



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

Byrne, Eleanor (2019) Said, bhabha and the colonised subject. In: Orientalism and Literature. Cambridge University press, pp. 151-165. ISBN 9781108614672

Downloaded from: <http://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/623220/>

Version: Accepted Version

Publisher: Cambridge University press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108614672.009>

Please cite the published version

<https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk>

Chap. 8 Said, Bhabha and the Colonised Subject

Eleanor Byrne

The Disorienting Present

Homi K. Bhabha's introduction to his collected essays, *The Location of Culture*, opens with an apprehension of the moment he is writing from as one marked by disorientation, with the posts of "postmodernism, postcolonialism and postfeminism" on the one hand and the sense of restless movements, a moving back and forth, 'here and there', that has unhooked contemporary critical theory from fixed and primary organisational categories, and has produced constellations of ways of being that acknowledge 'race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation'.ⁱ The central proposition established in this opening is the argument that it is theoretically innovative and politically crucial to think beyond narratives of originary subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference"ⁱⁱ Much of what follows reiterates and elaborates on this central interest in the moments and processes where different experiences and narratives of self, belonging, nation, community or cultural value meet, are remade, translated or altered. Bhabha's interest is in the terms of cultural engagement, understanding how different positions are negotiated and produced at the moment of interaction. As such his argument is that we need to refocus in order to think about how difference is experienced or mobilised, in an argument about 'where' culture actually is, as indicated by the term 'location', in his title. In this important conceptual shift, Bhabha seeks to re-site an understanding of culture away from authorised and pre-given forms of 'diversity' that organise around assumptions of a stable self or communities and posits that culture is always in process, negotiating, the point of its articulation to an other. Its 'location' is to be beyond here and there, to be disorientingly produced in fraught dialogues or dissident interventions, in restless revisions that characterise the postal age of postcolonial cultures. As

he argues in virtually all his work, “terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively”ⁱⁱⁱ He continues “The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation”^{iv} It is from this critical position that he formulates some of his most well known models for thinking differently about culture, through the overlapping terms of ambivalence, hybridity, and interstitial, translational subjectivities.

To a great extent Bhabha’s work from the 1980s hit a receptive postcolonial audience bringing to bear poststructuralist theory, notably Derrida’s field changing concepts of *différance*, deconstruction, and dissemination to Said’s model of Orientalism. As Robert Young notes, Bhabha combined often contradictory theories, seeking aspects of post-structuralism, psychoanalysis and critical race theory to serve his interrogation of colonial discourse and the postcolonial present.^v As well as drawing on Lacan’s influential psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity that were being eagerly used in literary studies in the late 1980s, he also drew on Foucault and Bakhtin, as well as Julia Kristeva, and later Judith Butler, trying to synthesise and draw in poststructuralist inflected theory that was highly influential in this period, to mobilise and hybridise these diverse theoretical approaches for a revived and non-identitarian postcolonial theoretical arena. Bhabha’s essays from the mid to late 1980s and early 1990s were collected in *The Location of Culture* in 1994, as such the essays reflect a number of key moments in the history of cultural studies, postcolonial theory and the developments in poststructuralist theory across a number of strands of critical theory during this period. Bhabha also wrote extensively for journals such as *Artforum* moving comfortably into the field of visual culture and fine art, at a time when the art world was rapidly changing its relation to hierarchies of race and class.

In particular in much of his work Bhabha considered how best we might begin to address various forms of what he calls after Derrida, 'displaced acceleration', the 'exilic' conditions of the present, where a new international must be sought in

the singular sites of violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, economic oppression, which must be attentive to the ways in which narratives of national rootedness in the West need to be taught to remember a displaced or displaceable population, where nationalist authority is brutally asserted through dispensing with 'others' who are perceived as being pre-modern and therefore underserving of nationhood, or basically labelled terroristic and therefore deemed unworthy of a national home, enemies of the very idea of a nation peoples.^{vi}

Bhabha's work has participated in ongoing debates about all these issues, real world political events, through a medium of what is often called 'high theory', and his relation to Said is a complex one, to some extent 'unlikely' as Said vigorously defended the role of the amateur critic, who did not use technical or obtuse language to communicate ideas, something Bhabha, and poststructuralist theorizing has frequently been charged with. Yet like Said, Bhabha has always found himself performing theoretical and critical acrobatics switching between the deployment of 'difficult' theory and engagement in real world events, participating for example in organising groups of writers and activists around the Fatwah declared on Salman Rushdie after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.^{vii} Whilst facing critics who baulk at his 'impenetrable prose' he was also enthusiastically taken up by artists and writers in the blossoming field of race and postcolonial theory, collaborated with eminent cultural critics like Stuart Hall, as well as with celebrated artists such as Anish Kapoor and written many articles

relating to transformations in British culture that engaged with the dynamics of race and nation in the contemporary moment. If some of his key critical ideas, ambivalence, hybridity, the Third Space have swept through the field of cultural theory and postcolonial studies it is arguably because he named and attempted to contribute to the concerns of an emerging discipline. His thinking is marked by an increasing awareness in the fields of postcolonial studies, cultural studies and feminist scholarship of cultural transformations brought about by global post-war migrations, cultural and political interventions by Black and Ethnic Minority minority groups on a local and global level, and in doing so helped artists and writers to articulate the positions they found themselves in.

Interestingly, whilst one of the major criticisms aimed at his writing has been their perceived lack of relation to real-world politics, a view that he actively challenges in his article 'The Commitment to Theory', his introductory essay in *The Location of Culture* comes partially from an exhibition catalogue for a pivotal and controversial biennial exhibition at the Whitney art gallery in New York in 1993. The exhibition which featured many Black and minority artists was negatively reviewed in many art establishment quarters at the time, as 'trendily political' which one can read as Conservative rhetoric for actually political. Paul Richards's review for *The Washington Post*, for example, comments that 'its artists all feel themselves aggrieved. And here they come in their noisy droves, those martyrs of the margins, the lesbians, the gays, the inhabitants of barrios, the sufferers of AIDS.'^{viii} Bhabha wrote one of the four exhibition catalogue essays alongside, Coco Fusco, Avital Ronnell and B. Ruby Rich. The exhibition was clearly a watershed moment for establishment art in the U.S. as it abruptly broke with models built around complacent white establishment concepts of greatness and genius. It featured, amongst many diverse and political works, Daniel J Martinez's controversial badges handed to every guest, with the words 'I can't imagine every wanting to be white', on them, and George Holliday's 10-minute videotape of the Rodney King beating.^{ix} Like Said, Bhabha has juggled

political affiliations alongside his theoretical explorations, and this has involved thinking beyond identity politics and about alliances, models of intersectionality and shared forms of activism and models of community that can facilitate inclusion whilst being attentive to difference.

As with many of his contemporaries - theorists, writers and artists - and Said before him, a key part of his attempt to imagine the present differently was founded on returning to the discourses of colonialism and race of the nineteenth-century, to make meaningful links between racist discourses of the past and their legacies in the present. Whilst some critiques of Bhabha's work have focused on the 'textual' nature of his identification of forms of resistance, he is not merely a historian of colonialism, rather he seeks to find a language and a set of tools to name the work and the experiences of the cultural practitioners of the present across multiple modes of oppression, race, class, gender, sexuality, outsidership, illegality, vulnerability and precarity.

Orientalism, Ambivalence, Hybridity

Orientalism is a form of paranoia – knowledge of another kind say from historical knowledge.^x

Said [...] hints continually at a polarity or division at the very centre of *Orientalism*. It is, on the one hand a topic of learning, discovery, practice; on the other it is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements. [...] This line of thinking is given a shape analogical to the dreamwork, when Said refers explicitly to a distinction between 'an unconscious positivity' which he terms *latent Orientalism* and

the stated knowledges and views about the Orient which he calls *manifest Orientalism*.^{xii}

Bhabha's work theorising colonial discourse influenced a generation of postcolonial scholars, largely through the widespread discussion and adaptation of his key concepts of ambivalence and hybridity. His reading of interactions between colonisers and colonised peoples resituated Said's model of colonial discourse counter-intuitively, as something that does not *only* facilitate the embedding of colonial systems of power. He does so through arguing for a kind of 'play' inherent in such discourses issuing from a fundamental irreconcilable contradiction at the heart of colonialism and Imperialism. Bhabha shares Said's sense of complicity and interrelation between orientalist discourses and political or administrative systems, modes of maintaining, asserting, showing, displaying and 'having' power, but he argues the knowability of the colonial subject always eludes colonial discourse, and proposes that colonial discourse produces ambivalent, fraught, psychically inflected knowledge and that such discourse says as much about the coloniser as it does about the colonised.

Bhabha develops Said's particular models of discourse analysis in *Orientalism*, demonstrating that colonial discourse was not monolithic but internally riven. Bhabha's approach is largely influenced by his use of seminal essays on deconstructive literary theory by Jacques Derrida who proposed a deconstructive approach to literary and philosophical texts as a critique of Western metaphysics, that highlighted the ways in which any text is founded on internal contradictions that reveal its foundations to be 'impossible', the text working 'against itself'. In Derrida's work writing undoes itself, as it holds irreconcilable meanings and the literary critic can find in this instability the politics of the text. Derrida's work clearly resonates with Bhabha as he thinks through the ways in which colonial discourses set

themselves up as knowledge but register their own profound instability and illegitimacy at the same time.

Bhabha also uses psychoanalytic literary theory to rethink Said's description of Orientalism, homing in, in what he calls an "underdeveloped passage in Said", on the lines that for a reader of Freud are immediately suggestive:

What is this theory of encapsulation or fixation which moves between the recognition of cultural and racial difference and its disavowal, by affixing the unfamiliar to something established, in a form that is repetitious and vacillates between delight and fear?^{xii}

As Robert Young suggests, "Bhabha exploits the ambivalence which Said denies but nevertheless demonstrates"^{xiii} At the centre of Bhabha's work we find a focus on the stereotype that brought the term ambivalence into play as a key mode of reading colonial discourse and the role of the stereotype in that discourse. Bhabha offers a close reading of what he terms "the stereotype-as suture" as a form of fetishistic identification that is profoundly split in a number of key ways but is also attempting to knit together those "splits"^{xiv}. By doing so he is able to see that a colonial text (indeed any text) is not already self sufficient in the meanings it contains but produces resistance as something that it does to itself as form that produces an internally split meaning, not a clear message that is opposed from the outside, or at least not only opposed from the outside. Instead he is interested in the way that colonial discourse anxiously repeats its stereotypes, which survive into the present day, partially adapted but largely intact. Rather than seeing the stereotype as simply inaccurate and empowering to the one doing the stereotyping he reads, with Derrida in mind, texts that are as anxious and unstable as they are fixed and certain about the stereotype they deploy. Bhabha moves away from thinking about stereotypes as positive or negative, and away from a model

where stereotypes are just projections of negative or unwanted aspects of those doing the stereotyping. He reflects poststructuralist ideas about narrative and ways of understanding how meaning is created. The stereotype becomes a fault line or a way of entry into thinking about colonial discourse itself as split and ambivalent. The stereotype he argues is a peculiar paradigm for colonial discourse, a privileged sign, something that denotes a strange, arrested, mix of desire and hate. Bhabha argues that “the stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations”. (p.75) Bhabha uses Frantz Fanon to support this reading, citing *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), where he argues; “When Fanon talks of the positioning of the subject in the stereotyped discourse of colonialism, he gives further credence to my point. The legends, stories, histories and anecdotes of a colonial culture offer the subject a primordial Either/Or. *Either* he is fixed in a consciousness of the body as a solely negating activity *or* as a new kind of man, a new genus” (p.75). Following Freud, we might best understand the stereotype as a fetish, something which in questions of sexuality and desire, is a thing that is a substitute for a lack; one that enables control over a sense of self that is potentially threatened by a sexual encounter or by desire for an other, by bringing the object of desire under control.

^{xv} Bhabha argues that the stereotype is similar to the fetish in two ways. Firstly, it is structurally similar to the fetish, linking something scary (racial and sexual difference and confrontation with that difference) to something familiar - an object in the case of the fetish, a stereotype in the case of colonial discourse. Secondly, because it hovers between figuring difference as an anxiety about a lack and as an affirmation of completeness it moves between lack and completion, the stereotype bolsters itself by putting itself in the paradoxical place of an unattainable completion. The stereotype has to be anxiously repeated forever - even though it

is supposed to fix itself to its subject, to be already known and obvious. Instead it circulates as a bogus and fetishized form of knowing, but one that Bhabha insists represents its own anxiety in the ways it circulates and is repeated.

Whilst the subject is 'fixed' as something, the things that it is fixed on can be quite volatile, disorder, sexual misconduct, dirt, drunkenness, bodily threat, verbal/ physical dominance, ugliness, already creating an odd model of 'fixed volatility'. So rather than merely a projection of what is hated or feared or a source of disgust about the self, it is an index of colonial discourse itself, and crucially for Bhabha it is an index of a desire that is disavowed. It simultaneously recognises and disavows difference. The stereotype also like the fetish operates as a kind of metaphor and metonymy. It is always there to cover a fear, and operates as a form of multiple and contradictory belief. In colonial texts it works to address moments where the difference of colonial culture and hence its threat to the coloniser cannot be named, hence Bhabha notes, "the same old stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish must be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time" (p.77).

This sense of internal splitting is also key to Bhabha's understanding of colonial discourse as always hybrid, according to Bhabha, because any attempt to impose or make meanings is always transformed in the moment of its interaction with its intended recipients. Hybridity is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation, "If the appearance of the English book is read as a production of colonial hybridity, then it no longer simply commands authority. It gives rise to a series of questions of authority that, in my bastardized repetition, must sound strangely familiar". (p.113)

Bhabha argues that colonial discourse is always altered when it takes place at the point of interaction, at the moment where it is interpreted in some way by the colonised. No colonial

discourse remains untouched or unaffected by this; it is always more or less than itself at the point of enunciation and reception. In his essay 'Signs Taken for Wonders', he considers the writings of Indian Catechist Anund Messeh in 1817, who struggles to contain the meanings that proliferate from the readers of Bibles he encounters outside Delhi, as they interpret the book given to them they say, by "An Angel at Hurdwar fair"^{xvi}. Bhabha comments; "The discovery of the book installs a sign of appropriate representation: the word of God, truth, art creates the conditions for the beginning, a practice of history and narrative. But the institution of the word in the wilds is also an *Entstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition – the dazzling light of literature sheds only areas of darkness" (p.105). *Entstellung* would name a kind of defacement, or disfiguring that takes place as the colonial text 'takes place' in the colony.

Colonial literature, such as R. L. Stevenson's short story, 'The Bottle Imp', written for a Polynesian readership whilst in Samoa, then translated with missionary help, suffers much the same fate. The interpretation and morals extracted from his story by his Samoan readers, as Stevenson's wife Fanny notes, reflects the profoundly hybrid condition of the colonial literary text. "I do not understand what civilizing effect the story of *The Bottle Imp* was supposed to have on the natives, but I cannot think it quite fulfilled the expectations of the missionary who translated it [...] Samoans are in the habit of speaking in parables; they found many different morals in the Bottle Imp, some very ingeniously extracted"^{xvii} *The Bottle Imp* is both saturated with colonial assumptions about the Polynesian readership and their needs, and the role of the coloniser, but also illustrates Bhabha's point, which is a poststructuralist one: hybridity shifts the power of the text, it questions discursive authority and suggests, contrary to Said's *Orientalism*, that colonial discourse is not 'in control' of its meanings. Discourse only operates as the moment of being interpreted, where it 'lands', and as such there is always an element of reversal or compromise or interpretation.

Said illustrates something similar in his humorous account of his education, when he relates his experiences of growing up in colonial Egypt, attending Victoria College in Cairo, in his memoir *Out of Place* (1999). The education system is entirely imported from England, the school is designed to be ‘the Eton of the Middle East’, and “except for the teachers of Arabic and French, the faculty was entirely English (not a single English student was enrolled) [...] Being and speaking Arabic were delinquent activities at VC and accordingly we were never given proper instruction in our language, history, culture and geography. We were tested as if we were English boys, trailing behind an ill defined and always out of reach goal from class to class, year to year”^{xviii} Whilst he doesn’t employ vocabulary of mimicry or ambivalence, but he does demonstrate the ways in which the colonial education system was subverted by his classmates during an English lesson on *Twelfth Night*; “Gately (the teacher) asked us to read out loud and explain various lines in the first scene but achieved only raucous laughter, incomprehensible gibberish and horrendous Arabic obscenities presented as ‘classical’ equivalents of what the Duke of Illyria was saying” (p182).

Mimicry and Menace

As with his work on the stereotype, Bhabha takes up the question of colonial mimicry- the desire of the colonizer for a recognizable and controllable other who is a kind of copy of the colonizer and has internalized colonial power systems- in order to mobilize what may seem an initially unpromising aspect of colonial culture and power from which to seek dissidents and resistance. Whilst mimicry is presented as disabling for the colonized, a tool for producing a lack of center and self for the colonized subject, Bhabha returns to this demand from colonial power for a fixed and recognizable other to destabilize the model and think it differently.

“Colonial mimicry” he argues “is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite. That is to say that discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective it must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference”^{xix}

Bhabha’s explorations of the importance of a kind of disavowed mimicry for the coloniser, looks at how the purported civilizing mission of British colonial expansion finds itself crossed by an anxiety, that too substantial a level of cultural and social reform would risk producing subjects that might then organise for or fight for their liberty. Charles Grant, a Scot who was Chairman of the British East India company in ‘Observations on the state of society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain (1792), argued for a ‘partial reform’, and partial diffusion of Christianity, a desire to create mimic men who adhere to British Christian values, but not free subjects. “Inadvertently Grant produces a knowledge of Christianity as a form of social control which conflicts with the enunciatory assumptions that authorise his discourse” (p.87) and Thomas Babington Macaulay’s famous ‘Minute on Education’ of 1835, which was Bhabha argues deeply influenced by this work. Macaulay notoriously comments on the relative values of an entire Oriental education versus the higher value he would put on a single primer of English literature, thus inaugurating the teaching of English to an Indian elite by the East India company.

Mimicry, of manners, customs, clothing, language, and schooling, answers to a desire for an approved and controllable other who is never quite as good as the original in the colonisers’ view: “Almost the same but not ‘white’” as Bhabha comments, adapting the Freudian phrase, “almost the same but not quite” (p.89). Mimicry, such as copying the wearing of a suit, as Dr Aziz does in E.M. Forster’s bitter critique of Anglo-India, *A Passage to India* (1924) demonstrates the way in which Aziz is seen as a ‘poor copy’ of the English, when his collar button is noted as being missing. Yet the scene where Aziz fixes his collar stud into Fielding’s

collar, an act of homoerotic symbolic intimacy, which involves the ‘undressing’ of Aziz who passes his stud to Fielding, demonstrates it is actually he who maintains the illusion of Fielding’s superiority in the eyes of others. Aziz’s hospitality and generosity are re-framed as the sloppy standards of the colonial subject, because this scene is hidden from public view. As the mimic man who always gets something a little wrong, Aziz is always aware of the politics of this dynamic, in the immediate aftermath of the lending of the collar stud, he moves the terms of discussion away from where Fielding would have it.

“Why the hell does one wear collars at all? Grumbled Fielding as he bent his neck.”

“We wear them to pass the Police.”

“What’s that?”

“If I’m biking in English dress – starch collar, hat with ditch – they take no notice.

When I wear a fez they cry ‘Your lamp’s out!’ Lord Curzon did not consider this when he urged natives of India to retain their picturesque costumes.”^{xx}

While Fielding wonders idly about the quirks of English fashion and inconveniences of the collar Aziz points to the policing of a type of mimicry as a prerequisite for avoiding persecution and everyday harassments. Aziz knows only too well the role of the mimicry in colonial India, as Bhabha notes, following Lacan, “mimicry is like camouflage, not harmonisation of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically.” (p.85) In ‘Sly Civility’ Bhabha builds on this troubled relation between coloniser and colonised as he proposes the self-defeating will for authority that tips narcissistic will to power into the paranoia of those in power, a “desire for authorization in the face of a process of cultural differentiation which makes it problematic to fix the native objects of colonial power as the moralized others of truth.” (p.100). However, Bhabha argues that the act of mimicry disturbs a straightforward relationship between original

and copy, drawing attention to the way in which the so-called original is a performance, thus unhooking it from a straightforward relationship with the natural.

The central preoccupation of *A Passage to India*, the accusation and trial of Aziz for the attempted rape of the visiting English woman Adela Quested, affords Forster with an opportunity to explore what Bhabha calls “the forked tongue” of post-Enlightenment colonial discourse. After the incident at the Marabar Caves the British gather in their club to rehearse a series of racist discourses, stereotypes and fears associated with British rule in India and the ambivalent claim to power they hold. In Forster’s narrative, fragments and murmurs from the couples grouped there are interspersed with thoughts of the Collector.

He wanted to flog every native that he saw, but to do nothing that would lead to a riot or to the necessity for military intervention. [...] The others, less responsible, could behave naturally. They had started speaking of “women and children” – that phrase that exempts the male from sanity when it has been repeated a few times [...] “They ought to be compelled to give hostages,” etc. [...] “Station a bunch of Ghurkhas at the entrance of the cave was all that was wanted”.^{xxi}

Fear of the natives is quickly rephrased by a drunken subaltern, the white community appear bunkered down, on a war footing, rehearsing older, long held, archaic fears of rebellion taking them back to 1857, and imaginatively conjuring the power structures of police, law, armed forces to avenge themselves of the fantasised collusion of the Indian men against the white women. Bhabha notes in “Sly Civility” the common trope of paranoia, the delusion of the end of the world functions as a sort of permanent apocalyptic formulation that underpins the discourses of British colonial presence in India. The rhetorical mobilisation of impending apocalypse, which has a lot in common with Slavoj Žižek’s account of the “tyrant’s bloody

robe”, is the stage upon which a peculiar ‘performance ‘of colonial ambivalence takes place amongst the whites holed up in their club:

“Mrs Blakison was saying if only there were a few Tommies,” remarked someone. “English no good” he [drunken subaltern] cried, getting his loyalties mixed. “Native troops for this country. Give me the sporting type of native, give me Ghurkhas, give me Rajputs, give me Jats, give me the Punjabi, give me Sikhs, give me Marathas, Bhils, Afridis, and Pathans, and really, if it comes to that, I don’t mind if you give me the scum of the bazaars. Properly led, mind, I’d lead them anywhere-” (p. 191)

Other members of the club assert that it is the mimic man who represents the most trusted and paradoxically least trusted form of colonised Indian; “The native’s alright if you get him alone. Lesley! Lesley! You remember the one I had a knock with on your maidan last month. Well, he was all right. Any native who plays polo is all right. What you’ve got to stamp on is these educated classes, and, mind, I do know what I’m talking about this time” (p.192). The native Indian is both completely readable and unreadable, is predictable and has only the basest of instincts, ones that are only superficially erased by appearance, style of speech, education.

Bhabha argues that in moments where the role of difference as threat or menace to colonial culture cannot be named, fetishistic nonsense is produced, such as the club discussion, because of the anomalous role of the colonies. This is something that Sara Suleri broadly agrees with in her discussion of English discourses of India, “If the limits of cultural knowledge dictate the curious genealogy of English India, then its chronology is intimately linked with a failure of ignorance to comprehend itself, or to articulate why the boundary of culture must generate such intransigent fears”^{xxxii} This ‘unreadability’, Suleri suggests, fetishized a colonial fear of its own cultural ignorance into the potential threats posed by an Indian alterity (p.7). At the end of this

chapter in the English club Fielding is forced to choose sides; he can't participate in the paranoia and propaganda, the rehearsal of colonial ambivalence and xenophobia, matched with a condescending and hypocritical attachment to the colonised that this meeting has produced. He must refuse the nonsense of colonial discourse and see beyond it to the real social relations that have produced the hysteria and paranoia of the ruling class.

The same problem occurs in the desire for an approved version of the other that is created in colonial contexts through a desire or a creation of mimicry. As Ronnie says to Adela later, after this meeting at the club, "So you won't go saying he's innocent again will you? For every servant I've got is a spy." (p.209) Ronnie demonstrates Bhabha's key phrase, the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined (p.89). As Robert Young notes, the question of whether the 'native' hates the colonizer, is not just a question of projection and paranoia on their part. The colonizer's perception 'he hates me' is not the overinterpretation of paranoia, therefore, but an interpretation that is entirely correct.^{xxiii} The problem comes in not knowing when, how and from whom, to detect the difference between subservient obedience and 'sly civility'.

Bhabha argues that at moments where the role of difference as threat or menace to colonial culture cannot be named, fetishistic nonsense is produced, such as the club discussion, because of the anomalous role of the colonies. This is something that Sara Suleri broadly agrees with in her discussion of English discourses of India, "If the limits of cultural knowledge dictate the curious genealogy of English India, then its chronology is intimately linked with a failure of ignorance to comprehend itself, or to articulate why the boundary of culture must generate such intransigent fears"^{xxiv} This 'unreadability', Suleri suggests, fetishized a colonial fear of its own cultural ignorance into the potential threats posed by an Indian alterity (p.7). It is this colonial nonsense that Bhabha sees as metonymically figured by the events in the Marabar caves; the 'Oboum', the echo seemingly without origin, was started by a tiny scrape on the wall, a touch,

producing an exorbitant, exaggerated and an endless and repeating copy that resounded in an inscrutable way both in the caves themselves and in Adela Quested's head. For Bhabha this dramatizes an enactment of an undecidable, uncanny colonial present, which dramatizes 'a play between colonial desire and colonial memory' which Bhabha links to 'a narrative uncertainty of culture's in-between' (p.127), a kind of enunciatory disorder, which bears strong similarity to Derrida's model of undecidability which arises from an inability to impose a unified reading on events that took place.

The Postcolonial Present

In 'Adagio,' his contribution to the collection of essays *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation* which he and W. J. T. Mitchell edited in memory of Said, Bhabha recalls a formative moment in his relation to Said's work.^{xxv} As a graduate student, reading an interview between Said and Gauri Viswanathan about Harold Bloom's *Diacritics*, he detected a sudden shift of tone in which Said "admits to performing a kind of acrobatics between parallel lives, as avant-garde critic and Palestinian exile." This struck a chord with Bhabha's sense of wrestling with his own conflicted beginnings. "I immediately identified with the precariousness of Said's acrobatics, and learnt much from his ability to be otherwise engaged both politically and philosophically, yet to be capable of a critical assessment that was free and fair."^{xxvi} For Bhabha, grappling with his study of V.S. Naipaul, Said spoke to the quandary he found himself in: how to derive important diagnostic insights from Naipaul whilst navigating Naipaul's political opinions on the history of the Third World "that can be provocative and offensive" (p.9). Bhabha suggests that Said modelled a kind of 'critical distance' that enabled him to mine Naipaul's insights into "the psychic and affective structures that inform the politics of everyday

life as it is lived in the midst of the protocols of colonial power and its contest of cultures,” whilst still vigorously resisting as morally and politically objectionable, “as I do and Said certainly did” (p.9), Naipaul’s ideological positions. Naipaul is an unlikely point of contact between the two theorists. Bhabha is referencing Said’s well known distaste for Naipaul’s negative and unsympathetic accounts of newly independent postcolonial nations and their cultures, Yet, as Said notes, Naipaul’s subject was “extraterritoriality – the state of being neither here nor there, but rather, in-between things that cannot come together for him.”^{xxvii} The concept of in-betweenness was taken up by Bhabha and mobilised as a key term in his critical lexicon for his model of how subject and cultures are formed. As he proposes: “It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest or cultural value are negotiated”^{xxviii} Subjects are then formed ‘in-between’ or in excess of the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference, that we might consider to be stabilised or knowable categories of race, gender, class, ethnicity. They are produced at the moment of interface or exchange, or as in Naipaul’s case, find themselves caught or fraught, sometimes in belated times and places, engaging in liminal and hybrid cultural interfaces with others as part of the postcolonial condition that forms the subject. “Cultures”, Bhabha asserts, “come to be represented by virtue of the process of iteration and translation through which their meanings are very vicariously addressed to – *through* - an Other. This erases any essentialist claims for the inherent authenticity or purity of cultures...”^{xxix} It is this ‘location’ of culture, made possible through iteration, through the other, that informs his rethinking of Said’s work in *Orientalism*, yet as this tribute to Said’s work shows, he credits his professional and personal relationship with Said’s thinking and literary analysis with having enabled him to read more effectively, providing him with ‘a critical terrain and an intellectual project’.^{xxx}

NOTES

-
- ⁱ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge: London and New York, 1994), p.1.
- ⁱⁱ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.1.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.
- ^{iv} Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.
- ^v Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (Routledge: London and New York, 1990), p.141
- ^{vi} Bhabha, Preface: Comings and Goings, x, in *Home, Exile Homeland*, Hamid Naficy, (Routledge: London and New York), 1990.
- ^{vii} *The Rushdie File*, eds., Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland (London: Fourth Estate), 1989.
- ^{viii} https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1993/03/04/scrawling-in-the-margins/8ee1f262-ef29-41dc-b03d-0ba2e49f64d2/?utm_term=.58d3ad7f1bfc
- ^{ix} <http://www.vulture.com/2016/04/identity-politics-that-forever-changed-art.html>
- ^x Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin, 1991), (p.72), first published, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
- ^{xi} Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.71
- ^{xii} Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.73
- ^{xiii} Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, p.151.
- ^{xiv} Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.75
- ^{xv} Freud, Sigmund, 'Fetishism' (1927) in *On Sexuality*, vol. VII Pelican Freud Library.
- ^{xvi} Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.103.
- ^{xvii} Rosemary Jolly, Oxford Worlds Classics, ed. Rosemary Jolly, citing R. L. Stevenson prefatory note to *Island Nights Entertainments* Tusitala, vol xiii, pp. xii-xiii).
- ^{xviii} Edward Said, *Out of Place* (Granta, 1999), p.198.
- ^{xix} Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.86.
- ^{xx} E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, (Penguin: Harmondsworth 1989) p.83, first published Edward Arnold, 1924).
- ^{xxi} Forster, *A Passage to India*, p.190-191.
- ^{xxii} Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, (University of Chicago press: Chicago and London, 1993), p.2
- ^{xxiii} Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, Routledge: London and New York (p.151)
- ^{xxiv} Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, p.2.
- ^{xxv} Homi K. Bhabha, Adagio, in Homi K. Bhabha and W.J.T. Mitchell, eds. *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation*, University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- ^{xxvi} ^{xxvi} (Bhabha, Adagio, *Edward Said, Continuing the Conversation*, 2004 (p.8).
- ^{xxvii} (Edward Said, Bitter Dispatches from the Third World, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (p.99).
- ^{xxviii} Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.
- ^{xxix} Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.58.

FURTHER READING

- Appignanesi Lisa and Sara Maitland, eds., *The Rushdie File*, London: Fourth Estate, 1989.
- Bhabha, Homi K., ed., *Nation and Narration* (Routledge: London and New York, 1990).
- Bhabha, Homi, K., *The Location of Culture* (Routledge: London and New York, 1994).
- Bhabha, Homi, K., and W.J.T. Mitchell, (eds.) *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation* (University of Chicago Press, London and Chicago, 2004).
- Byrne, Eleanor, *Homi K. Bhabha* (Palgrave, 2009).
- Gilroy, Paul, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture*, (Routledge: London and New York, 2004)
- Fanon, Franz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952.
- Said Edward, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, (Granta: London, 2000).
- Suleri, Sarah, *The Rhetoric of English India*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1993).
- Young, Robert, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (Routledge: London and New York, 1990).
- Zizek, Slavoj, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, (Verso: London, 1999).