



## Hybridity and Identity Formation in Second-Generation Immigrant Writing.

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**Abstract:** Second-generation immigrant literature increasingly portrays identity not as an automatic inheritance but as something produced through continual negotiation between memory, culture, and everyday experience. This study investigates hybrid identity in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong and *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, focusing on how migrants' children shape their sense of self within spaces shaped both by family histories and contemporary national life. Whereas first-generation narratives usually emphasize movement and adaptation, second-generation works address inherited displacement — a condition in which people feel cultural tension despite being born in the receiving society. Identity therefore develops not from migration itself but from its psychological and cultural consequences.

The analysis draws on theories of diaspora and cultural hybridity, particularly Homi K. Bhabha's idea of the "Third Space," which understands identity as an intermediate site where meanings are constantly negotiated and redefined. Through this lens, second-generation identity appears dynamic and changeable rather than fixed. It also incorporates Stuart Hall's understanding of identity as a process of becoming, shaped by representation, memory, and discourse rather than biological inheritance or notions of national purity. Within these approaches, hybridity is seen not as disorder or loss but as a productive mode of self-formation that questions rigid ideas of belonging. In *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, identity takes shape through an intimate narrative written as a letter from a son to his mother. Silence, trauma, and language barriers strongly influence how the narrator understands himself. He inherits histories of war and migration that he did not personally live through and must make sense of them through fragmented memories and limited communication. The challenge of expressing emotions across languages mirror a broader gap between generations. The novel also deepens questions of identity through queer self-realization, showing how sexuality intersects with race and migration to produce multiple layers of marginalization. In this way, hybridity appears mainly as an internal psychological condition shaped by reflection and emotional negotiation. In contrast, *White Teeth* situates second-generation identity within a wide multicultural environment. Through interconnected family plots and generational tensions, the novel illustrates identity forming in shared spaces like schools, friendships, religious settings, and community life. Disagreements between parents and children reveal contrasting attitudes toward tradition and modernity, while humor and satire undermine ideas of cultural purity. The narrative indicates that identity develops not only from inherited memory but also through everyday interactions and social institutions, making hybridity both a personal and collective experience shaped by diverse social participation. Considering the two novels together highlights different yet related perspectives on identity formation. One focuses on internal emotional negotiation, while the other emphasizes social relationships and communal experience; still, both reject assimilation as an easy or complete process. Identity instead appears relational, created through translation, reinterpretation, and selective attachment. The second generation neither preserves ancestral culture intact nor fully assimilates into dominant culture, but occupies an in-between position where meanings remain flexible.

Overall, the study proposes that second-generation immigrant writing reconceptualizes belonging

by presenting multiplicity as ordinary rather than problematic. Hybridity functions as a creative source of agency rather than a conflict requiring resolution. Reading these texts together demonstrates how contemporary immigrant literature challenges rigid notions of nation, ethnicity, and authenticity. Identity emerges as a continuing negotiation shaped by language, memory, and social interaction, suggesting that belonging is not a fixed end point but an ongoing process of becoming.

## INTRODUCTION

Identity has persistently occupied a central position in immigrant literature, yet contemporary works approach the theme with greater analytical depth and structural complexity. Earlier migration narratives often concentrated on exile, longing for the homeland, cultural discontinuity, and the struggle to adapt to unfamiliar environments. In contrast, second-generation immigrant literature redirects attention to inherited displacement and the ongoing negotiation of cultural belonging. For those born or brought up in the host country, migration is not a lived recollection but a transmitted inheritance carried through family narratives, silences, and collective memory. Existing between ancestral histories and present social realities, they construct identities that are plural, layered, and continually evolving. This intermediate positioning challenges linear models of assimilation and demands a more nuanced understanding of what it means to belong.

Second-generation identity cannot, therefore, be reduced to a simple progression from tradition to modernity or from homeland to host society. Rather, it takes shape through the interplay of familial memory, language, racial dynamics, institutional structures, and societal expectations. Migrants' children inherit stories of sacrifice, endurance, suffering, and hope while simultaneously navigating the dominant cultural systems that structure everyday life. Their experiences within educational institutions, workplaces, peer groups, and public spaces frequently diverge from the cultural values preserved within the home. This dual orientation cultivates a hybrid consciousness that resists fixed categorization. Instead of aligning exclusively with one cultural framework, they inhabit a liminal zone in which identity remains fluid, negotiated, and subject to continual reconstruction.

The notion of hybridity, closely linked to Homi K. Bhabha, provides a significant conceptual tool for understanding this condition. His theory of the "Third Space" contests essentialist definitions of identity by emphasizing processes of translation, negotiation, and reinterpretation. Within this space, identity is not passively inherited but actively shaped through cultural interaction and difference. The "Third Space" becomes a productive arena where meanings are destabilized and reformulated, allowing hybrid identities to emerge as dynamic and creative formations. This perspective disrupts ideas of cultural purity and underscores the transformative potential embedded in cultural intersections. Similarly, Stuart Hall reconceives identity as an ongoing process rather than a fixed essence rooted in origin. For Hall, identity is formed through discourse, representation, memory, and historical context, and it remains open to revision. When applied to second-generation immigrant writing, this framework highlights how identity develops through the convergence of personal experience and inherited history. The second generation must interpret parental narratives—often shaped by migration and marginalization—while negotiating their own place within contemporary society. Their sense of self emerges through a dynamic interplay between remembrance and reinvention, continuity and change.

This research builds upon these theoretical perspectives through a comparative study of *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong and *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith. Though the novels differ significantly in tone and narrative structure—one intimate, lyrical, and epistolary; the other expansive, socially panoramic, and satirical—both provide insightful representations of second-generation identity formation. Vuong's text foregrounds memory, trauma, language, and the fragile bond between mother and son, portraying identity as shaped through silence and storytelling. Smith's novel situates its characters within a diverse urban context, examining generational tensions, racial politics, scientific developments, and the complexities of modern Britain. Through their contrasting narrative forms, both works demonstrate how hybridity operates across private and public spheres. Their characters confront linguistic divides, racialized assumptions, and inherited cultural expectations while striving for belonging and self-definition. By bringing these texts into conversation, the study maintains that second-generation identity cannot be explained through a single theoretical paradigm. Instead, it unfolds as a relational and evolving process shaped by memory, language, intergenerational negotiation, and socio-political realities.

In conclusion, this introduction establishes the conceptual framework of the research by asserting that hybridity in second-generation immigrant literature should not be interpreted as confusion or

simple cultural amalgamation. Rather, it represents an active, creative process of negotiation and meaning-making. By examining how identity is constructed across varied narrative strategies and

cultural contexts, the study contributes to postcolonial and diaspora scholarship, presenting hybridity as a lived, textually mediated, and continuously transforming experience.

## I. Theoretical Framework

This study is situated within postcolonial theory and ongoing discussions about cultural identity formation. Its primary conceptual grounding comes from the work of Homi K. Bhabha, especially his ideas of hybridity and the “Third Space.” According to this perspective, identity is not a fixed legacy passed down unchanged; instead, it is produced within an intermediate cultural space where meanings are interpreted, negotiated, and continually reformulated. This approach is particularly relevant to second-generation narratives because these characters do not directly experience migration. Rather, they inherit its psychological and cultural consequences through memory, family histories, and intergenerational exchange. Their identities therefore evolve through processes of mediation and reinterpretation rather than through physical relocation alone. The research also draws upon the theoretical insights of Stuart Hall, who understands identity as an ongoing process of becoming instead of a stable essence tied to origins. Hall shifts the focus from fixed beginnings to lived realities, representation, and social positioning. In this framework, identity is continuously shaped and reshaped through storytelling, cultural practices, and everyday social engagement. By combining these perspectives, the study conceptualizes hybridity as active and creative rather than as a sign of instability or fragmentation. Instead of attempting to assign the characters to a single cultural category, the framework emphasizes how they construct meaning within overlapping cultural environments. Identity thus emerges through language, daily interactions, and changing social contexts, positioning hybridity as a dynamic space of negotiation, adaptation, and transformation.

## II. Research Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative approach centered on close textual analysis to explore the formation of hybrid identity in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong and *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith. Rather than employing quantitative techniques or empirical data, the study prioritizes interpretive engagement, critical inquiry, and theoretical discussion. The selected novels are treated as cultural narratives that both reflect wider socio-political environments and portray deeply personal emotional and psychological realities. By closely examining diction, imagery, symbolism, and character portrayal, the research analyzes how second-generation immigrant identity is constructed and negotiated within the literary text. The methodology is structured through a comparative framework that brings the two works into analytical dialogue. This model facilitates the identification of both convergences and divergences in their depictions of hybridity, displacement, belonging, and intergenerational conflict. Although each novel centers on second-generation immigrant experiences, they differ substantially in narrative form and tone. Vuong's work adopts an intimate, reflective, and epistolary mode, while Smith's narrative expands outward into a socially grounded and satirical panorama with multiple viewpoints. Through an exploration of these stylistic differences, the study demonstrates how narrative form itself shapes and influences the representation of identity. The theoretical grounding of the research draws from postcolonial and diaspora studies, especially the contributions of Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall, who conceptualize identity as fluid, relational, and continually evolving. However, the study does not apply these theories mechanically; instead, it weaves them into the textual analysis to show how abstract theoretical principles manifest in lived fictional experiences. In addition, particular emphasis is placed on narrative voice, temporal organization, generational interaction, and the portrayal of memory and language. By situating individual subjectivities within broader historical and social contexts, the research highlights identity as a dynamic and ongoing process shaped by the interaction between personal feeling and collective environment. Overall, this qualitative and comparative methodology provides a nuanced interpretation of second-generation identity as flexible, context-dependent, and constantly in formation rather than stable or predetermined.

## III. Literature Review

Second-generation immigrant literature has emerged as a key area of interest within postcolonial and diaspora studies, particularly in debates concerning hybridity, identity negotiation, and belonging. Earlier critical models tended to read immigrant narratives through themes such as exile, nostalgia, cultural fragmentation, and the emotional impact of migration. These interpretations largely centered on first-generation migrants, highlighting the loss of homeland

and the trauma of displacement. More recently, however, scholars have redirected their attention toward generational change, examining how identity is reshaped within multicultural societies rather than being defined solely by migratory suffering. This shift reflects a broader movement away from essentialist understandings of identity toward approaches that emphasize fluidity, relational processes, and socially constructed subjectivities. Influenced by postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and diaspora scholarship, contemporary critics foreground negotiation, interaction, and continual transformation. This theoretical development is strongly influenced by the ideas of Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "Third Space" challenges fixed binaries such as colonizer and colonized, proposing instead an in-between space of translation where new cultural meanings are produced. Hall similarly reconceptualizes identity as an ongoing process rather than a stable core, stressing its construction through discourse, memory, and representation. Together, their frameworks enable scholars to interpret second-generation texts as spaces where inherited histories converge with contemporary social contexts, generating identities that are provisional, negotiated, and constantly evolving. Academic discussions of *White Teeth* frequently emphasize its satirical portrayal of multicultural Britain, focusing on race relations, generational tensions, and the contradictions within liberal multiculturalism. Critics observe how Zadie Smith uses humor and a broad social narrative to question notions of national belonging and scientific progress. In contrast, studies of *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* often concentrate on trauma, memory, queerness, and fragmented language, highlighting how Ocean Vuong constructs identity through intimate, epistolary storytelling. Although both strands of criticism offer valuable perspectives, they are generally examined separately, with limited comparative consideration of how different narrative forms shape representations of hybridity. Recent scholarship in diaspora studies has also adopted intersectional methodologies, drawing on gender studies, race theory, and transnational perspectives to explore how class, sexuality, and racialization complicate second-generation experiences of belonging. Scholars increasingly challenge celebratory portrayals of hybridity as harmonious cultural blending, instead recognizing it as marked by tension, ambiguity, and structural inequalities. Despite these developments, much of the existing research remains either confined to individual texts or highly theoretical, leaving scope for comparative analyses that integrate thematic, formal, and conceptual concerns. This study addresses that gap by placing *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* and *White Teeth* in dialogue. By examining how lyrical interiority and expansive satire differently articulate hybrid subjectivities, the research contributes to broader discussions within postcolonial and diaspora studies. It contends that second-generation identity cannot be fully understood through a single theoretical lens but must be viewed as a multifaceted and evolving process shaped by memory, narrative strategies, intergenerational negotiation, and socio-political contexts.

## Hybridity and Postcolonial Theory

The notion of hybridity, most closely associated with Homi K. Bhabha, remains central to the interpretation of diasporic literature. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha presents the "Third Space" as a site where meaning is created through negotiation rather than simple preservation or total assimilation. Within this framework, cultures neither remain untouched nor vanish; instead, they are reshaped through contact and exchange. Hybridity challenges rigid oppositions such as colonizer/colonized or self/other and presents identity as unstable, performative, and produced through interaction rather than inherited essence. Critics frequently apply this model to immigrant fiction, arguing that second-generation characters occupy this uncertain in-between position. They belong neither completely to their ancestral homeland nor entirely to the dominant culture of the host nation. Instead, they continually reinterpret both. Although hybridity has been widely discussed, studies often focus on individual texts, leaving space for comparative analysis that examines how different writers portray negotiated identity across varied cultural contexts. Alongside Bhabha's ideas, Stuart Hall describes identity as a process of "becoming" rather than a stable condition of "being." According to Hall, cultural identity develops through memory, representation, and historical experience. Diasporic identity emerges from the tension between continuity and rupture, where inherited pasts intersect with present circumstances. His perspective has strongly shaped literary criticism, particularly in readings of migrant and postcolonial works in which characters attempt to reconcile family history with contemporary social life. However, Hall's framework is often applied to individual works rather than used comparatively to examine multiple forms of second-generation experience. As a result, scholarship highlights the constructed nature of identity without always exploring how narrative style itself shapes different expressions of hybridity. A comparative approach can therefore

demonstrate not only that identity is constructed but also how literary form contributes to that construction.

Overall, theories of hybridity and identity formation emphasize fluidity, negotiation, and historical positioning. Yet relatively little attention has been given to how different second-generation narratives express these ideas through variations in tone, structure, and narrative voice. By studying the selected texts together, this research aims to show how distinct literary strategies produce diverse representations of hybrid identity within contemporary multicultural contexts.

## **Diaspora and Generational Identity**

Diaspora studies have been crucial in explaining the complex character of second-generation identity. Scholars such as Avtar Brah define “diaspora space” as a shared field in which migrants, their descendants, and the host population encounter one another. By stressing relational interaction, this concept suggests that belonging is something negotiated across cultural, racial, and social differences rather than automatically inherited. Within literary criticism, this approach enables an examination of how second-generation characters feel both connected to and separated from their ancestral homelands. Work on intergenerational tensions in immigrant families also highlights the psychological effects of inherited displacement. Critics point out that second-generation individuals often juggle two expectations: loyalty to familial traditions and adaptation to dominant cultural norms. In literary narratives, this conflict commonly appears through language difficulties, naming practices, religious adjustments, and misunderstandings between parents and children. Although such studies successfully identify recurring features, many remain confined to sociological description or isolated themes, without fully explaining how these elements together shape hybrid identity.

## **Identity as Process and Representation**

Expanding postcolonial debates, Stuart Hall reconceives identity as a continuous process of becoming. He maintains that identity is not a stable essence transmitted unchanged across generations but is formed through representation, discourse, and memory. Diasporic identity therefore emerges from the interaction between rupture and continuity, negotiating inherited histories alongside present realities. In second-generation immigrant writing, this perspective becomes especially relevant. Unlike their parents, later generations rarely have direct experience of the homeland, yet their sense of self is shaped by inherited stories of migration, trauma, and sacrifice. Literary texts portray this mediated inheritance through fragmented narration, experimentation with language, and dialogue between generations. As a result, identity appears layered and relational, produced through both personal experience and collective memory.

## **Generational Conflict and Cultural Negotiation**

Tension between immigrant parents and their children remains a central concern in migrant literature. Scholars examining generational dynamics observe that second-generation characters frequently attempt to balance inherited customs with the demands of modern life in the host country. Disputes commonly emerge over language, religion, gender expectations, and professional choices. In such narratives, this conflict goes beyond ordinary family disagreement and becomes a key element in shaping identity. The child often functions as a cultural and linguistic mediator linking ancestral heritage with dominant social norms. This continuous negotiation produces hybrid subjectivity, since traditions must be reinterpreted within contemporary realities. Instead of depicting assimilation as simple or gradual, these works portray identity as the outcome of negotiation, resistance, and reinterpretation.

## **Silence, Voice, and Linguistic Displacement**

Language plays a defining role in the construction of second-generation identity. Many immigrant texts portray linguistic displacement, where the language spoken in the wider society differs from that used at home. This separation frequently leads to silence, miscommunication, and emotional distance between generations. In *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong, critics often underline the symbolic importance of language and silence within immigrant

households. Writing becomes a medium for expressing experiences that cannot be easily spoken, transforming silence into a site of emotional negotiation rather than simple absence. More generally, studies of second-generation identity demonstrate how language influences belonging by affecting education, mobility, and self-expression. Linguistic hybridity further complicates identity formation. Techniques such as code-switching, fragmented storytelling, and translation mirror a hybrid consciousness. Through these methods, immigrant literature captures the instability and multiplicity typical of diasporic identity.

### **Multiculturalism and Social Identity**

Second-generation immigrant narratives are strongly connected to multicultural social settings. *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith is frequently discussed in relation to multicultural Britain and debates surrounding race and belonging. Critics note that the novel presents identity as shaped not only by family background but also by institutions such as schools, religious communities, and peer groups. Research on multiculturalism indicates that second-generation individuals often face racialized perceptions that complicate their sense of national belonging. Even when born in the host nation, they may still be regarded as outsiders. This external perception interacts with internal negotiation, reinforcing the fluid and contested nature of identity. In many multicultural narratives, humor and satire expose rigid cultural categories and challenge stereotypes.

### **Naming, Self-Definition, and Belonging**

Naming practices frequently appear in immigrant literature as symbolic expressions of identity negotiation. Scholars observe that names carry cultural memory and social meaning, shaping both how characters are viewed and how they understand themselves. Modifying, shortening, or abandoning a name often reflects attempts to adjust to dominant cultural expectations. The pursuit of belonging remains another key theme in second-generation narratives. Rather than returning to an ancestral homeland or fully assimilating, characters often occupy an intermediate position. This search centers on psychological reconciliation rather than physical relocation. Contemporary scholarship increasingly interprets belonging as relational rather than territorial, grounded in social recognition and self-acceptance rather than fixed origin.

## **IV. RESEARCH GAP**

Despite extensive scholarly engagement with hybridity, diaspora, and generational conflict in postcolonial and cultural studies, sustained comparative inquiries into second-generation immigrant narratives remain relatively insufficient. Much of the existing research approaches literary texts independently, foregrounding either trauma, memory, and linguistic fragmentation in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong or multicultural satire and social critique in *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith. These works are seldom examined in conjunction to evaluate how their differing narrative techniques together expand the discourse on hybrid identity. As a consequence, critical discussions often separate internal psychological experiences from broader socio-cultural frameworks, overlooking the ways in which private and public dimensions of identity intersect in the lives of second-generation subjects.

Moreover, dominant conceptualizations of hybridity have been shaped significantly by theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall. While their theories have been foundational in presenting identity as fluid, relational, and constructed, literary criticism does not always sufficiently align these abstract formulations with the concrete realities portrayed in contemporary narratives. Concepts like “in-betweenness” and cultural negotiation frequently remain theoretical, lacking sustained engagement with depictions of family structures, educational settings, community life, and everyday interpersonal exchanges. Additionally, the stylistic and narrative strategies through which hybridity is represented—such as silence, non-linear narration, irony, and shifting viewpoints—are often mentioned but not comparatively analyzed across texts. Furthermore, the impact of narrative structure on the formation of hybrid subjectivity has not been comprehensively explored within comparative literary studies. Aspects such as narrative voice, temporal shifts, genre conventions, and structural experimentation—whether reflective, epistolary, or satirical—substantially influence how identity is articulated. Yet these formal elements are rarely studied collectively to demonstrate how they shape varying representations of second-generation belonging. Emotional dimensions, including vulnerability, resilience, irony, and intergenerational negotiation, similarly call for deeper cross-cultural and cross-textual engagement.

This research seeks to bridge these gaps by employing a comparative framework that brings together theoretical discourse, thematic exploration, and formal analysis. By situating intimate emotional experiences within broader socio-political contexts, it offers a more integrated perspective on how hybridity operates simultaneously within personal and communal spheres. The study contends that second-generation identity cannot be confined to a singular explanatory model; instead, it emerges as a dynamic and relational process shaped by memory, language, generational dialogue, and everyday social interaction. In doing so, it contributes to diaspora and postcolonial scholarship by redefining hybridity as not merely a theoretical construct but a lived and narratively mediated experience.

## V.DISCUSSION

A close comparison of *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong and *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith suggests that second-generation immigrant identity cannot be reduced to mere cultural uncertainty; rather, it is shaped through continuous negotiation. By examining issues such as intergenerational conflict, the dynamics of silence and articulation, naming practices, and the longing for belonging, the novels portray identity as fluid and evolving instead of stable and complete. The protagonists do not simply absorb their parents' traditions, nor do they fully assimilate into the dominant culture. Instead, they construct their identities within intersecting cultural spaces. An important conclusion that emerges from this comparison is that second-generation identity is formed through processes of mediation rather than the act of migration itself. Whereas the first generation experiences geographical displacement, the second generation faces a more psychological and interpretive form of dislocation. Although they grow up in the host society, they remain shaped by inherited histories and collective traumas they did not directly endure. This produces a layered sense of self—rooted in the contemporary social environment yet emotionally tied to memories passed down to them. Consequently, identity takes shape through constant translation between languages, cultural codes, expectations, and generational perspectives.

The texts depict generational conflict as a constructive and shaping force rather than merely a source of damage. Parents frequently symbolize stability, perseverance, and the preservation of cultural inheritance, whereas their children signify reinterpretation and change. The tension between these viewpoints creates the conditions in which hybrid identity emerges. Instead of fully embracing either tradition or modernity, the second generation reshapes and redefines both. Cultural traditions are neither strictly maintained nor completely discarded; they are selectively adapted to fit evolving contexts. This highlights that hybridity is not simply a blending of cultures, but a continuous negotiation arising from intergenerational interaction and lived experience.

Language is also fundamental to this formation of identity. Silence within private spaces and speech in public settings both influence how the self is constructed. In intimate relationships, emotions may remain unexpressed due to trauma, emotional separation, or linguistic barriers. Yet this silence is meaningful—it can communicate affection, suffering, and protection simultaneously. In contrast, public dialogue offers opportunities to explore, perform, and affirm identity. The second generation therefore navigates between internal contemplation and external expression. Identity takes shape not through a single stable mode of communication, but through the dynamic relationship between these inward and outward forms of expression. The study proposes that belonging is better understood as a relational experience rather than a strictly geographical one. The characters are not merely in pursuit of a physical homeland; instead, they desire affirmation, recognition, and emotional connection. In this sense, “home” becomes an affective condition shaped by relationships rather than a specific territory. Even when they are securely located within a nation, they continue to negotiate acceptance within both familial and social spheres. This suggests that, in second-generation narratives, diaspora operates more as a psychological reality than as physical displacement. The persistent feeling of being “in-between” remains, regardless of citizenship status or familiarity with national culture. Through comparison, two narrative patterns emerge. One represents identity as reflective and grounded in memory, while the other portrays it as socially constructed through interaction and engagement. Although these approaches differ in emphasis, they ultimately intersect. Both illustrate that second-generation identity is formed through the ongoing negotiation between inherited pasts and present experiences. The self becomes dialogic—shaped through exchanges across generations, cultural traditions, and social settings. These insights correspond with Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the Third Space, where cultural meaning is continuously produced rather than fixed. They also echo Stuart Hall's view that identity is an evolving process of becoming rather than a stable condition of being. The characters do not settle into a final cultural identity; instead,

they repeatedly renegotiate belonging through memory, language, and lived experience. In sum, the discussion reveals that second-generation immigrant literature disrupts fixed, binary understandings of identity, including the opposition between origin and assimilation. Rather than depicting identity as a selection between two stable extremes, these works portray it as dynamic, relational, and consciously formed. Hybridity is not represented as a brief transitional phase, but as a sustained reality of modern multicultural life. Instead of dissolving cultural tensions, the second generation inhabits and reworks them, converting tension into a space for creativity and self-construction. Thus, the study emphasizes that second-generation narratives reshape conventional ideas of belonging. Identity is neither passively received from heritage nor dictated by external pressures; it is continually crafted through negotiation across generational and cultural lines. The “in-between” position is reimagined not as a symbol of fragmentation or absence, but as a meaningful and generative space where multiplicity is integrated into a coherent yet evolving sense of self.

## VI. Conclusion

This study analyzes how second-generation immigrant fiction presents identity as something formed through hybridity and continuous cultural negotiation, with particular attention to *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong and *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith. Through comparative examination, it argues that identity in these novels is neither a stable inheritance nor a completed outcome of assimilation. Instead, identity appears as an ongoing, dialogic process shaped by memory, language, generational interaction, and social context. The second generation does not merely choose between cultural affiliations; rather, it constructs meaning within overlapping and sometimes contradictory spheres of belonging.

A key argument of the study is that the second generation experiences migration differently from the first. While their parents confront physical displacement, economic hardship, and cultural adjustment, their children primarily negotiate interpretation. They grow up with inherited stories of trauma, sacrifice, and relocation without having directly endured those events. Migration therefore becomes a transmitted memory rather than an immediate rupture. This inherited displacement creates a layered awareness: they are socially embedded in the host country yet emotionally influenced by narratives of another homeland. Their identities are shaped less by crossing borders and more by mediating between inherited histories and present realities.

As a consequence, belonging becomes layered and complex. On one side, second-generation individuals speak the dominant language fluently, participate in educational and social institutions, and share common experiences with their peers. On the other, they remain conscious of cultural differences preserved within family life. The home often sustains traditions, expectations, and memories that diverge from those of the wider society. Rather than producing simple alienation, this dual positioning fosters reflexivity. Identity becomes something actively negotiated and expressed rather than automatically received. The research also highlights the constructive role of generational tension in identity formation. Disagreements between parents and children do not merely signal cultural decline; instead, they open spaces for dialogue between different historical experiences and perspectives. Parents often embody continuity, valuing tradition as a safeguard rooted in lived vulnerability. Their children seek authenticity and self-definition within contemporary contexts. The interaction between preservation and reinterpretation becomes the arena in which hybrid identity takes shape.

Importantly, this process does not entail a rejection of cultural heritage. Instead, heritage is reassessed and transformed. When second-generation characters question religious practices, professional expectations, or social norms, they are engaging critically rather than abandoning tradition. Identity develops relationally, emerging from conversation with inherited memory while adapting to present circumstances. Hybridity thus represents negotiated integration rather than fragmentation. Language operates as a vital medium in this negotiation. Communication gaps between generations reveal both intimacy and distance. Many second-generation characters move between linguistic and cultural codes, navigating multiple value systems with varying ease. At times, silence conveys emotional depth—experiences that resist articulation or traumas beyond shared vocabulary. In other instances, humor and storytelling provide alternative channels of expression. Through dialogue and narrative, characters shape identities that acknowledge inherited emotional histories while asserting individuality. The comparative approach further demonstrates how differing narrative strategies illuminate various dimensions of hybridity. One novel emphasizes introspection and memory, portraying identity as formed through interior reflection and personal narration. The other foregrounds social interaction, depicting identity as constructed within communal networks and multicultural public spaces. Despite stylistic contrasts, both texts affirm that identity is produced through relational exchange.

Whether through private letters or public encounters, the second generation defines itself in conversation with others.

Another significant insight involves the redefinition of home. In these narratives, home is not imagined as a fixed geographical origin or an idealized homeland awaiting return. Rather, it is conceived as a fluid emotional and relational space. Characters are less concerned with reclaiming origins than with reconciling multiple attachments. Even when materially secure, they continue to experience in-betweenness because belonging depends on recognition and self-understanding rather than location alone. Diaspora becomes primarily psychological rather than territorial. These conclusions resonate with theoretical perspectives associated with Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall. Bhabha's idea of negotiation within an in-between cultural space explains how hybrid identities are continually produced rather than inherited as fixed forms. Hall's conception of identity as an ongoing process of becoming emphasizes its fluid and constructed character. However, the novels extend these theoretical insights by illustrating how hybridity operates in everyday emotional life—within families, friendships, romantic relationships, and moments of private reflection. Moreover, the study shows that second-generation fiction challenges rigid binaries such as tradition versus modernity or origin versus assimilation. These narratives resist the expectation that cultural duality must be resolved into singular belonging. Instead, they propose that multiplicity itself can function as a stable condition. The second generation does not eliminate contradiction but learns to inhabit it. Hybridity becomes not a temporary transition but a sustained mode of existence within multicultural societies.

Through sustained comparison, the research identifies both common patterns and diverse expressions of second-generation experience. In each novel, identity is shaped by inherited memory, generational dialogue, linguistic mediation, and social negotiation. Belonging is portrayed as constructed rather than automatically secured. At the same time, the contrasting narrative techniques—one introspective, the other socially expansive—demonstrate that hybridity can appear in different expressive forms while maintaining its central dynamic of negotiation. Ultimately, the study concludes that second-generation immigrant literature redefines cultural belonging. Rather than presenting hybridity as confusion or divided loyalty, these works portray it as adaptive and creative. The second generation develops the capacity to engage multiple cultural perspectives simultaneously, forming a flexible sense of self responsive to changing social realities. Although identity remains evolving and unfinished, it is sustained through dialogue, reinterpretation, and emotional continuity. In an increasingly globalized and multicultural world, these representations carry broader significance. They suggest that identity is shaped less by fixed origins than by interaction and exchange. The ability to negotiate differences becomes central to contemporary belonging. Through memory, language, and relational engagement, individuals construct selves capable of accommodating multiplicity without demanding absolute certainty. The in-between position, once perceived as marginal, emerges as a productive site of meaning.

In conclusion, second-generation immigrant literature shifts attention from narratives of exile to narratives of negotiation. It affirms that identity is neither wholly inherited nor entirely self-created but continuously formed through lived experience. By portraying hybridity as an enduring and creative dimension of modern life, these texts offer a nuanced understanding of belonging in a world shaped by migration and cultural interconnectedness

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