. C. Young 1995). Hybridity is considered to be a major weapon against “grand narratives” and dominant authorities. The assumption here is that hybridity stands for the voices “in-between” the dominant authority and the “other”, and is thus a major force in challenging polar oppositional discourses that have often characterized colonial and other oppressive relations. The paper is interested in the way African writers theorize and represent hybridity as a product of the complex cultural interactions that took place in Africa from colonialism to the present and the resultant uncertain crossings and invasions of identities. The paper argues that African writers have always been concerned and have written extensively about African people meeting and incorporating western culture into their lives as well as those individuals caught between the tides of these antagonistic cultures. Many African writers often present African identities as characterized by an “essential”, core identity which is threatened by violent cross-cultural contact, interactions and violations. They portray hybridity as an unstable product of alienation and cultural contamination. The paper will critically examine and discuss the specific positions and images that are dominant in African literature.