

# Hybrid Identities

Theoretical and Empirical  
Examinations

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# Contents

List of Figures .....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	xi

## Part I. *Theoretical Study of Hybridity*

1. Hybrid Identities: Theoretical Examinations .....	3
KERI E. IYALL SMITH	
2. Hybridity, Transnationalism, and Identity in the US-Mexican Borderlands .....	13
PATRICK GUN CUNINGHAME	
3. DuBois and Diasporic Identity: The <i>Veil</i> and the <i>Unveiling</i> Project .....	41
JUDITH R. BLAU AND ERIC S. BROWN	
4. Disturbingly Hybrid or Distressingly Patriarchal? Gender Hybridity in a Global Environment .....	63
FABIENNE DARLING-WOLF	
5. Gender and the Hybrid Identity: On Passing Through .....	81
SALVADOR VIDAL-ORTIZ	
6. Bridging the Theoretical Gap: The Diasporized Hybrid in Sociological Theory .....	101
MELISSA F. WEINER AND BEDELIA NICOLA RICHARDS	
7. Geoculture and Popular Culture: Carnivals, Diasporas, and Hybridities in the Americas .....	117
KEITH NURSE	
8. The Internal Colony Hybrid: Reformulating Structure, Culture, and Agency .....	129
RODERICK BUSH	

## Part II. *Empirical Studies on Hybrid Identities*

9. An Introduction to Empirical Examinations of Hybridity .....	167
PATRICIA LEAVY	
10. Conquest, Colonization, and Borderland Identities: The World of Ethnic Mexicans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1900–1930 .....	179
TRINIDAD GONZALES	

11. Neither Black nor White Enough – and Beyond Black or White: The Lived Experiences of African-American Women at Predominantly White Colleges .....	197
SHARLENE HESSE-BIBER AND EMILY BROOKE BARKO	
12. Creating Place from Conflicted Space: Bi/Multi Racial <i>Māori</i> Women’s Inclusion within New Zealand Mental Health Services .....	225
TESS MOEKE-MAXWELL	
13. Women Occupying the Hybrid Space: Second-Generation Korean-American Women Negotiating Choices Regarding Work and Family .....	245
HELEN KIM	
14. Hybrid Identities in the Diaspora: Second-Generation West Indians in Brooklyn .....	265
BEDELIA NICOLA RICHARDS	
15. Hybridized Korean Identities: The Making of Korean- Americans and <i>Joseonjok</i> .....	291
HELENE K. LEE	
16. One Plus One Equals Three: Legal Hybridity in Aotearoa/ New Zealand .....	313
ALEX FRAME AND PAUL MEREDITH	
17. Occupying Third Space: Hybridity and Identity Matrices in the Multiracial Experience .....	333
DAVID L. BRUNSMA AND DANIEL J. DELGADO	
Author Biographies .....	355
References .....	361
Index .....	391

## Chapter One

# Hybrid Identities: Theoretical Examinations

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Globalization is an historical, dialectical process. Cultural globalization tends to produce one of three outcomes: differentiation, assimilation, or hybridization. There are multiple historical layers of hybridity, which span the *longue duree* (Pieterse 2004). The study of the processes and outcomes of hybridization of cultures will be essential to allow for a deeper understanding of globalization (Ang 2003, Canclini 2000, and Hannerz 1996). Cultural hybridization refers to “the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices” (Pieterse 2004: 64). A reflexive relationship between the local and global produces the hybrid. The identities are not assimilated or altered independently, but instead elements of cultures are incorporated to create a new hybrid culture. The creation of a hybrid identity is a “twofold process involving *the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism*” (Robertson 1992: 100). The local and the global interact to create a new identity that is distinct in each context. As the two interact, the local influences the global and the global influences the local. The local is universalized and the universal is localized. The result is a form of hybridity that “signifies the encounter, conflict, and/or blending

of two ethnic or cultural categories which, while by no means pure and distinct in nature, tend to be understood and experienced as meaningful identity labels by members of these categories" (Lo 2002: 199). Power and hierarchy influence the process of globalization, resulting in the uneven integration of human life and contributing to the emergence of diasporas and migration (Pieterse 2004).

For example, Simmel's (1950) "The Stranger" occupies a hybrid identity space. The stranger arrives today and has the *potential* to leave tomorrow (Simmel 1950). Strangers are simultaneously members of the community and not members of the community. The stranger is one new identity that might emerge by combining two identities that were previously discrete and now overlap. They are not seen as individuals, but as a particular type that is a combination of the stranger's identity and the local identity. One resolution to the problem of having two identities, or being identified by types and labels, is to create a new identity. It is the hybrid identity that includes a local and global identity form, merged to create the hybrid identity.

It is common to find hybridity in the context of a colonized culture that has been destabilized (Gandhi 1998). When cultures take in elements of global influence, they are doing so within the context of their local lives and creating a new hybrid. Individuals occupying a hybrid space simultaneously experience a doubleness and cultural intermixture (Gilroy 1993). Initially a term of derision, the meaning of hybridity is changing in the globalized world. Given a compressed world and a constrained state, identities for all individuals and collective selves are becoming more complex. With globalization and increasing modernization, being a hybrid is now a benefit. The ability to negotiate across barriers – language, cultural, spiritual, racial, and physical – is an asset. Although the hybrid contains elements of the local and the global, the intermixture makes it unique. Those who occupy hybrid spaces benefit from having an understanding of both local knowledge and global cosmopolitanism. Those who can easily cross barriers in a world of amorphous borders have an advantage.

The hybrid concept has roots in the hard sciences (e.g., botany or biology), as well as in the social sciences. Young's (1995) review of the genealogy of the term "hybrid" illustrates this. In the more literal interpretation, the hybrid is the product of "pure" or "distinct" categories. Notions of purity cannot

be as easily linked to cultural identities, which consist of constructed and imagined elements. In this interpretation, cultures are not sealed off from each other (Gilroy 1993), which renders it nearly impossible to assert that there are “pure” cultures that could produce a hybrid. In the plant world, purity can be maintained with plastic bags and controlled pollination by a gardener. The same gardener can engineer hybrids, as Mendel illustrated with his peas, using planned cross-pollinating. However, even the most isolated culture cannot be so carefully maintained or manipulated. Instead of using the more literal biological model, we choose to follow recent scholarship in postcolonial studies. Biology is an excellent inspiration for the idea of the hybrid, but it does not properly reflect the process of cultural production.

Although hybridity was initially an outcome of oppression, a way of negotiating stability for a fragile dual identity (DuBois 1996 [1903], Gandhi 1998), the expansion of globalization brings hybridity to the privileged and the disadvantaged. Universalizing processes are acting simultaneously with localizing processes. A global culture is spreading, and as it comes in contact with various localities a hybrid identity develops. Hybridity is about creativity and cultural imagination (Lo 2002). Those who occupy hybrid spaces benefit from having an understanding of both local knowledge and global cosmopolitanism.

Hybridity encompasses partial identities, multiple roles, and pluralistic selves. The individual or community with a hybrid identity mimics the squeezing of the world community with a simultaneous expansion of the world community. Exposure to global communication and culture plant the seeds for the formation of a hybrid culture. The hybrid identity might allow the globe to unite in its differences, to be a truly multicultural society that is able to recognize and reconcile diversity. This blending of multiple cultural categories is happening around the world, and hybrid identities are emerging. Hybridity is also a cross-category process and a subversion of hierarchy (Pieterse 2004).

Globalization and localization are two contradictory processes operating simultaneously. As a global culture, economy, and society are spreading, local communities continue efforts to maintain their particular cultural, economic, and societal customs. Hybridity has become one way to re-create and re-vision a local community, while incorporating elements of outside groups, such as

the global culture. The hybrid allows for the perpetuation of the local in the context of the global – using the global selectively while continuing essential elements of the local.

The sociological analysis of hybridity investigates the range of types of hybrid identities that are explored theoretically and empirically in the literature on identity. Multiple forms of hybridity are analyzed: identities that exist across borders, duality, gender (a false dichotomy), new identities, the diaspora (borderless), and the internal colony hybrid (formed within boundaries). A hybrid identity might form as a result of a false dichotomy, where an identity that seemingly only has the capacity to occupy two forms is actually shown to encompass another form. Physical borders of states assume discrete identities, people who experience double consciousness also experience a “two-ness” that is distinct from either single identity contributing to the duality, and, finally, the dichotomized sex and gender identities do not encompass the full range of sexed or gendered identities. Alternatively, it is possible for a hybrid identity to emerge as a category that defies borders. This type of hybrid exists simultaneously in multiple contexts. Hybrid identities that occupy the third space, or that emerge as a result of a diasporized population are two examples of hybrid identities that are borderless. Finally, hybrid identities form when multiple categories exist within borders and fuse to create a new form of identity. The hybrid identity that is born among internally colonized populations is a hybrid identity that is formed within boundaries.

### **Hybridity on the Borders**

The creation of a hybrid identity crosses borders, as the local and the global interact to create a new identity that is distinct. It also challenges existing borders, particularly those of political and ethnic communities. Yet, hybridity can only exist in a world with borders. The creation of hybrid identities is evidence that borders are shifting, reforming, and being created. This chapter will survey developments in the study of boundaries and boundary crossing in a breadth of contexts. Patrick Gun Cuninghame explores the economic and political aspects of bordered hybridity, critiquing the “bordered” construct as he explores the identity formation that is emerging in this distinct context. Cuninghame also explores the distinction between hybridity and transnationalism, using the maquiladoras to apply his theoretical ideas empirically.

## **Double Consciousness**

DuBois (1996 [1903]) describes hybridity as resulting in a double consciousness. Double consciousness is distinct because it explicitly embodies multiple identities instead of crossing identity group boundaries. Groups or individuals that occupy this space experience a kind of “two-ness,” as two identities trying to exist within one person (DuBois 1996 [1903]). Expanding this idea to all blacks in the West, Gilroy describes the position as “between (at least) two great cultural assemblages” (Gilroy 1993:1). The individual occupying a hybrid space navigates between two cultural groups and occupies space within both cultural groups. This space holds a challenge and a privilege. Two-ness can be a hindrance. Yet, Judith R. Blau and Eric S. Brown explore how it is possible to create a reflexive perspective on two-ness, allowing African-Americans to achieve synthetic emancipation in their chapter. The African-American is described as having a veil, and a second sight (DuBois 1996 [1903]). Blau and Brown suggest that the veiled individual is able to see others better than they can be seen. The veil creates distance, but the second sight affords a way of seeing the self in the view of others.

## **Gender and the Hybrid Identity**

Examination of the hybrid identity applied to gender is less common than many of the other classifications identified in this book. Fabienne Darling-Wolf’s chapter examines the dichotomized expressions of gender in our society, identifying a hybrid form of gendered identity that occupies both maleness and femaleness. Alternatively, it is also possible to interrogate the categories of man and woman by looking at gender hybridity. The result of this work might be a reshaping of definitions of maleness and femaleness. Studies of gender hybridity allude to the false dichotomy of sex and gender identities, suggesting that maleness and femaleness do not adequately represent the range of sex and gendered identities. Salvador Vidal-Ortiz further interrogates the dichotomy of sex and gender, exploring the process of what he calls passing through. With passing through, Vidal-Ortiz explores transgenderism and transsexuality in a society that conceives of sex and gender as dichotomous.

Globally, there are also multiple definitions of gendered identity: Maleness and femaleness are not expressed in the same ways in all societies. Mobile



men and women and place-less cultures are redefining the meanings of male and female as well, adopting elements of multiple cultures to create new conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Studies of immigrant women analyze attire to see how women choose to express their gender and their culture. Darling-Wolf explores the impact of globalization on gender in her chapter, identifying the importance of the transnational influence, cultural identity formation, and nationalism on gendered identities.

### **The Third Space**

Where communication, negotiation, and translation bridge societies, a new space emerges (Bhabha 1994). The third space is a product of the negotiations, interface, and exchange across cultural boundaries. The third space is the in-between position, and it is also a newly crafted position. It did not exist prior to the merging of identities. This is one type of hybrid identity that arises as cultural boundaries meet and blur. Identifying this space allows for the recognition of identity groups and the creation of institutions that recognize and can speak to people who occupy this particular type of hybrid position. Alex Frame and Paul Meredith explore the third space (see Chapter 16), suggesting that the third space is not new, but has been in existence and is applicable to customary law, language, and culture. The co-existence of cultures, Frame and Meredith suggest, can be particularly useful in the legal system. David L. Brunisma and Daniel J. Delgado's empirical analysis of the third space also considers the theoretical construct (see Chapter 17). They argue that the third space does not adequately represent the experiences of multi-racial individuals, and instead Brunisma and Delgado recommend applying an identity matrix to show the range of identity experienced by multiracial people.

### **The Diasporized Hybrid Identity**

Although the term diaspora was initially only applied to cases of historical dispersion, it is now more widely used to apply to any population that has spread beyond its borders (Ang 2003). Diasporas become divorced from the homeland as they spread to new lands. Yet the diaspora remains tied to a border via their shared national identity. Simultaneously, diasporized popula-

tions are borderless, as members of the diaspora might live anywhere beyond the borders of the homeland. The result is a dissolving of the territorially bounded nation and the diminishing of the possibility of the cosmopolitan imagination of “one world” (Ang 2003). As members of diasporized groups attempt to fit in within their new homeland, they might be more likely to adopt a hybrid identity. Alternatively, they might be less likely to adopt a hybrid identity as they attempt to cling to their identity that is tied to the homeland. Or, more likely, they become different from those who remain in the homeland as they adopt elements of the society they now live within.

Using immigration literature to inform their study of the diaspora, Melissa F. Weiner and Bedelia Nicola Richards explore the experience of diasporized populations and their adoption of hybrid identities. They explore the history of immigration in the United States, looking at how the waves of immigrants interact differently with American society, resulting in different forms of diasporized hybrid identities. Keith Nurse explores the diasporized culture and hybrid identity, focusing his lens on the carnivals of the Americas. Nurse uses the idea of geocultures to examine the role of diasporization on identity formation, using these ideas to question the constructs of empire, nation, and race. Carnivals, a cultural product of the diasporized peoples, allow peoples to negotiate their cultural identity and practice, and they are also a site of contestation of value and meaning. Nurse also recognizes the ways that carnivals reflect a hybridized identity type, adopting localized elements even as they are part of a broader American cultural festival.

### **The Internal Colony Hybrid**

An internal colony exists within the boundaries of another identity group. This hybrid identity bridges the space between colonizer and colonized within a distinct context. The idea of internal colonialism comes from the power-conflict school of theory, which emphasizes the role of stratification and power. Internal colonialism debunks the salt-water thesis, which suggests that colonies can only exist overseas. An internal colony is a colony within the boundaries of the state that colonized it. This concept is significant because “by defining inter-regional relationships as ‘colonial,’ nationalist leaders have tried to inspire popular support for movements designed to promote greater autonomy, if not outright secession” (Stone 1996 [1979]:279). The internal

colony is subjected to oppression from the outside government, questions of legitimacy, and forced assimilation. The colonizing government legitimates their expropriations by transposing them into “customs,” but the internal colony can appeal to the same customs they resist.

As internal colonies, these hybrid groups are a society living within another society. They live under legal rules and cultural norms of the external society most of the time, simultaneously seeking to maintain cultural and legal independence and integrity. The internal colony creates an opportunity to maintain the integrity of its culture while learning to exist within the outsider culture. The internal colony is used to explain the social, economic, and political experiences of hybrid identities: Mexican-Americans, black Americans, Appalachian-Americans, Arab-Israelis, and many others. Roderick Bush focuses on the structural aspects of colonialism in his critical analysis of internal colonialism and hybrid identities, looking at how this positioning might allow them to become change agents within their societies. Bush explores the history of internal colonialism, along with its origins, and then he charts the critique and the decline of this concept. Yet Bush argues that internal colonialism continues to be relevant, pointing out that the structural relations of colonial oppression persist, and that these relations are important in the formation of identity and culture.

## **Conclusion**

Culture is our general human software, and none of the world’s institutions can function without software (Pieterse 2004). Cultural traits are programmed into society and individuals through processes of socialization across the life course. As people cross arbitrary institutionalized categories of identity, a synthesis occurs and a hybrid identity emerges.

In the theoretical chapters that follow, the authors analyze multiple types of hybrid identities to build more accurate theories of identity in a globalizing world. The authors pose critiques to existing theoretical constructs, seeking to develop more accurate concepts with which to examine the empirical world. Alternatively, they build upon previous research to create more relevant models of identity. The resulting texts present an array of identity constructs for analyzing the processes that produce the fusion of identities where once only two identities existed, across borders, and within borders. In response

to diverse contexts, hybrid identities emerge: when a false dichotomy fails to represent identity fully, when identities merge across bordered spaces to span the previously established boundaries, and when cultures fuse within boundaries.