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Understanding the Relation between Culture and Identity through a Postcolonial Perspective: A Study of Edward Said's 'Orientalism' and Homi K. Bhabha 'The other Question'

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Abstract

Using the theories of Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said as a guide, this research explores the link between culture and identity from a postcolonial perspective. The study sheds light on how culture shapes both individual and group identities by defining cultural identity and examining its dynamic relationship with culture. This research looks at the difficulties in constructing identities in postcolonial settings using Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and 'The Other' in conjunction with Said's idea of orientalism. Said and Bhabha's theories support each other's viewpoints on culture and identity when compared. In summarizing the research, the conclusion considers how cultural identity in postcolonial studies is changing.

Keywords: Culture, identity, hybridity, the other, orientalism, postcolonialism

Introduction

Culture and identity are complex concepts that have attracted a lot of scholarly interest in the field of postcolonial studies. This study makes use of Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said's theoretical frameworks to clarify the intricate relationships between cultural influences and identity development.

This study aims to give a thorough understanding of the relationship between culture and identity, as well as to compare and contrast the views of Said and Bhabha on the subject. To set the stage for a thorough analysis of Said's concept of Orientalism and Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and "The Other," the study will commence with a theoretical investigation of cultural identification. The impact of colonialism on the development of identity will be examined by both thinkers in detail in this section. After this, we'll compare and contrast Said and Bhabha's theories to show where they differ and where they overlap.

The study's conclusions will provide a thorough examination of how cultural identities originate and change, highlighting the significance of identifying and examining the long-lasting impacts of colonialism on the creation of identities and the expression of cultures.

Culture & Identity

What is Culture? A group of people's collective customs, values, beliefs, conventions, and artifacts define their culture, which is a broad notion. In "A Glossary of Cultural Theory" (2002), Culture is defined as the "learnt and symbolic

components of human civilization, which includes everything from art and technology to language and rituals" (Brooker 15).

In "The Interpretation of Cultures" (1973), Culture is "a system of inherited notions articulated through symbolic forms that people use to communicate, propagate, and evolve their attitudes towards life and their understanding of it" (Geertz 89).

Culture is made up of various essential elements. Symbols are concrete representations of a culture's ideals and beliefs. Examples of this include religious icons and national flags. Another essential element is language, which serves as the main medium for cultural transmission and communication. Pierre Bourdieu addressed this in "Language and Symbolic Power" (1991). Social expectations are greatly influenced by values and norms, which are standards and guidelines that are culturally determined and serve as behavioral guidelines.

What is Identity? With aspects from the social, cultural, and personal spheres, identity is a dynamic and multifaceted term. In 1990, Stuart Hall argued in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" that identity is a continually changing creation that is affected by social and historical settings rather than a fixed core. The three main components of identification-personal, social, and cultural-can be used to understand identity.

The term "personal identity" describes a person's sense of self, which is shaped by their unique experiences and innate qualities. However, social identity comes from belonging to certain social groupings, such as family, race, and nationality.

One's cultural group, which includes common customs, values, language, and heritage, is closely linked to their cultural identity. In "Identity: Community, Culture, Difference" (1990), Jonathan Rutherford addresses how internalizing cultural practices and narratives shape one's own cultural identity.

Social interactions and cultural settings impact the formation and interpretation of identity. In "Modernity and Self-Identity" (1991), Anthony Giddens highlights how identity is reflexively preserved via ongoing interactions with society. While social identity develops from the roles and expectations within social groupings, personal identity is shaped by individual experiences and introspection. Rituals, symbols, and a common past all serve to strengthen the absorption of cultural narratives and behaviors that shape cultural identity.

Identity is not a static entity, but rather a "production" that is always changing under the impact of historical, social, and cultural factors, as Stuart Hall explains in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990). Our sense of self and belonging is shaped by culture, which also affects how we see ourselves and how other people see us. Individual identities have historically been shaped by Indian cultural standards such as the caste system, community life, and reverence for elders.

How does Culture Construct an Identity? The cultural background has a major effect on how identity is formed. By uniting communities in common rituals and festivities, holidays such as Diwali and Holi in India are important in preserving cultural identity. Language has a strong cultural influence on identity as well. Indian identities were profoundly altered by the imposition of Western values and standards through colonial schooling and administrative structures.

Cultural practices can be influenced and changed by identities. For example, the early 20th century saw the growth of Indian nationalism, which in turn sparked a renewed interest in traditional Indian literature, art, and culture that had been suppressed during British rule. Indian cultural revival and preservation groups were sparked by this nationalist identity. The notion of hybridity proposed by Homi K. Bhabha in "The Location of Culture" (1994) demonstrates how identities can combine various cultural components to create new cultural forms.

Postcolonialism

It is essential to comprehend colonialism and imperialism before diving into postcolonialism. The process of assuming political authority over a foreign nation, populating it with citizens of the colonizing country, and reaping economic benefits is known as colonialism. By contrast, imperialism is a more general term that refers to the expansion of a nation's authority and sway through military action or diplomacy, frequently with little or no settlement.

Postcolonialism, according to Peter Barry's "Beginning Theory," is the academic field that examines, clarifies, and addresses the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism. According to Barry, Postcolonialism critiques the lingering effects of colonial dominance by attempting to comprehend how the histories of colonization create modern cultures and identities. To recover and reinterpret narratives that were suppressed or misrepresented by colonial powers, it includes the study of literature, politics, history, and culture from formerly colonized areas.

Postcolonialism is important because it shows how colonial history still shapes contemporary power systems, cultural identities, and socioeconomic institutions. Barry notes that

"the analysis of literature and cultural texts produced in countries that were once colonies, focusing on issues of power, identity, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism" is what postcolonial criticism entails.

Some theorists in the development of postcolonial theory include:

- Edward Said, whose seminal 1978 work is "Orientalism". According to Said, Western conceptions of the "Orient" as foreign and subpar were used as an instrument of colonial dominance, forming Western and Eastern identities in ways that served to legitimize and extend colonial control.
- Homi K Bhabha, another well-known postcolonial theorist, presented important ideas including hybridity, mimicry, and the "third space" in his book "The Location of Culture" (1994).
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In postcolonial studies, she is also a key figure. In her landmark 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", she examines the challenges marginalized people, or the "subaltern," confront in expressing their viewpoints and experiences inside prevailing discourses.
- Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist and revolutionary, is another important figure in postcolonial thought. His pieces "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) and "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952) examine the cultural and psychological effects of colonization on the colonized. Postcolonial theories offer important instruments for examining and comprehending the long-lasting effects of colonialism on contemporary society through the writings of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Fanon, and others

Culture & Identity in Postcolonial Context

It is important to draw attention to the significant influences on identity development while examining culture and identity in postcolonial situations. People frequently deal with experiences of marginalization, oppression, and occasionally internalized colonial ideals, which can result in problems like depression and the repression of cultural expression. The notion of hybridity arises when individuals navigate several cultural influences, frequently fusing native customs with Western standards in intricate ways. This hybridity can be interpreted as a challenge to the uniform cultural identities imposed during colonial authority as well as a sign of cultural persistence. Additionally, global exchanges strengthen postcolonial societies' cultures. Globalization exposes people to a wider range of cultural practices and knowledge systems, which broadens their viewpoints and enhances their local traditions.

In summary, postcolonial identities exhibit resiliency and inventiveness in negotiating challenging cultural environments, even when they are molded by histories of oppression and cultural imposition. The dynamic interaction between tradition and globalization highlights how cultural identities in postcolonial countries are still evolving.

Edward Said's "Orientalism" (1978)

A "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident' is the fundamental definition of

Orientalism (Said, sec.1) According to Said, Orientalism is a systematic framework that the West used to create the perception of the East as being exotic, primitive, uncivilized, and fundamentally different from the West rather than just an academic or creative endeavor.

Representation of the Orient: According to Said, “the Orient was almost a European invention” while Orientalism “expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles” (Said). Both in the East and the West, these representations have a significant influence on cultural identity, influencing how people and communities view one another and themselves.

Impact on Cultural Identity: The legacy of Orientalism in post-colonial cultures feeds into internalized notions of cultural inferiority and reinforces stereotypes. Because colonized populations internalize emotions of inferiority and alterity, this phenomenon has an impact on cultural identity. Even in a post-colonial society, according to Said, these depictions uphold Western dominance and control over the East.

Contemporary Instances of Orientalism: Misconceptions about Middle Eastern countries are perpetuated in Western media by emphasizing violence and terrorism, which shape public opinion and policy. Said’s research emphasizes how these representations contribute to prejudice and cultural misrepresentation while also having a substantial impact on local and foreign policy. They are not only harmless.

Ongoing Effects on Cultural Identity: The idea of the “clash of civilizations,” for example, stems from an Orientalist perspective that sees cultural differences as irreversible and fundamentally antagonistic. This viewpoint influences how people from Eastern cultures are perceived and understood in Western societies, in addition to diplomatic and commercial relationships. Said’s writings support a more courteous and nuanced view of cultural diversity and urge a critical analysis of these persistent misconceptions.

Homi K. Bhabha’s “The Other Question”

“The Other Question” by Homi K. Bhabha delves into the intricacies of colonial discourse and identity construction, presenting several crucial ideas that have grown to be cornerstones of postcolonial theory. The three main tenets of Bhabha’s approach are hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry. Each is essential to comprehending the dynamics between colonizers and colonized.

Bhabha defines mimicry as a tactic wherein the colonized subject mimics the language, mannerisms, and culture of the colonizer. But there’s one distinction that makes this replication stand out while also undermining colonial power. According to Bhabha, “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace,” implying that the almost-but-not-quite quality of mimicry exposes the ambivalence in colonial rhetoric and calls into question the colonizer’s purported superiority.

The complex emotions of attraction and repulsiveness that define the interaction between the colonizer and colonized are referred to as ambivalence. Bhabha contends that because colonial discourse aims to both govern and civilize the colonized, it is by its very nature equivocal. The sharp distinctions between superiority and inferiority created by colonialism are undermined by this ambivalence. Colonial discourse is, in Bhabha’s words, “always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference.”

The term hybridity describes how colonizer and colonized cultures interact to create new, blended identities. This idea emphasizes how cultures are always changing via interaction and exchange, casting doubt on the idea of pure or true cultural identities. According to Bhabha, “hybridity is the sign

of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities,” implying that the process of negotiating and transforming culture gives rise to hybrid identities.

Cultural hybridity encourages a sense of plurality and flexibility in how people view themselves and their place in the world, which has an impact on identity formation. It disproves the notion of a singular, uniform cultural identity and makes room for a variety of self-expression. Bhabha’s research emphasizes that hybrid identities are a continuous process of negotiation and development that results in new and complex identities rather than just a blending of two cultures.

In many cultural contexts where indigenous and colonial influences collide, hybrid identities can be observed. India’s unique hybrid forms in language, cuisine, fashion, and the arts are the result of the merging of Indian and British cultures during and after colonial control. Cultural hybridity is best illustrated by the English-language literature found in India, which also features native themes and storytelling. Writers such as Salman Rushdie and

Arundhati Roy utilize Indian cultural and historical settings in their English-language works, resulting in a reflection of hybrid identities. “Midnight’s Children” by Rushdie is a perfect example of how to explore the various identities of postcolonial India by fusing Indian storytelling traditions with the English language.

Because of the region’s history of colonization and slavery, African, European, and indigenous cultures have mingled to create unique hybrid identities in the Caribbean.

Caribbean literature, music (like calypso and reggae), and religion (like Rastafarianism and Vodou) all serve to highlight the dynamic process of cultural hybridization. These hybrid forms subvert colonial divisions and establish fresh avenues for identity development and cultural expression. For instance, Derek Walcott’s poetry explores questions of identity and belonging by fusing European and Caribbean influences, which reflects the hybrid nature of Caribbean society.

Comparative Analysis of Said & Bhabha’s Theories

Said’s “Orientalism” and Bhabha’s “The Other Question,” in particular, offer fundamental frameworks for comprehending how colonial authority affects cultural conceptions and identities. Although their theoretical methods have many similarities, each theorist’s unique contributions are highlighted by differences as well.

Said and Bhabha both criticize how cultural representation is used by colonial discourse to establish and maintain power relations. Said’s Orientalism idea illustrates how the West stereotypes the East as the “Other,” a process that legitimizes colonial dominance. This concept demonstrates how Western perceptions of Eastern cultures are firmly rooted in power dynamics rather than being objective.

By examining the ambivalence and hybridity inside colonial discourse, Bhabha expands on Said’s observations. He contends that colonial power is unstable and riddled with inconsistencies rather than being a homogenous entity. The two thinkers highlight how cultural identities are malleable and how colonial discourse can be both constructive and disruptive.

Said and Bhabha have different theoretical frameworks and implications, despite these commonalities. The majority of Said’s approach to “Orientalism” is historical and textual; it concentrates on examining scholarly writings, works of art, and literature to show how the West has shaped the East. His

criticism is based on the notion of an Orient-Occident binary dichotomy, with a distinct focus on the hegemonic influence of Western representations. On the other hand, Bhabha's framework explores the fundamental paradoxes of colonial discourse and is more flexible and psychological. He presents hybridity as a term that subverts the binary oppositions Said outlines. Cultural identities, according to Bhabha, are constantly forming as a result of interactions and negotiations between colonizers and colonized.

Conclusion

Several important claims and conclusions have come to light during this postcolonial examination of culture and identity, illuminating the complex interactions between representation, power, and history. First, we defined culture as a dynamic system of shared values, beliefs, and practices that shape both individual and communal identities within a community. Culture creates identity through a multifaceted process in which people negotiate their sense of self within larger social frameworks, shaped by both current and historical.

As a critical lens to analyze these interactions, postcolonialism evolved, opposing colonial hierarchies and promoting the decolonization of representation and knowledge. Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity highlighted agency and resistance against hegemonic power systems, showing the complexity of identity construction in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The book "Orientalism" by Edward Said helped us comprehend how Western perceptions of the East reinforced prejudice and provided justification for colonial dominance. Said's critique focused on how knowledge creation contributes to the construction of the "Other," which strengthens the dynamics of colonial authority.

It was possible to see theoretical convergence as well as the difference between Said and Bhabha. Said concentrates on the textual and historical aspects of Orientalism, whereas Bhabha investigates the psychological and performative aspects of colonial mimicry and hybridity. Both thinkers criticize colonial discourse and its effects on identity. Together, their contributions deepen the understanding of postcolonial philosophy by providing complex viewpoints on resistance and cultural identity.

In conclusion, the process of decolonization and cultural understanding is necessary to create a future in which identities in a globalized society are valued for their diversity and richness.

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