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■ THE PARADIGM OF *CULTURAL HYBRIDITY* IN THE POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE

A key text in the development of hybridity theory is Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) which analyses the liminality of hybridity as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. His key argument is that colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, produced ambivalence in the colonial masters and as such altered the authority of power. Bhabha's arguments have become key in the discussion of hybridity. In fact the concept of hybridity occupies a central place in postcolonial discourse. This critique of cultural imperialist hybridity meant that the rhetoric of hybridity became more concerned with challenging essentialism and has been applied to sociological theories of identity, multiculturalism, and racism. Within European culture, the construction of *Otherness* has its own history, developing a model of 'travelling cultures'. There is also a nostalgic attempt to revivify pure and indigenous regional cultures in reaction against what are perceived as threatening forms of cultural hybridity.

1. THE NEGATIVE LIMITS OF HYBRIDITY IN THE COLONIAL DISCOURSE

One of the most disputed terms in postcolonial studies, 'hybridity' commonly refers to "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation" (Ashcroft 2003: 118). Hybridisation takes many forms including cultural, political and linguistic. Hybridity as a concern for racial purity responds clearly to the zeitgeist of colonialism where, despite the backdrop of the humanitarian age of enlightenment, social hierarchy was beyond contention as was the position of Europeans at its summit. The social transformations that followed the ending of colonial mandates, rising immigration, and economic liberalisation profoundly altered the use and understanding of the term hybridity.

Robert Young has remarked on the negativity sometimes associated with the term hybridity. He notes how it was influential in imperial and colonial discourse in giving damaging reports on the union of different races. He argued that at the turn of the century, 'hybridity' had become part of a colonialist discourse of racism. In Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to be a Creole or a 'hybrid' was essentially negative. They were reported in the book as lazy and the dangers of such hybrids inevitably

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reverting to their 'primitive' traditions is highlighted throughout the novel. In reading Young alongside Rhys, it becomes easy to see the negative connotations that the term once had. Ashcroft says how "hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth" (Ashcroft 1995: 183).

The initial use of the term hybridity in wider discourse was as a stigma in association with colonial ideas about racial purity and a horror of miscegenation. In the colonial experience the children of white male colonisers and female 'native' peoples were assigned a different (and inferior) status in colonial society (a society which refused to even consider the possibility of white women with black men).

Despite this loaded historical past, Papastergiadis reminds us of the emancipative potential of negative terms. He poses the question "should we use only words with a pure and inoffensive history, or should we challenge essentialist models of identity by taking on and then subverting their own vocabulary." (Papastergiadis 1997: 258). It is "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of *in-betweenness*, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference." (Hoogvelt 1997: 158) This is particularly so in Bhabha's discussion of cultural hybridity. Bhabha has developed his concept of hybridity from literary and cultural theory to describe the construction of culture and identity within conditions of colonial antagonism and inequity. For Bhabha, hybridity is the process by which the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonised (the *Other*) within a singular universal framework, but then fails producing something familiar, but at the same time genuine new. Bhabha contends that a new hybrid identity or subject-position emerges from the interweaving of elements of the coloniser and colonised challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity. Hybridity is positioned as antidote to essentialism, or "the belief in invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity." (Fuss 1991: xi). In postcolonial discourse, the notion "that any culture or identity is pure or essential is disputable" (Ashcroft *et al.* 1995: 190). Bhabha himself is aware of the dangers of fixity and fetishism of identities within binary colonial thinking arguing that "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity." (Rutherford 1990: 211). This new mutation replaces the established pattern with a 'mutual and mutable' (Bhabha 1994: 184) representation of cultural difference that is positioned *inbetween* the coloniser and colonised. For Bhabha it is the indeterminate spaces in-between subject-positions that are lauded as the locale of the disruption and displacement of hegemonic colonial narratives of cultural structures and practices. He posits hybridity as such a form of liminal or in-between space, where the 'cutting edge of translation and negotiation' (Bhabha 1996: 190) occurs and which he terms the *third space*. This is a space intrinsically critical of essentialist positions of identity and a conceptualization of 'original or originary culture':

For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'Third Space', which enables other positions to emerge. (Rutherford 1990: 211)

1.1. Hybridity as “third space”

Thus, the third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a *productive*, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new *possibility*. It is an ‘interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative’ (Bhabha 1994: 189) space of new forms of cultural meaning and production blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorisations of culture and identity. According to him, this hybrid third space is an *ambivalent* site where cultural meaning and representation have no ‘primordial unity or fixity’. (Bhabha 1994: 200). The concept of the third space is submitted as useful for analysing the enunciation, transgression and subversion of dualistic categories going beyond the realm of colonial binary thinking and oppositional positioning. Despite the exposure of the third space to contradictions and ambiguities, it provides a spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that “initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation.” (Bhabha 1994: 187)

The *hybrid identity* is positioned within this third space, as ‘lubricant’ (Papastergiadis 1997: 260) in the conjunction of cultures. The hybrid’s potential is with its innate knowledge of ‘transculturation’ (Taylor 1991: 210), its ability to transverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion. They have encoded within them a counterhegemonic agency. At the point at which the coloniser presents a normalising, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy opens up a third space of/for rearticulation of negotiation and meaning.

In his article entitled *Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences*, Bhabha stresses the interdependence of coloniser and colonized, in terms of hybridity. He argues that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in what he calls the ‘Third Space of Enunciation’. In accepting this argument, we begin to understand why claims to the inherent purity and originality of cultures are ‘untenable’, urging us into this space in an effort to open up the notion of an international culture “not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity”. In bringing this to the next stage, he hopes that it is in this space “that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this ‘Third Space’, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves”. He goes as far as to see this imperial delirium forming gaps within the English text, gaps which are:

the signs of a discontinuous history, an estrangement of the English book. They mark the disturbance of its authoritative representations by the uncanny forces of race, sexuality, violence, cultural and even climatic differences which emerge in the colonial discourse as the mixed and split texts of hybridity. If the English book is read as a production of hybridity, then it no longer simply commands authority. (Bhabha 1994: 190)

1.2. “Mimicry” as a negative form of hybridity

His analysis, which is largely based on the Lacanian conceptualization of mimicry as camouflage focuses on colonial ambivalence. On the one hand, he sees the colonizer

as a snake in the grass who, speaks in “a tongue that is forked,” and produces a mimetic representation that “...emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge”. Bhabha recognizes then that colonial power carefully establishes highly-sophisticated strategies of control and dominance; that, while it is aware of its ephemerality, it is also anxious to create the means that guarantee its economic, political and cultural endurance, through the conception, in Macaulay’s words in his “Minute on Indian Education” (1835), “of a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” – that is through the reformation of that category of people referred to by Frantz Fanon in the phrase, “black skin/white masks,” or as “mimic men” by V.S.Naipaul. On the other hand, Bhabha immediately diverts his pertinent analysis by shifting the superlative certainty of the colonizer and the strategic effectiveness of his political intentions into an alarming uncertainty. Macaulay’s Indian interpreters along with Naipaul’s mimic men, he asserts, by the very fact that they are authorized versions of otherness, “part-objects of a metonymy of colonial desire, end up emerging as inappropriate colonial subjects... [who], by now producing a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence, de-stabilize the colonial subjectivity, unsettle its authoritative centrality, and corrupt its discursive purity. Actually, he adds, mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*... and in that very act of repetition, originality is lost, and centrality de-centred. What is left, according to Bhabha, is the trace, the impure, the artificial, the second-hand. He analyses the slippages in colonial political discourse, and reveals that the Janus-faced attitudes towards the colonized lead to the production of a mimicry that presents itself more in the form of a “menace” than “resemblance”; more in the form of a rupture than consolidation. Hybridity subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the very entry of the formerly-excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse. The dominant culture is contaminated by the linguistic and racial differences of the native self. Hybridity can thus be seen, in Bhabha’s interpretation, as a counter-narrative, a critique of the canon and its exclusion of other narratives. In other words, the hybridity-acclaimers want to suggest first, that the colonialist discourse’s ambivalence is a conspicuous illustration of its uncertainty; and second, that the migration of yesterday’s “savages” from their peripheral spaces to the homes of their “masters” underlies a blessing invasion that, by “Third-Worlding” the center, creates “fissures” within the very structures that sustain it.

In colonial discourse, hybridity is a term of abuse for those who are products of miscegenation, mixed-breeds. It is imbued in nineteenth-century eugenicist and scientific-racist thought.

2. “HYBRIDITY” AS A STRATEGY OF SURVIVAL IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

In its most recent descriptive and realist usage, hybridity appears as a convenient category at ‘the edge’ or contact point of diaspora, describing cultural mixture where the diasporized meets the host in the scene of migration. Nikos Papastergiadis makes this

link at the start of his book, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*, where he mentions the 'twin processes of globalization and migration' (Papastergiadis 2000: 3). He outlines a development which moves from the assimilation and integration of migrants into the host society of the nation-state towards something more complex in the metropolitan societies of today. Speaking primarily of Europe, the Americas and Australia, Papastergiadis argues that as some members of migrant communities came to prominence 'within the cultural and political circles of the dominant society' they 'began to argue in favour of new models of representing the process of cultural interaction, and to demonstrate the negative consequences of insisting upon the denial of the emergent forms of cultural identity' (Papastergiadis 2000: 3). Hybridity has been a key part of this new modelling, and so it is logically entwined within the coordinates of migrant identity and difference, same or not same, host and guest. Worrying that assertions of identity and difference are celebrated too quickly as resistance, in either the nostalgic form of 'traditional survivals' or mixed in a 'new world of hybrid forms' (Clifford 2000: 103), Clifford sets up an opposition (tradition/hybrid) that will become central to our critique of the terms.

There is much more that hybridity seems to contain: 'A quick glance at the history of hybridity reveals a bizarre array of ideas' (Papastergiadis 2000: 169). In addition to the general positions set out above; hybridity is an evocative term for the formation of identity; it is code for creativity and for translation. In Bhabha's terms 'hybridity is a camouflage' (Bhabha 1994: 193) and, provocatively he offers 'hybridity as heresy' (226), as a disruptive and productive category. It is 'how newness enters the world' (227) and it is bound up with a 'process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences' (252).

With relation to diaspora, the most conventional accounts assert hybridity as the process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform and reconfigure this in production of a new hybrid culture or 'hybrid identities' (Chambers 1996: 50). Whether talk of such identities is coherent or not hybridity is better conceived of as a process. Kobena Mercer writes of 'the hybridized terrain of diasporic culture' (Mercer 1994: 254) and even the older terminologies of syncretism and mixture evoke the movement of 'hybridization' rather than a stress on fixed identity. Hybridity in postcolonial theory is associated with the idea of identity as a fluid, constantly shifting process. Finally, a turn of the millennium volume *Hybridity and its Discontents* is able to describe hybridity as: 'a term for a wide range of social and cultural phenomenon involving "mixing", [it] has become a key concept within cultural criticism and post-colonial theory' (Brah/Coombs 2000: 125).

3. DECONSTRUCTING HYBRIDITY BETWEEN PURITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Even as a process in translation or in formation, the idea of 'hybrid identities' (Chambers 1996: 50) relies upon the proposition of non-hybridity or some kind of normative insurance. Hybridity theorists have had to grapple with this problem with a revealing degree of agitation. Gilroy, for example, has moved away from an allegiance to hybridity and declared:

Who [...] wants purity? ... the idea of hybridity, of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities... I think there isn't any purity; there isn't any anterior purity... that's why I try not to use the word hybrid ... Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails. (Gilroy 1994: 54-55)

Gilroy clearly recognizes the problem of purity when he laments 'the lack of a means of adequately describing, let alone theorizing, intermixture, fusion and syncretism without suggesting the existence of anterior "uncontaminated" purities'. He is correct that the descriptive use of hybridity evokes, counterfactually, a stable and prior non-mixed position, to which 'presumably it might one day be possible to return' (Gilroy 2000: 250). Gilroy continues, this time with the arguments of Young firmly in his sights:

Whether the process of mixture is presented as fatal or redemptive, we must be prepared to give up the illusion that cultural and ethnic purity has ever existed, let alone provided a foundation for civil society. The absence of an adequate conceptual and critical language is undermined and complicated by the absurd charge that attempts to employ the concept of hybridity are completely undone by the active residues of that term's articulation within the technical vocabularies of nineteenth-century racial science. (Gilroy 2000: 250-251)

Hall also reacts, naming Young, admittedly in defence against an even more sweeping condemnation of postcolonial theory, yet significantly with the penultimate words of a volume entitled *The Postcolonial Question*, where he writes:

a very similar line of argument is to be found ... [in] the inexplicably simplistic charge in Robert Young's *Colonial Desire* (1995) that the post-colonial critics are "complicit" with Victorian racial theory because both sets of writers deploy the same term - hybridity - in their discourse. (Hall 1996: 259)

The driving imperative is to salvage centred, bounded and coherent identities: placed identities for placeless times. This calls the search for purity and purified identity. Purified identities are constructed through the purification of space, through the maintenance of the territorial boundaries and frontiers. We can also talk of 'a geography of rejection which appears to correspond to the purity of antagonistic communities'. Purified identities are also at the heart of empire. Purification aims to secure both protection from and positional superiority over, the external Other. Anxiety and power feed off each other. In this case, William Connolly argues:

When you remain within the established field of identity and difference, you become a bearer of strategies to protect identity through devaluation of the other; but if you transcend the field of identities through which the other is constituted, you lose the identity and standing needed to communicate with those you sought to inform. Identity and difference are bound together. It is impossible to reconstitute the relation to the second without confounding the experience of the first. (Connolly 1991: 30)

In conclusion, Stuart Hall argues that ‘unsettling, recombination, hybridisation and “cut-and-mix” carries with it a transformed relation to Tradition, one in which ‘there can be no simple “return” [to] or “recovery” of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present’ (Hall 1996: 30). The crossing of boundaries brings about a complexity of ambivalent identities and also a sense of the permeability and contingency of cultures. It allows us ‘to see others not as ontologically given but as historically constituted’ and, thus, can ‘erode the exclusivist biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own not least’ (Said 1993: 225).

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SUMMARY

THE PARADIGM OF *CULTURAL HYBRIDITY* IN THE POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE

In a broad view, culture has two primary operative functions: one is to endorse the 'fixed tablet of tradition' and the second is to provide a location for the progression of culture through generations and time. This paper refers to the process of cultural change and hybridization, one way to distinguish between these two cultural forces is that fixed tradition is not geographically, whereas as hybridisation is often specifically related to place, locale and situation. The rhetoric of hybridity or the *hybrid talk* is associated with the emergence of postcolonial discourse and its critiques of cultural imperialism. This stage in the history of hybridity is characterised by literature and theory that focuses on the effects of mixture upon identity and culture. Cultural hybridity produces new forms of alterity and is inherent in processes of social and cultural dynamics. A sharp contrast between cultures and hybrids is the notion of choice in cultural referent. This choice is significant because in cultural hybrids, traditions are loosened, and the capacity to make choices allowed. Cultural hybridity therefore, represents a cultural dynamism. This ferment of culture is found on the borders, in the overlaps, and the in-between places between two or more cultures.

KEYWORDS: cultural hybridity, alterity, transcultural forms, colonial discourse, postcolonial, ambivalence.