Trauma, Borders, and Third Spaces: Mestiza Consciousness and Liminal Memory in Selected Pakistani Anglophone Short Stories

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how the concepts of mestiza consciousness and liminality, particularly those arising from memory and trauma, shape hybrid subjectivities in Pakistani Anglophone short fiction. Focusing on two short stories, Qaisra Shahraz's "The Visiting Grandmother" (1998) and Sabyn Javeri-Jillani's "Neither Day Nor Night" (2007), the research explores the experiences of characters as they negotiate cultural, religious, and national boundaries. The data consists of close textual readings of the two short stories, selected for their thematic focus on hybridity, displacement, and intergenerational trauma. Using a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in postcolonial theory and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) notion of mestiza consciousness, the study analyzes how liminal spaces become sites for reconstructing fragmented identities. The findings reveal that these narratives foreground borderland experiences marked by unhomeliness, cultural conflict,

and fluid subjectivities. The protagonists' struggles to reconcile divided loyalties and multiple identities reflect a broader critique of binary thinking and essentialist frameworks. The selected stories suggest that trauma and memory, when situated in liminal spaces, serve as powerful tools for resisting fixed notions of identity and enable the formation of hybrid selves. This research contributes to the discourse on postcolonial identity by highlighting how Pakistani women writers use narrative to map the emotional and psychological terrain of border crossing and cultural negotiation.

Keywords: Mestiza consciousness, Liminality, Trauma, Memory, Hybridity, Pakistani Anglophone fiction

Introduction

Gloria Anzaldúa introduced the concept of mestiza consciousness in her groundbreaking book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. It represents a new way of thinking about identity that emerges from living in the borderlands, which are both real and metaphorical places where different cultures, languages, and social conventions intersect. When someone lives between two or more cultural identities that are often at odds with each other, they develop mestiza consciousness, which is a hybrid, flexible, and open-minded state of mind. It doesn't appreciate strict categories, such as us vs. them, male vs. female, colonizer vs. colonized; instead, it embraces ambiguity, contradiction, and multiplicity. Therefore, postcolonial subjects inhabiting liminal spaces operate in a state of in-betweenness. The liminality of border and in-between spaces creates a unique context for negotiating memory and trauma, as well as for constructing individual and collective identities. The exploration of 'mestiza consciousness' vis-à-vis Pakistani Anglophone short stories, particularly in terms of border crossing and in-between spaces, enables us to highlight the role of liminality in shaping memory and trauma. It conveys a sense of intersectionality and hybridity. In this regard, interstitiality, an important concept in postcolonial theory, feminist theory, and cultural studies, describes the experience of living in defined spaces, categories, or identities a sort of 'in-betweenness.' It indicates an ambiguous space, existing in a liminal zone where boundaries blur, intersect, overlap, and generate new implications. The concept of interstitiality refers to the space in between cultural identities, which resonates with the protagonist's experiences of being caught between two cultures (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1).

Liminality is associated with the existence at borders, which represents unhomeliness created by the recombination of subjectivities resulting from transitions in selfhood, language, geography, and political identity.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant since it links Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of mestiza consciousness with Pakistani Anglophone literature, a relationship that has been insufficiently explored previously. The study examines how hybrid identities emerge in the lives of women after colonialism by looking at liminality through the lens of memory and trauma. It contributes to the discourse on diasporic identity, female subjectivity, and cultural hybridity in South Asian literature by offering a new perspective on how Pakistani women writers navigate and articulate the complex terrains of cultural displacement, being in between, and resistance to essentialist identities. It contributes to postcolonial studies by examining how literary narratives reconstruct fragmented identities when characters are forced to move or confront trauma that has been passed down through generations.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate how mestiza consciousness and liminality, shaped by memory and trauma, contribute to the formation of hybrid identities in Qaisra Shahraz's "The Visiting Grandmother" and Sabyn Javeri-Jillani's "Neither Day Nor Night."
2. To examine how Pakistani women writers use literary storytelling to portray the psychological and emotional complexities of cultural negotiation and identity formation.

3. To analyze how the selected short stories represent borderland experiences that challenge binary identity constructions and resist essentialist cultural narratives.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do mestiza consciousness and liminality, influenced by memory and trauma, construct hybrid identities in Qaisra Shahraz's "The Visiting Grandmother" and Sabyn Javeri-Jillani's "Neither Day Nor Night"?
2. In what ways do Pakistani women writers employ literary narratives to depict the psychological and emotional aspects of cultural negotiation?
3. How do the selected stories depict borderland experiences to contest binary identity frameworks and essentialist cultural narratives?

Literature Review

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized how liminality functions in postcolonial literature as a generative and transformative space for reimagining fractured identities. Drawing on the aftermath of trauma and displacement, scholars examine how this 'in-betweenness' enables the creation of hybrid subjectivities. For instance, Adhikari (2022) argues that "postmemory becomes a liminal space in itself, giving birth to hyphenated identities who oscillate within the realms of this liminality" (p. 117). This postmemory rooted in inherited trauma and imagined histories, complicates traditional understandings of identity, especially among second-generation immigrants and diasporic communities who live with inherited memories of dislocation and violence.

Similarly, Fiaz, Nawaz, and Munawar (2022) argue that indigeneity, although contested in postcolonial discourse, can serve as a strategic means of reclaiming identity. Drawing on Mbembe's theory of decolonization, their study of *Namak ka Jeevan Ghar* by Riffat Abbas

suggests that fictional utopias, such as *Loonri Shahr* (The City of Salt), become sites of resistance where marginalized communities resist imposed modernities and assert parallel epistemologies. In doing so, they highlight how creativity and cultural memory become tools of political subversion and identity preservation.

In postcolonial and diaspora studies, scholars such as Karmakar and Khan (2023) examine how memory and trauma are represented in literature as tools of both resistance and healing. Quoting Robson (2004), they argue that although trauma is often described with "non-linearity, incoherence and complexities," the very gaps and silences in such narratives reveal the unspeakability of traumatic experience. According to them, "the narratives become a plausible and vital way to read and decipher traumatic encounters through language and words, literature in particular … narratives of trauma are a process of retelling subjective experiences" (p. 6). In other words, literature becomes a vehicle for retelling, not just recollecting, trauma translating deeply personal pain into a collective, cultural idiom. These retellings thus resist erasure and allow for the articulation of what might otherwise remain unspoken.

Such frameworks are aligned with Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of *mestiza consciousness*, a theoretical lens through which the intersectionality of identity across race, language, gender, geography, and spirituality is explored. For Anzaldúa, identity is inherently fluid, fractured, and situated within liminal spaces, or what she famously refers to as the *borderlands*. Anzaldúa, being a hybrid woman who is "neither Mexican nor North American, does not speak only Spanish or only English," defines herself as a new mestiza a subject composed of multiple fragments, like a collage (Despagne & Jacobo-Suárez, 2022, p. 6). The acknowledgment of hybridity entailed in the formation of a new consciousness is

echoed in Anzaldúa's (1987) articulation of "a third space, the in-between, border, or interstice that allows contradictions to co-exist" (Yarbro-Bejarano, 1994, p. 11). Anzaldúa's theories resonate widely in postcolonial literature, particularly in the representation of female diasporic identities as they negotiate cultural alienation and ancestral ties.

Victor Turner's (1967) concept of liminality also becomes central to understanding cultural dislocation in postcolonial fiction. Turner links liminality to alterity the experience of being "othered" or marginalized, which, in turn, evokes collective trauma (p. 95). This form of consciousness, born out of living in borderlands, parallels Anzaldúa's concept of the borderlands, where identity is constantly negotiated, never fully stable or fixed.

In the South Asian context, Nayyar (2022) examines how diasporic trauma becomes a form of political retrieval, particularly in Pakistani Anglophone literature. He argues that the trauma expressed by postcolonial subjects is not only a private affliction but also a mode of decolonial assertion. He states, these are "acts of retrieval and reclamation … done with the conscious purpose of decolonization. … a postcolonial writer and a son of the soil believes in his right to speak to colonizing powers and to offer his own interpretation and version of indigeneity" (para. 6). Writers reclaim silenced histories and resist dominant Eurocentric frameworks by foregrounding personal narratives that assert indigeneity and agency. These narratives reveal how identity can be reconstructed from cultural fragments and memories of loss, often through storytelling that crosses generations and geographies.

This theoretical groundwork provides an essential backdrop to the stories "The Visiting Grandmother" by Qaisra Shahraz and "Neither Day Nor Night" by Sabyn Javeri-Jillani, which are central to this study. Both short stories portray female protagonists who occupy liminal positions caught between the cultures, religions, and histories of their homeland and

the societies they now inhabit. Rabia Bibi in Shahraz's story experiences profound alienation in England, yearning for a cultural wholeness that is unattainable. Meanwhile, the unnamed protagonist in Javeri-Jillani's narrative navigates multiple layers of diasporic anxiety, disillusionment, and estrangement as she attempts to reconcile her Muslim, immigrant, and female identities.

Both characters exhibit what Homi Bhabha (1994) refers to as interstitial consciousness a state of duality or "double consciousness," where one is constantly negotiating between conflicting cultural frameworks. Bhabha asserts that such figures dwell in the "in-between," refusing both complete assimilation and essentialist nostalgia. Similarly, Caro de la Barrera (2005) notes that characters in postcolonial fiction often "make interstitial their home," engaging in a process of cultural translation that challenges monolithic identity narratives (p. 212).

In this context, *mestiza consciousness* becomes not only a framework for personal identity but also a political tool for challenging colonial legacies and essentialist nationalisms. It embodies the struggle to live with contradiction, to resist closure, and to create meaning out of multiplicity. These short stories demonstrate how trauma and memory mainly when situated within liminal spaces enable new modes of cultural negotiation and subject formation. They depict how postcolonial female subjects creatively reconstruct their identities from fragmented pasts and plural affiliations.

Ultimately, we can establish that the intersection of trauma, memory, hybridity, and liminality is not simply a theme but a method of storytelling in postcolonial literature. Pakistani women writers, in particular, are utilizing these themes to challenge dominant

narratives, propose alternative epistemologies, and reconceptualize identity as a fluid, ever-evolving construct.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in postcolonial theory and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of mestiza consciousness. This study adopts a close textual analysis of two Pakistani Anglophone short stories: Qaisra Shahraz's "The Visiting Grandmother" (1998) and Sabyn Javeri-Jillani's "Neither Day Nor Night" (2007). These stories were selected as primary texts for their thematic focus on cultural hybridity, border-crossing, intergenerational trauma, and identity negotiation. The study analyses how liminal spaces, shaped by memory, trauma, and cultural displacement, forge hybrid identities in female characters through detailed textual analysis.

The analysis is framed within the postcolonial feminist paradigm, integrating Anzaldúan theory, which highlights the fluidity and contradictions inherent in borderland identities. Themes of unhomeliness, double consciousness, and emotional fragmentation are examined to comprehend how literary narratives both mirror and challenge prevailing cultural polarities. The emphasis is on interpretive meaning-making, concentrating on language, metaphor, narrative structure, and symbolic representations of identity, trauma, and resistance. This methodology facilitates a comprehensive examination of how Pakistani women writers express intricate experiences of cultural negotiation within postcolonial frameworks.

Discussion and Analysis

Employing Anzaldúa's theory of borderlands and cultural trauma, the selected short stories portray the female protagonists as exemplars of the struggles faced by those living in the borderlands, and how their struggle to define identity leads to traumatic yet transformative experiences. These interstitial spaces, while painful, also offer potential for self-renewal. Thus, this research positions mestiza consciousness not only as a marker of fragmentation but also as a site of resistance and reconstruction.

In "The Visiting Grandmother," Qaisra Shahraz (1998) portrays Rabia Bibi as a character emotionally grounded in feelings of loneliness and misery, as if "she had landed from another planet" (p. 488). Her hybridity and detachment from Pakistani culture intensify her sense of alienation, even as she assimilates into English society. Similarly, Sabyn Javeri-Jillani's "Neither Day Nor Night" (2007) portrays a protagonist who exists between two conflicting worlds her conscience drawn to her homeland while her body is trapped in an unfamiliar society. Her internal dialogue, "I want to stay aloof, uninvolved …" (p. 59,) evokes the psychic dissonance of postcolonial migration. The protagonist in "Neither Day Nor Night" remains unnamed in the narrative. The narrator remains anonymous and speaks in the first person, a choice that highlights her ambiguous identity and sense of dislocation between Pakistani and British traditions. This narrative decision enhances the story's themes of hybridity, cultural liminality, and the unspecified "in-betweenness" experienced by the character.

The conflicting voices that arise from the mestiza's diverse and hybrid identity can create a sense of ambivalence, leading to internal conflict and emotional uncertainty. As a logical consequence, a mestiza experiences insecurity and indecisiveness due to internal conflict. The personality of the mestiza is often marked by a restless and emotional turmoil due to

hybridity, as they navigate the tensions and contradictions inherent in their complex identity (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78). In the short story "Neither Day Nor Night," Javeri-Jillani explores the concept of border-crossing and liminality in terms of memory and trauma through the psychological impact, resilience, and search for identity of the female protagonist. Being a Pakistani refugee living in London, her experience of displacement becomes a metaphor for the crossing of psychological and physical boundaries. Javeri-Jillani paints an evocative picture of the pain of straddling two worlds: the world of her past in Pakistan and the world of her present in Tooting. The story portrays how the protagonist is constantly in a state of limbo as the memories of her past are both a means of comfort, allowing her to reconnect with her past and feel a sense of belonging, and a means of trauma, constantly challenging the reality of her displacement and the trauma of leaving a history. Therefore, she is unable to inhabit either world fully, i.e., she is stuck in a state which she navigates as 'neither day nor night'. This liminality is explored via the use of flashbacks and dream sequences, which emphasize the instability and fragility of her life in London.

Similarly, Rabia Bibi in "The Visiting Grandmother" while living in England, is constantly engaged in flashbacks as her mind retorts to her two sons and her family in Lahore. Her large house, where they lived together with an atmosphere of respect and companionship, was lacking in Manchester (Shahraz, 1998, p. 493). This feeling of lack develops into a trauma as she experiences a psychological conflict about the cultural shift, which develops into her feeling deprived of being loved and respected by her grandchildren in England. Due to her liminal existence and inability to assimilate completely into another culture, she suffers from psychic unrest. Both stories serve as a potent reminder that the realities of displacement and the power of memories can both comfort and haunt.

Trauma developed due to existing between the interstices can haunt through memories because it can create deep and lasting imprints on the brain. The intense emotional and physical experiences associated with trauma can cause the brain to encode memories in a way that makes them difficult to forget and can trigger vivid and distressing flashbacks. Jacques Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology, which suggests that the past continues to haunt the present, is also relevant to the story's themes. It emphasizes the idea that the past is always present in the present, and that this presence can be productive and transformative (p. 48). The backdrop of memory continues to haunt the protagonists of the stories under scrutiny, and this memory is linked to their feelings of liminality and border-crossing. A sense of ambivalence and disorientation is created by the recurring flashbacks of the past and the present that are intertwined (p. 29). At one instance, the protagonist says, "but here in Tooting, surrounded by Punjabi and Urdu expressions, colorful chadors, black hijabs, appetizing smells of curries, and cries of 'stop the war' mingled with the Mullah's pungent call to prayer from a mosque nearby" (Javeri-Jillani, 2007, p. 60). This excerpt depicts the protagonist's life in Pakistan as a constant reference to her present, whether in terms of mullahs, immigrant shopkeepers, male gaze, food, clothes, etc. She is constantly creating parallels from her past life in Pakistan as if she has created a mini-Pakistan in Tooting. Rabia Bibi, in a similar way, is plagued by the memories of Pakistan "while in Lahore, in her household, she was the mistress, giving advice, instructions and orders to her daughters-in-law and granddaughters, here she was at the receiving end of those instructions" (Shahraz, 1998, p. 493). Rabia Bibi is caught between her Pakistani heritage and her life in Manchester. Her psychological traumas are rooted in memory and vivid flashbacks. She struggles to create a balance between her Pakistani identity and her life in England, which invokes a

feeling of anxiety and trauma. The story highlights the confusion and displacement that arise with a transitional state. It's a reminder of the emotional toll that can take over an individual when inhabiting a new, alien territory. In this state of liminality, memories of one's home country can become amplified and may lead to feelings of nostalgia, sadness, and emotional trauma. The person may long for the familiarity and comfort of their home country while also feeling disconnected from it due to their current physical and cultural surroundings.

This experience of liminality can be complicated by memories and traumas associated with displacement. The short story "Neither Day Nor Night" is a subtle portrayal of the psychological trauma of border-crossing and displacement, as seen through the perspective of a young Pakistani woman who has married an Asian man named Jack and has moved to Tooting, London. The story conveys a liminal sense of identity, where cultural alienation manifests as the "ambivalence of psychic identification" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 42). The protagonist's psychic restlessness in "Neither Day Nor Night" can be seen as a result of the feelings of resistance and crisis associated with her interstitial existence. This psychological conflict is depicted via this quote from the text when the protagonist says:

> Jack doesn't understand my fascination for the ordinary […] Jack doesn't understand my adoration for the royal family, given their history of colonization. Jack doesn't understand why I don't want to live in my country but bring back all the kinds of smells and tastes to recreate the memories I have left behind. Jack can't compartmentalize me. Just like the other people in Tooting can't. I am part of a nameless mongrel humanity with nothing to claim as my own, not even the land I stand on or the roads I left behind. A hybrid without firm beliefs and heroes, neither haunted by a search for self

> nor consumed by identity like my predecessors. We come and go. We don't belong to anyone or any one place […] I don't know where my home is. (Javeri-Jillani, 2007, p. 66)

This excerpt reveals that when she attempts to reconcile her conflicting identity and cultural expectations, she experiences a sense of unease and dislocation that reflects the conflicts and broader tensions inherent in living within a borderland milieu, ultimately creating a psychic trauma in her. She is portrayed as being in a state of flux; she seeks refuge yet feels lost and disconnected from her roots. She calls her new passport an "entry to the forbidden worlds" (Javeri-Jillani, 2007, p. 60), which suggests that she is willfully seeking out the refuge in her new identity, which can open the 'close doors' for her (p. 60). Though she has made it to the forbidden world, she is still in the state of 'in-betweenness' or 'otherness'. This state of flux can be depicted by her words when she says, "I am not a Paki anymore. I can write nationality: British on the forms. True, they still ask me, where have you come from? And their accent still baffles me just as my pronunciation causes them to cringe" (Javeri-Jillani, 2007, p. 60).

Similarly, Rabia Bibi, while living with her son's family in England, experiences a psychic unrest as she navigates her life in England while continuously comparing it with the culture of Pakistan, which she has internalized to the point that it is difficult for her to accept another way of life. She argues with herself to recognize another perspective, another way of life (Shahraz, 1998, p. 490).

The mestiza, according to Anzaldúa, is caught between multiple cultures and their conflicting value systems, facing a unique struggle with identity. This struggle is often

experienced as an inner war, as the mestiza grapples with the conflicting narratives and versions of reality communicated by each culture. Ultimately, like all people, the mestiza is shaped by the cultural context in which they exist and the version of reality that it communicates (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78). This assertion of a distinct identity resonates with the experiences of many Pakistani individuals who have migrated to Western countries. "Neither Day Nor Night" depicts how the protagonist occupies a liminal space, despite all the necessary precautions she has taken to assimilate; namely, the denial of her origin has further exacerbated her identity crisis. As she says, "Life feels like an intersection. East, West, Pakistan, Britain. Paki, Paki-British, British-Paki, British?" (Javeri-Jillani, 2007, p. 60), she confirms her 'borderosis'. These lines indicate that border-crossing hasn't crossed her roots, i.e., the origin would always coincide with the adopted identity, and hence would only prevail as an adaptation. According to Bhabha (1994), liminality suggests that the in-between space can give rise to new forms of hybrid identities that are binaristic and polarized (p. 145). The protagonist's experiences of interstitiality provide a means to explore hybrid cultural identities as she navigates the reconciliation of her Pakistani identity with her life in London.

Moreover, Turner (1967) proclaims liminality as a transitional phase where individuals experience uncertainty and a loss of identity as they move between social or cultural spaces, as those in the transitional phase become structurally invisible (p. 96). This phase serves as a space for transformation, characterized by interdependency and ambiguity. In "The Visiting Grandmother," this ambiguity manifests itself in Rabia Bibi's dissociation with the people in England as she proclaims that "no one would understand her" (Shahraz, 1998, p. 494). The protagonist of "Neither Day Nor Night" is also caught between two

cultural spaces, and her experiences of interstitiality play a significant role in shaping her identity. Thus, her liminality is highlighted through her inability to form deep connections with people around her. The lines "sailing on two boats, trying to be both, my mother would say, or just sitting on the fence, refusing to choose, I like to think, why can't I be both" (Javeri-Jillani, 2007, p. 60), depict her state of ambivalence and flux between her former and new identity.

The protagonists of both the stories inhabit a third space which according to Edward Soja is a deconstruction of prevailing binary logic and "the creation of a third, an alternative, a significantly different logic or perspective" (as cited in Borch, 2002, p. 113) that are linked to the feelings of alienation and disorientation as they try to find their place in England while coming to terms with their past. Hence, Turner's (1967) concept of 'neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification' (p. 232) best classifies the liminal order of the protagonists within the domain of border-crossing. Rabia Bibi, while sitting on a plane bound for Pakistan, is depicted as being overwhelmed with emotions of both sadness and excitement. Her emotions oscillate between two opposite spectrums as she struggles to reconcile her despair at leaving England with the happiness of returning to Pakistan (Shahraz, 1998, p. 496). Javeri-Jillani (2007) in a similar vein, targets the interstitial existence of the protagonist in the given words:

> Here I am living in west, not caring at least what the community and my family back home think about my life, yet I can't bring myself to trash a piece of paper […] Or so I have been taught to believe. A belief I find hard to discard, like a lot of other small beliefs buried deep inside my heart. (p. 58)

Anzaldúa (1987), along the same lines, regards the mestiza as responsible for developing a capacity for embracing ambiguity and contradiction, juggling multiple cultures and identities without rejecting or abandoning any of them. Rather than being overwhelmed by ambivalence, she transforms it into a source of creative energy (p. 79). The following lines interestingly establishes the idea that the protagonist, though claiming to let go of the Paki identity, cannot subvert her heritage and occupies an inherent sense of belonging derived by the cultural gravity that constantly and effortlessly drags her back to her origin as this becomes a source of energy for her:

> 'But before I leave the smells and colors of my childhood behind for the odorless, gray landscape of my present, there is one last thing I have to do. Mangoes […] 'produce of Pakistan' says a sign proudly at the top. For a second, I feel a gleaming pride in belonging to the land that produces a thing of such joy.' (Javeri-Jillani, 2007, p. 62)

The author provides an intensive exploration of the themes of liminal space, border-crossing, memory, and trauma. These concepts have embedded complexities, suggesting that finding a sense of belonging in a new culture may not be easy. Still, it is possible through acceptance, willingness, and reflection on one's past, which can help alleviate trauma and comfort the self.

In "The Visiting Grandmother," Rabia Bibi is seen as wearing a headscarf, whereas "no one else had their head covered" (Shahraz, 1998, p. 489). This shows that she possesses the capacity to accept ambiguity and contradictions, handle diverse cultures and identities, and

refrain from rejecting or relinquishing any of them. Instead of succumbing to ambivalence, she transforms it into a catalyst for generating creative energy.

Conclusion

Mestiza consciousness offers a valuable framework for examining hybrid identities in Pakistani Anglophone fiction, especially in relation to memory, trauma, and liminality. Through an analysis of Qaisra Shahraz's "The Visiting Grandmother" and Sabyn Javeri-Jillani's "Neither Day Nor Night", this study highlights how postcolonial women writers articulate the complexities of cultural negotiation and identity reconstruction within third spaces and borderlands. Anzaldúa's notion of the *new mestiza* underscores the transformative potential of inhabiting such spaces. As she writes, "Though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (as cited in Henríquez-Betancor, 2012, p. 41). These stories reflect that tension how trauma, displacement, and cultural conflict can foster both fragmentation and renewal. By embracing ambiguity and contradiction, the protagonists transcend fixed identities and enter more fluid and expansive modes of self-understanding. Ultimately, the development of mestiza consciousness enables a critique of dominant binaries and essentialist cultural frameworks. It provides a space for reimagining identity as an ongoing process, lived at the intersection of languages, histories, and affiliations. In doing so, the short stories examined here not only offer poignant reflections on diasporic trauma and cultural dislocation but also affirm the possibility of agency, resilience, and creative reinvention within postcolonial narratives.

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