

Review

“Culture” ‘Sous Rature’: A critical review of the notion of “Culture”: Consideration from cultural and literary studies

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This paper offers a critical review of the concept of ‘culture’, and argues that at this particular juncture of our recent times the case against the concept has become *prima facie* a strong one. By tracing the various conceptualisations of the notion, its paradigms and schools of thought underlying the study of ‘culture’ in Western academy and beyond, I argue that in the 21st century the notion of culture has little to offer in terms of reflecting people’s ways of living. Following a post-colonial and Derridean deconstructionist repertoires, I argue that the limitation of the term stems from its singular and latent form as it fails to reflect the mobility dynamicity, multiplicity and hybridity of current societies. The study is based on the premise that “culture” is thought of as hybrid, contested, and in constant (re)construction; not a noun but a ‘verb’. I, therefore, put the concept ‘under erasure’ to challenge the taken for granted, fixed and unified meaning of the term and move beyond the limitations of several ways it has been studied and theorised. In so doing, I speculate on the relevance of the concept to the liquid post-modern era that is marked by the fragmentation of societies, the emergence of new identities, Diasporas, immigration and birth of cyber-cultures. Additionally, in post-colonial institutional contexts, I argue that the concept of ‘culture’ mirrors the honorific term of the ‘canon’ or (the canonised English literary tradition). I contend that both concepts signify archaeology of ‘knowledge’ of the existing matrix of power relations in academia as well as in world relations. Both concepts signify the adoption of monolithic discourses that still perpetuate the regulation and dissemination of the ‘high cultural’ or ‘canonical ideology’, particularly in post-colonial academic contexts. I conclude that, both concepts should undergo critical revision or ‘erasure’ since they fail to reflect the discursive aspects of human and artistic life. The paper contributes to the wider debate of issues around “culture” and the literary canon by adopting a deconstructive post-colonial argument.

Key words: Cultural studies, post-colonialism, cultural hybridity, cultural hegemony, English literature

INTRODUCTION

“Culture”¹ is a word that is on everyone’s lips, yet it is extremely difficult to tell what it means. The term is sometimes romanticised to denote the local and ‘distinct’,

minority communities believed to be ruled by fixed traditions. In the context of white settlers, the notion is used to describe immigrant minorities by racialising these people while appearing to describe differences of values and beliefs (Merry, 2009). Historically, in the 19th century, the concept was largely used to classify people on scale of civilised/uncivilised underlining the enlightenment discourses that perceived man’s emergence from his

¹ I use the term “culture” between double inverted commas to denote my rejection of the term, but since there is no other term to capture its signification, I continue to use the term. For its plural form, I use the terms without inverted commas, and when it occurs in direct quotations.

self-incurred immaturity. With the rise of modern anthropology, the concept was typically bound up with radical/ethnic superiority of White races that has been strongly linked with colonialist discourses. Within anthropologists' approaches, the term was used as equivalent to 'traditions' to evoke an evolutionary vision of change from a primitive onto civilised. Such a placement was used to describe the affluent countries of global North as opposed to traditional global South, or to refer to immigrant communities and/or racial minorities (Razaq quoted in Merry, 2009).

In the contemporary world, the term is used to signify ideas that are not homogeneous but continually changing because of contradictions in them. At this particular juncture of our history that is fraught with the resurgence of new forms of conflicts, emergence of new identities, and fragmentations of societies, the term has become more contestable and vulnerable than ever before. As Williams (1976) contends, the concept of "culture" is extremely difficult and debatable as it is used in "several distinct and incompatible systems of thought" and lacks a single authoritative definition (p. 87). Cultural studies and sociology of "culture", for example, deem the concept to be "concerned with the production and the exchange of meaning- the 'giving and taking of meaning'- between the members of a society or group" (Hall, 1997a, p. 2). However, despite its high status in various social and intellectual circles, it might be said that the term is divided against itself: "Its own genesis and semantic operation also bears, in Adorno's phrase, 'the stigma of capitalism', and separates and acts out the conflictual structure of the class system that produces it" (Young, 1995, p. 53).

In this paper, I wish to engage conceptually with the notion of "culture" in the context of cultural and literary studies by putting concept under deconstruction. I aim to trace the trajectory of the study of the concept in Western academy and beyond by reviewing and examining how the concept has been studied and theorised, and to discuss the limitations and strengths of various cultural approaches. I adopt an inclusive revisionist and narrative approach to explore the boundaries of various disciplines related to the concept of "culture": anthropological studies, literary studies, identity formation and the politics of cultural representations, among others. I draw on a post-colonial deconstructive approach in the context of post-modernist arguments to attempt a reconfiguration of the concept. The assumptions of the study are optimised as follows: a) fixed and ideological account of the concept of "culture" fails to capture knowledge and meaning regarding people's ways of living, which b) are discursive, hybrid and in constant emergence. In the context of literary studies, c) I claim that the notion of "culture", in its hooked and singular structure mirrors the canonical (or Anglo-American) English literary tradition especially in post-colonial institutional and academic contexts. While

the former seeks to stereotype people according to archaeology of knowledge inherited from the 18th century colonial Europe, the latter perpetuates the notions and discourses of universalism and standardisation. d) Both notions (culture and canonicity), however, reflect various manifestations of a matrix of relations of power in academia and institution.

In my encounter with the various concepts in this paper: post-colonial theory and post-modernity in literary, cultural, and educational studies – I seek to promote a critical attitude to axiomatic stances, and endorse an emancipatory endeavour. In this sense, I challenge the practices and ideologies which inform essentialised constructions of "culture" by adopting a discursive reading of the issues of cultural studies and canonicity ranging between local and global settings. As Said (1995) contends, the strengths of post-colonial theory lie in its attempt to grapple with issues of local and regional significance whilst retaining an emancipatory perspective.

DECONSTRUCTING "CULTURE"

Following Derrida, I put the concept of "culture" 'under erasure' or *sous rature*; that is, recognising and making visible its exclusions and limitations, yet holding onto the term as there is no other concept to capture its reconstructed form and replace it (Kocatepe, 2005). Putting the concept 'under erasure' or deconstruction is a way to challenge the taken for granted discursive practices and categories and move beyond the limitations of several ways the concept has been studied and theorised. It is a way to subvert the taken for granted and unified meaning of "culture"; it is a move from hierarchical and monolithic assumptions of certain ideologies informing the meanings that a concept signifies. Spivak (1974) perceives the process of deconstructionism as a way to "dismantle the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work, not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way" (p. xxv). The basic principle Derrida proposes in the act of deconstruction is the premise that unifies constructions of meanings regarding discursive constructions, hence, what can be constructed can also be deconstructed. It is a process through which the man-made bonds of words, images and metaphors are analysed and ruptured: rather than seeing the word "the way it is", as natural, it should be seen as "created and maintained everyday by people" (St Pierre, 2000, p. 483).

Derrida (1974) disrupts Saussure's argument of the arbitrary relationship between a sign and its signified, and argues that the meaning of a sign is never fixed but constantly deferred. He claims that meanings of things are always inhabited by other meanings, and always shift into new contexts and discourses without erasing the

trace of its previous meanings. He refers to this process as *difference* to denote the deferred and different nature of meanings. Derrida contends that, for any given concept, there cannot be a fixed centre or privileged reference from which other meanings of that concept can derive their value. Meanings, then, are not fixed or stable, nor are they mutually exclusive, but refer beyond themselves. In other words, the boundaries that a meaning of a word signifies are in constant change when different subject positions and discourses are drawn on. Derrida concludes that meanings of words are constantly transitory, transient, and fleeting.

Drawing on a Derridean view of deconstruction, post-colonial theorists draw attention to those who have interests in the maintenance of the oppositional categories while theorising the concept of “culture”. Hall (1996a), for example, believes that meanings are in constant process of repositioning as they are related to different points of references. Meanings, therefore, cannot be universal nor transcendental; they are not fixed or stable, but rather since the boundaries enclosing them are fluid and dynamic; they are continually re-sited along scale of markedness (Sondergaard, 1999). Likewise, Ahmad (quoted in Kocatepe, 2005) puts ‘under erasure’ the terms or categorisations of ‘First’ and ‘Third Worlds’. In so doing, he contends that the term of ‘First World’ is constructed in terms of economic production while the ‘Third World’ is defined according to historical experience of subordination. This distinction, according to him, divides the world into those who make history and those who are mere objects of it.

The act of deconstructing the concept of “culture” requires navigation in a multitude of discursive of referents: geography, history, politics and above all, ideology. The Western construction of cultural differences, according to Said, is not done without the political agendas of the powerful colonial powers at a time. The creation and categorisation of cultural groups, according to geography is maintained through cultural theories of superiority. The circulations of labels such as ‘West’, ‘East’, ‘North’ and ‘South’ divide the world into implicit binaries of ‘civilised’ versus ‘uncivilised’ cultural groups. Such act of labelling seeks to homogenise and categorise people on the basis of geography and place. As Said (1995) points out: differences from Western norms and values are drawn in an anonymous collectivity, with Arabs “shown in large numbers [with] no individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences” (287).

In a similar vein, the case of ‘post-colonial’ contexts still largely entails ideologies of supremacy and elitism practiced through hegemonic powers (Ghandi, 1998; Davis and Schleifer, 1998; Rizvi *et al.*, 2006). Although all countries which had been colonised, have gained their political independence, their educational institutions and other social spheres (political, economic) are marked by European modernism and still work within Western infrastructure of a society with different values and

motives (Mulenga, 2001). Although it seems that the once colonised nations have gained political independence, the assumption of the present critique stems from the fact that ‘neo-colonialism’ or ‘colonial ideologies’ are perpetuated in their regulation and dissemination of particular knowledges. Willinsky (1998) contends:

We are schooled in differences great and small, in borderlines and boundaries, in historical struggles and exotic practices, all of which extend the meaning of difference. We are taught to discriminate in both the most innocent and fateful ways so that we can appreciate the differences between civilised and primitive, West and East, first and third worlds (1998, p. 1).

As such, “culture”, in ‘post-colonial’ contexts is preserved as a source ideological and national struggle inherited from European colonial powers, and by configuring an act of reproduction of colonial discourses. McQuaid (2009) draws attention to what she calls ‘racialised thinking’ as one of the most perilous colonial legacies. ‘Racialised thinking’, according to her, refers to a generally accepted standard in cultural discourse, education practice, and theory. In the realm of literary studies, these contexts retain ‘high cultural approaches’ and canonical traditions with the assumption that they embody a humanistic enterprise of universal values and uniform of human experience (Sadiq, 2007).

THE TRAJECTORY OF CULTURAL STUDIES

In Western Europe, during the Enlightenment era, “culture” became equated with literary and artistic work. Enlightenment thinkers, such as Kant and Descartes, emphasised the advancement of reason and advocated an intellectual and moral refinement through engaging with literature and art. In this tradition, “culture” was theorised as a process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development that could be experienced only by a privileged minority.

In the post-Enlightenment era, the idea of “culture” as a process of intellectual refinement was transferred to the artistic achievements of a society such as its music, theatre, art, and especially literature. Mathew Arnold, for instance, according to Easthope (1991), viewed “culture” as intellectual refinement, defining “culture” as the perfection exhibited in a canon of classical literary works. Arnold regarded the literary and artistic capabilities of ordinary people, or the ‘masses’, as unworthy of study because he considered them to be anarchic and vulgar. Although he espoused the view that “culture” could be transmitted through education and, thereby, become shared by more than an elite social group, “culture” was still separate from the everyday activities of the general population (Easthope, 1991). In this sense, “culture” is said to embody the ‘best that has been thought and said’

in a society" (Hall, 1997a, p. 2).

Ethnographic approaches, such as that of Tylor, perceived "culture" as a complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, and custom. Drawing on Darwinian evolutionary theory, such theorists advocated the notion of the mental faculty in humankind. They authorised Western European's 'norms' as inherently rational, and interpreted other societies' practices according to these norms. Therefore, when the norms and lifestyles of the other societies do not match those of the West, these societies are seen as irrational and unstable. Unlike Tylor, Boas rejected homogenising humanity through "culture". Boas emphasised uniqueness of each cultural group, and viewed its lifestyles as relative to its historical contexts. He proposed the use of native transcriptions and collections for their own cultural understanding. This, according to him, enables readers to gain an insider's perspective, rather than imposing their own views or standards on a "culture". Although Boas' ideas were deemed as liberal towards colonial groups, his approach has rendered many social groups as primitive and uncivilised (Kocatepe, 2005).

Shaped by a major set of revolutions in theory, the second half of the twentieth century and onwards, witnessed radical theorising about "culture". In fact, such revisionist upheaval was a feature of many other fields in that period (Ortner, 1984). During this era, three major methods for studying "culture" developed: symbolic anthropology, cultural ecology, and structuralism. Greetzian's school of symbolic anthropology approaches "culture" as something that "is embodied in public symbols through which the members of a society communicate their worldviews, value-orientations, ethos, and all the rest to one another and to future generations", rather than as something "locked inside people's heads" (Ortner, 1984, p. 129). Symbols, according to Greetz, are a vehicle for communicating meaning; thus, the study of symbols was never an end in itself, but rather the way these symbols operate in society. Cultural ecology, on the other hand, represents a further development of materialist evolution and deems the 'adaptation' to environmental factors as having no fixed form. In this sense, "culture" gains meaning when considered as a whole and having the qualities that are more than the sum of its parts. 'Adaptation' according to Sahlins (quoted in Ortner, p. 132) has to work with external factors of the natural and social environment and are amenable to treatment as fixed, measurable, 'independent variables'.

Structuralism, the guerrilla of the radical shift in theory at a time made the seemingly bewildering social or cultural phenomena intelligible by demonstrating the shared relationships of those phenomena to a few simple underlying principles. Structuralists, therefore, seek to

... establish universal grammar of "culture" [...] (by the principle of binary opposition), and the rules according to which the units (pairs of opposed terms) are arranged and combined to produce the actual cultural productions

[...] that anthropologists record (Ortner, p. 135).

Structuralists approach "culture" as a set of sign systems that express the unconscious foundations of meaning-making and seek to demonstrate the existence of a universal grammar of "culture" rooted in the subconscious of human mind. "Culture", for them, is primarily a system of classification, and a set of "institutional and intellectual productions built upon those systems of classification" (*ibid*, p. 135).

Drawing on this historical review, it is possible to question how the English literary canon was both a source and representation for most of these assumptions regarding "culture" in its Western version. Canonicity of "culture" and its attempts to perpetuate itself synchronically and diachronically is thus called into question. In other words, the repeatability of this discourse ranging from anthropology to literary studies as sources of understanding "culture" encompasses the early project of Enlightenment ideals of history, reason, and universality, which, according to Young (1995), continue to be repeated today. A tradition that seems to be true in most of post-colonial academic institutions (Hall, 2005), which, through insisting on the canon, and after long years of heated debate (for example, Guillory, 1993; Obeidat, 1997; Bose, 2004; 2002; Hassan 2001), raises a pivotal question of how such assumptions of "culture" are being engaged with by those studying these literatures. Since in its current status, the English literary canon in these educational contexts bears the parameters of the Arnoldian notion of "culture", which "is often assumed to involve the propagation of high culture in the service of an organic nationalism... [and] have generated the very philistinism it wished to vanquish" (Young, 1995, p. 55).

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Cultural relativism that emphasises the uniqueness of each cultural group relative to its historical context was a critique of the evolutionary and Darwinist approaches that adopted Eurocentric models through which all other social groups were studied. Recognising the philosophical implications of cultural relativism, Herskovits (quoted in Edgerton, 1992) suggests that not only customs, but also reality and truth are relative: "cultural relativism [has] developed because the facts of differences in these concepts of reality or in moral systems, plus our knowledge of the mechanisms of cultural learning, forced the realisation of the problem of finding valid cross-cultural norms" (p. 56). As Edgerton (199,) asserts: culture cannot be compared as such. A "culture" can only be understood by someone en-culturated in that culture (p. 26).

At the descriptive level, cultural relativism resorts to historical perspective by indicating that each "culture" is a unique reflection of its historical context through which understanding of 'self', institution, and society is relative

to cultural perspective, and therefore, develops differently according to different sets of historical circumstances (Brey, 2007). 'Ethical relativism' or descriptive moral relativism is the position where exists extensive diversity between values and moral principles of societies, groups, cultures and historical periods or individuals" (*ibid*, p.35). 'Ethical relativism', a highly contested notion, underlies the assumption that since moral principles vary from one "culture" to another, one cannot live a moral life in one "culture" without violating the morality of another; hence, no one from outside a "culture" should bring moral judgement upon it (Mays, 2004; Brey, 2007). The opposite of descriptive moral relativism is 'descriptive moral absolutism', which sees moral judgements as universal regardless of differences that exist between societies. A more controversial perspective is 'meta-ethical moral relativism', according to which, the truth or justification of moral judgements is not absolute or objective, but relative to societies, groups, historical periods, or individuals.

In an attempt to deconstruct "culture", embodied in the argument of cultural relativism, I argue that the notions of 'moral relativism' versus 'moral absolutism' entail a failing in understanding cultural groups as such. According to moral relativism, certain values are considered moral, whereas in another they are considered immoral. A meta-ethical relativist, however, could make the more far-reaching claim that certain values are true or justified in some societies, while false or unjustified in others. Thus, there are moral principles that are absolute or objective, and that are universally true across cultures, societies or individuals. 'Meta-ethical absolutism', on the other hand, holds that certain values are either universally true or universally false: they cannot be true for some societies but false for others. If these values are true, then societies that hold them to be moral are in error, and if false, then the mistake lies with societies that condemn them. Building on this argument, which emphasises the normative and evaluative values rather than describing them, a claim that the literary values of the English canon are culturally relative is, therefore, a claim that meta-ethical moral relativism is true for these values. It is to claim that the principles of these values are only relative to a particular "culture", the "culture" in which they have been developed.

On another ground, the notion of cultural relativism itself is subject to deconstruction. Cultural relativism relies on two assumptions: a) collectively considering cultural values, and overlooking the notion of the mobility of cultures. It assumes that all cultural values are worthy of acceptance and tolerance. This collective view denies the fact that all cultures have both positive and negative aspects, and thus not all individuals within the cultural group enjoy similar benefits. The assertion of cultural uniqueness as an outstanding entity ignores cultural hybridisation, the ever-shifting particularities, and the influence of the consistent mobility of social groups. The emergence of diasporas, globalisation, and other forms of

cultural interactions through which cultures either impact or are impacted loosens the notions of cultural collectiveness and fixity.

There is always tension between radical cultural relativism and radical universalism when sensitive matters such as human rights are at question. While the first would hold that "culture" is the sole source of the validity of moral right or rule, the second would hold that "culture" is irrelevant to the validity of moral rights that are universally valid. This tension appears most when taking up the idea of "culture" to refer a presumable static and unified entity of a group of people labelled as 'cultural group', which holds that this group is the principle source of the validity of human rights. On the furthest end of a continuum, the validity of human rights is hold universal or human in nature. For a robust list of basic human rights (for example, Universal Declaration of Human Rights), the tension appears when particular practices of national or non-cosmopolitan moral communities 'violate' the principle of this list, and thus would be rendered guilty by the principles of 'international community'.

A reconciliation of this dilemma could be arrived through reconsidering the concept of "culture" itself rather than those of relativity or universalism since across the continuum of strong and weak relativism and universalism remains several areas where cultures as well as values meet, develop and change. The notion of cultural Hybridity could be of use to attend to such tension since human rights are held consistent with human nature. As Donnelly (1984) argues, "the cultural variability of human nature not only permits but requires significant allowance for cross-cultural variations in human rights" (p. 403). The dilemma one faces in judging culturally specific practices that is torn between the demands of relativism and universalism requires one to renounce radical relativism (culturally specific practices) and radical universalism in favour of some combination of internal and external judgement (*ibid*).

OTHER SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Raymond Williams, a key figure in cultural studies, announced, from a Marxist background, a point of departure from defining "culture" as belonging to the elite. Working against this notion of "culture", he dispensed with the eighteenth and the nineteenth-century distinction between 'high' and 'low' cultures. He explicitly expressed this inclination in *The Long Revolution* (Williams 1961): "We speak of Cultural Revolution, and we must certainly see the aspiration to extend the active process of learning ... to all people rather than to limited groups" (p. 11). This 'deeper cultural revolution', as Williams saw it, constitutes the core of the living experience, which is being interpreted and fought out in very complex ways in 'the world of arts and ideas' (p. 12).

His approach to "culture" worked against the divisions

of the class system, and encouraged the crossing of social borders. I deem Williams' treatise an early attempt to a deconstructionist approach towards the paradigm of singularity and artistic elitism of "culture".

In examining the status of 'creative theory' as 'superior theory', Williams perceived that the claim that art represented a 'superior reality', which is not accessible to other human faculties, would be contested and eroded. This is because fiction art is inferior to reality, and the persistence of this reality needs no emphasis. For him, the idea of "culture" is similar to the creation of art, since reality is not what we experience through our senses, but consists of images and other inputs that are processed in our brains: "We 'see' in certain ways- that is, we interpret sensory information according to certain 'rules'- as a way of living" (p. 34). These 'rules' are learned through inheritance and "culture", and particular cultures devise particular 'rules', which carry distinct versions of reality. However, these 'rules' are not fixed, but are constantly revealed or created and produce new areas of reality.

Williams reports three categories that any adequate theory of "culture" must include: ideal, documentary, and social. The ideal category sees "culture" as "a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values" (p. 57). Analysing "culture" in this way sees it as a composition of 'timeless order' or of permanent reference to the universal human condition. The documentary category sees "culture" as a body of intellectual and imaginative work; for this category, the analysis of "culture" is the 'activity of criticism'. Through this process, thoughts, language, and experiences are described and valued, and seeks to relate them to the unique traditions and societies which produced them. The 'social' category describes "culture" as a particular way of life that expresses its meanings not only in arts, but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. Analysing "culture" as such seeks the clarification of the explicit and implicit meanings and values in a particular way of life, which includes historical criticism of intellectual, imaginative works and other elements of life, such as social relations, structure of family, and organisation of production.

Such deconstructionist approach conceives "culture" not only as troubling to the boundaries and the divisions between canonical texts, but also allowing all other forms of representation to be considered as worthy of study by cultural workers.

Williams' understanding of "culture" is relevant to the study of the canonical literary tradition since the investigation poses the question of how "culture" is manifested not only in the literary production of a certain society or a social group, but also how that social group performs its nationalistic understanding through its 'documentary heritage' on an idealistic basis. Building on Williams' conceptualisation of "culture", any claim of universal "culture" or 'absolute' values without considering the role of 'social' agents loses its ground, since no complete understanding

could be attained without referring to its immediate agents, 'the social groups', that are bound to that specific context. Therefore considering these values while overlooking the role of their agents or exporting them to other contexts where other agents who do not share common norms of the originating "culture" make claims of universal value vulnerable to critique and erasure. Additionally, the dynamism and evolution of the 'rules' through which society interprets, judges, and transfers its values elude the notions of cultural universalism and time-free of 'the absolute value' notwithstanding the status of the source of these values. In this sense, time and context work against the claim of the universal values which are represented by imagi-native social documents such as the canonical literary traditions.

THE POST-COLONIAL TURN; A DECONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH TO "CULTURE"

Post-colonial theorists have drawn attention to the liaison between anthropology and colonialism, and have scrutinised the largely male, Eurocentric view of cultural studies that have dominated the social sciences (Said, 1993; Bhabha, 1994; Young, 1995; Pels, 1997; Goldberg, 2000). These criticisms in general have destabilised Eurocentric anthropologists' approaches and the authority they give themselves to study the 'other' and assume 'the white man's burden' to speak on behalf of the 'other' and to 'be the voice of the muted' (Young, 1995). They have also questioned how practices associated with the 'other' become fixed into predefined traits in attempts to seek excuses for colonisation (Said, 1993). Post-colonialism's sensitivity to the notion of "culture" nurtures the concept as one of the tools used by the West to depict its 'ideal' image in its ideological confrontation with other social groups it aims to subjugate.

ANALYSING "CULTURE"

The underlying assumptions of a post-colonial approach for analysing "culture" emerge from its criticism of Western discourse and its claimed objectivity while studying "culture". The case against "culture", in Atkinson's words (2003), is a strong one for post-colonial thinking. Owing to the nineteenth century notion of "culture", which located people on scales of civilised/uncivilised, primitive/advanced, the notion of "culture" was typically bound up with colonialism. As Young (1995) observes, "culture" was "manufactured and disseminated with great success" (p. 54), first as a product of seasoned intellectuals, and second as the expression of an indigenous folk identity, through the growth of pedagogical institutions. Young perceives a close relationship between the development of the concepts of "culture" and race in the nineteenth century where "an implicit

racism lies powerfully hidden but repeatedly propagated within Western notions of culture" (p. 91). Therefore, "culture" as a 'Western notion' upon which to base notions of 'self' and nation, emerged from a dialectic of 'self' and 'other' that experienced difference through power and identified difference through racial signs. Young concludes that race "has always been culturally constructed ... [and] culture has always been racially constructed" (p. 54). Similarly, May (1999) argues that colonial legacies across the world create racial hierarchies of power. This colour-blind discourse has replaced the term 'race' with "culture", and has moved the discussion of 'racial difference' to a more acceptable discourse of 'cultural difference'. By the same token, "the birth of modern anthropology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has itself been strongly linked to various strains in colonialist culture. The romantic notion that one could live with the 'other' and somehow make them one's own (or vice-versa) had both pro-colonialist and anti-colonialist origins — the two parts of the term 'noble savage' itself signify colonial contradictions" (Atkinson, 2003, p. 50).

Post-colonial theorists reject the singularity of the term replacing it with a set of terms or phrases to reflect a challenge, and hence, deconstructing the concept. In this manner, concepts such as 'cultural supremacy', 'cultural hegemony', 'cultural hybridity', and 'cultural identity' have become dominant endeavours in post-colonial discourse while attempting to understand "culture". Bhabha, for example, views the process of social marginalisation of the colonial experience as requiring an engagement with "culture" as different from the dominant canonical or essentialist definitions of the term. He conceptualises "culture" as an "uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value often composed of incommensurable demands and practices produced in the act of social survival" (1994, p. 172). Therefore, rather than taking up "culture" as an essentialist notion, it becomes hybrid, dynamic, productive; it is "a verb, a strategy of survival that is both transnational [...] and translational" (Souza, quoted in Andreotti, 2006, p. 67).

CULTURAL SUPREMACY

Race has played a significant role in the Western view of "culture", knowledge, values, morals, and artistic productions. Scherurich and Young (2002) contend that "all epistemologies are embedded in racism" (p. 54). Discourses of modernity and cultural supremacy have impacted many aspects of Western relations, epistemologies, and institutions, and how these aspects have become 'normalised' in both the West and in colonial settings. By distinguishing epistemological racism from that of individuals and institutions, they reinstitute epistemological racism as "the most primary assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), and the ways of

knowing that reality (epistemology), and the disputational contours of the right and wrong or morality and values (axiology) – in short, the presumptions about the real, the true, and the good" (p. 56). Western epistemology, according to Smith, represents an oppressive racist epistemology which "assumes that western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings" (quoted in Scheurich and Young, p. 56).

Drawing on this, it might be argued that social practices project social and cultural understanding that represents the dominant group or that can be situated in relation to this dominant civilisation. Therefore, "the projection of one's own values as superior to those of others is connected to the European Enlightenment and the justifications for colonisation" (Andreotti, 2006, p. 15). Cultural supremacy, might also refer "to the projection of a local (European) epistemology as universal, unmarked and neutral, which resulted in the creation of 'myths of modernity', which dictate that the modern civilisation is the most developed culture and has an obligation to civilise, uplift, educate and develop the lesser (barbarian) cultures (Mignolo, quoted in Andreotti, p. 15).

Racialised discourse and notions of difference are parallel to each other in the manner they have been developed in the scholarly thought of Europe. The birthplace of notions of difference, according to Goldberg (2000), was Greek philosophy, medieval art, and literature based on "rationally defined categories of inclusion and exclusion" p. 23). Binaries such as master/slave and human/monster, would later pave the way to categorising humans by race. When Europeans came across seemingly different people during the era of imperialism, this categorisation or formula had been already established; thus, 'savage man' symbolised lack of reason, discipline, "culture", civilisation, and sense of morality. Racialised discourses are a set of pre-conceptual elements that structure, (re)form, and (in)scribe racialised social conditions. On the other hand, differentiating people according to ethnicity/race necessarily projects a dominant group over an 'other', where the subordinated group is rationalised or normalised. The act of racially defined 'other' becomes an exclusion of the different.

In light of this argument, the English literary classics and canon might be viewed as "an exclusive men's club, with membership restricted to those of the right ethnicity, gender, and class" (Dasenbrock, 1999, p. 692). Similarly, "the current concerns about opening up the canon of literature in English to create space for marginalised writers have established an institutional market for literary texts by writers bearing visible signs of difference. Thus, non-white writers find their texts 'racialised'-accorded a pre-conceived racial identity- to present 'difference' within the field and stand in for a history of absence from English literary studies" (Popatia, 1998).

The idea of cultural supremacy is deeply rooted in the ways White racial discourses view 'self' and 'other'. The notion of Whiteness, and hence, its racial discourse, draws its power from its identification of the 'othering', which reflects the very idea of ethnicity. The central characteristic of Whiteness is the process of 'naturalisation'; making 'White' a norm from which other 'races' stand apart (Leonardo, in Gillborn, 2005). The notion of Whiteness is 'performatively constituted', which often intersects with notions of power. In line with this argument, Giroux (1997) is in favour of [t]he critical project that largely informs the new scholarship on 'whiteness' [that] rests on a singular assumption. Its primary aim is to unveil the rhetorical, political, cultural, and social mechanisms through which 'whiteness' is both invented and used to mask its power and privilege (p. 102).

In accordance with this, post-colonialism sees the supremacist assumptions of whiteness to be one of the tools and discourses colonial powers employ to justify dominance over other races. Bonnet (1997) contends that:

whiteness has developed, over the past two hundred years, into a taken-for-granted experience structured upon a varying set of supremacist assumptions [...] Non-White identities, by contrast, have been denied the privileges of normativity, and are marked within the West as marginal and inferior [and therefore need to be] 'civilised', moralised, and educated according to those norms of the 'supremacist whiteness' (p. 188).

Additionally, cultural supremacy relies on ignorance and falsification of major concepts and historical facts, which radicalised Western thought in its attempt to give preferential treatment to a particular ethnic and racial group. However, challenging the notion of cultural supremacy requires one to turn to history for evidence against the processes through which such assumptions were normalised. Forbes (2000), for example, traces how the terms 'America' and 'Americans' have been robbed of their original meanings and reference to make sure that Anglo-American values, languages, and "culture" remain supreme in the face of a non-white majority in California. He concludes that the racist and a historical use of the term 'America', allows the users to limit the term to Anglo-Americans or those of European birth. He adds:

the terms 'America' and 'American' are extremely powerful, evocative and emotional terms. When an ethnic group is inaccurately given the exclusive use of these names, it gives them a privilege and preferential treatment of inestimable value. It also denigrates, alienates, and disadvantages those Americans who are denied the right to be known by the name of our continent and our hemisphere (p. 11-12).

This racist discourse ignores and excludes the actual

history of the continent, which socially as well as educationally denies the native Americans their rights since "this is a one-sided and ethnically biased way of teaching, one sure to tell non-white youth that they do not belong" (p. 15). In a similar vein, Soucar (1992) contends that "the ideology of white supremacy rests on the notion that the greatness of whites lies in a culture [...] great literature, as part of this culture should, therefore, originate with whites" (p. 2). She contends that "cultural supremacy strongly covets to the English literature and literary figures such as Coleridge, Wordsworth and 'that paragon of greatness', Shakespeare" (p. 8).

CULTURAL HEGEMONY

Cultural hegemony is another concept that is widely used in post-colonial discourse denoting cultural authority and domination by certain groups over others. I perceive an understating of how cultural hegemony preserves its perceived power a vital deconstructionist approach towards essentialised constructions of "culture". The concept of hegemony is best understood as 'domination by consent' (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 116). Fundamentally, hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all: "Domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over the state apparatus such as education and media, but by which the ruling class' interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted" (*ibid*, p. 116).

Anthony Gramsci discusses the concept of hegemony within political and cultural discourses. Providing a thorough discussion of Gramsci's concept, Lears (1985) points out that 'hegemony' is not workable without the 'consent' of the subordinate. I highlight the second part of this as I seek to understand the complicity of subordinate "culture" and how certain beliefs and academic traditions, such as those of the English literary canon, have been perpetuated for so long in the post-colonial educational contexts.

According to Lears, the concept of hegemony has little meaning unless paired with domination and consent. The "ruling groups do not maintain their hegemony merely by giving their domination an aura of moral authority through the creation and perpetuation of legitimating symbols; they must also seek to win the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order" (Adamson, quoted in Lears, p. 269). Lears argues that consent, for Gramsci, involves a complex mental state; a 'contradictory consciousness', a mix of approbation, apathy, resistance, and resignation, which varies from one individual to another, and that makes hegemony a complete success.

The notion of ideology is crucial to Gramsci's cultural model of hegemony and consent. Providing a more flexible, but more complex understanding of ideology or

'spontaneous philosophy' he continues as follows:

...1. language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2. common sense (conventional wisdom) and good sense (empirical knowledge); 3. popular religion and [...] superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of folklore (p. 571).

Spontaneous philosophy embodies all forms of sentiments and prejudices which bear subjective meaning apart from the public realm of power relations, yet it can never be separated from that realm. In a given group, values and attitudes develop in a mobilised manner, and some values are more congenial than others. Therefore, each group selectively refashions the available spontaneous philosophy, develops its new and particular worldview, or what Gramsci called 'historical bloc'. For a historical bloc to become hegemonic, which is not always successful, it needs to form alliances with other groups or classes. Therefore, the keys to successfully achieving cultural hegemony are ideological and economic: the leaders of a historical bloc must develop a worldview that appeals to a wide range of other groups, and they must be able to claim that their particular interests are those of the society at large (*ibid*).

Gramsci's approach rejects economic determinism and roots ideology in spontaneous philosophy. In so doing, he views the complex role of the state, not as dominated by the elites, but as a cultural unit defined by race and ethnicity. However, *to resort to the concept of cultural hegemony is to take a banal question – 'who has power?' – and deepen it at both ends. The 'who' includes parents, preachers, teachers, journalists, literati, 'experts' of all sorts, [...] – all of whom are involved (albeit often unwittingly) in shaping the values and attitudes of a society. The 'power' includes cultural as well as economic power and political power (p. 572).*

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony shows how ideas function in society. His concept of hegemonic consensus acknowledges differences of wealth and power to demonstrate how inequalities have been maintained or challenged in the sphere of "culture". He shows how people in general are able to create their own symbolic universes (spontaneous philosophy), which help them understand and tolerate life. Symbolic universes come to have apparently 'objective' validity, particularly over generations as they spread from scattered individuals to broad social groups. However, for a given symbolic universe, if it becomes hegemonic, it serves the interests of some groups better than others. Therefore, subordinate groups may participate in maintaining a symbolic universe, even if it serves to legitimate their domination (*ibid*, p. 573).

For post-colonialists, the concept is used to analyse colonial discourse aimed at suppressing the desire for

self-determination through the greater good, which is often practiced through employing terms of social order, stability, and advancement. Ashcroft *et al.* (2000) believes that the "empire is distinct from a collection of subject states forcibly controlled by a central power by virtue of the effectiveness of its cultural hegemony" (p. 116). They argue that the consent of the subordinate groups is achieved through the interpellation of the colonised subject (p. 220). This process is achieved through colonial discourse, which demonstrates Eurocentric values, beliefs, and assumptions to be an 'objective reality', and to be the most natural and valuable. Therefore, "The inevitable consequence of such interpellation is that the colonised subject understands itself as peripheral to those Eurocentric values, while at the same time accepting their centrality" (p. 116).

The concept of cultural hegemony has been expanded to cover many social practices. Post-colonial educational settings witness heated debates regarding the hegemonic practices of Western forms of knowledge as well as the local practices of educational policies. Gordon (1992), for example, contends that "Afrocentric education can be thought of as a response to or corrective for what has been perceived by some as Eurocentric education, with the latter's history of having pre-empted the academic canon by imposing standards for knowledge content and validity that are associated with the "culture's of northern Europe" (p. 405). In educational agendas, a debate emerged that concerned itself with the appropriateness of a canon that reflects the hegemonic "culture" and argues for the uniquely superior character of Western civilisation and its consequent centrality in any curriculum (Kagan quoted in Gordon, p. 409).

Within the sphere of English literature, hegemonic practice, I argue, could be a two edged sword; both a tool for cultural hegemony and an end in itself. The greatest propaganda used to reinforce English ideals and authority in its colonial setting, was English literature, the study of which began under the rule of Empire (Viswanathan, 1987). Outlining the history of English education in India in the nineteenth century, Viswanathan contends that England was able to impose its cultural standards on the native population through the introduction of English literature. Ashcroft *et al.* (2000) notice that the Englishman could be seen as 'the embodiment of universal human values', therefore, the "split between the material and the discursive practices of colonialism is nowhere sharper than in the progressive refraction of the rapacious, exploitative and ruthless actor of history into the reflective subject of literature". This refraction powerfully demonstrates a mode of hegemonic control that proves its effectiveness "because the discourse of English literature was disseminated with its attendant spiritual values, cultural assumptions, social discrimination, racial prejudices and humanistic values more or less intact" (p. 116).

Along with using the power of English literature as a

vehicle for imperial authority, English literature itself is promoted for having a unique universal human value and its ability to shape the character of the aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking (Viswanathan, 1987). Other world literatures or literatures of non-white people written in English are often referred to as lacking these universal values, and of being unable to meet the literary 'standards' of those at the centre. According to Viswanathan, "in the colonies, English studies substituted for prestigious Latin and Greek studies" (p. 20). If British literature took the place of the classics in the colonies, then 'other literatures' became what English literature was to England, a less prestigious variant of English studies (p. 22). This has created a hierarchy of cultural capital within classical European literature as the most respectable and colonial literature as the least.

Institutionally, the historical emphasis of English departments on English literature up to the 1970s and the rise of cultural studies as opposed to literature in English through the organisation of the curriculum is another manifestation of the inherent hegemonic disposition of the English literature. However, university English departments in most colonial settings have developed the habit of constructing a particular brand of 'standards', not by teaching colonial literature or literature written in English, but rather insisting on teaching the 'best' works represented by the 'classics' of English literature. As such, they might assume that these 'classics' would inspire students write well by emulating the British and in this manner they shape a literary tradition that would be geographically local, but British in form and sentiment (p. 25).

Thus, it could be assumed that the force of the English literature is expressed through its aesthetic and spiritual value synchronically and diachronically. Therefore, the 'spontaneous philosophy' or the consent of the 'historical bloc', Gramsci talked about or the 'consumers of English literature in the peripheries', seemingly conceive their interest not only by exclusively adopting English literature in their teaching settings, but also by promulgating its humanistic value among their students.

Hegemonic literary discourse of Western Writers, furthermore, made use of linguistic and figurative elements of classical colonialist discourse while depicting or (mis)representing the colonised subject. Cultural hegemony is revealed mostly through the employment of 'ideological allegory' or 'ideological stylistic' (Suberamaniam, 2009). Colonialist assumptions implicitly inscribed in the discourse of colonial texts including a number of encapsulations such as the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype and the polemical confrontation, which mounted as lenses through which the Orient is experienced and through which language about him is shaped. A significant aspect of ideological allegory is the manipulation of discursive colonialist imagination that informs the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised such as good/evil or civilised primitive. JanMohamed

(quoted in Suberamaniam, 2009) contends that "the colonialist discourse 'commodifies' the native subject into a stereotypical object and uses him as a 'resources' for colonialist fiction" (p. 3). Analysing the Henri Faucnner's (1931) novel *The Soul of Malay*, Suberamaniam argues that commodifies the native by negating his individuality, his subjectivity, so that he is perceived as a generic being that can be exchanged for any other native. Once reduced to his exchange value in the colonialist signifying system, he is fed into ideological allegory, which functions as the currency, the medium of exchange, for the entire colonialist discursive system. Such an 'epistemic hegemony' embellishes an image of the all knowing and all benevolent white saviour of the colonised 'other' who is internalise and absorb the image about himself. Such an absorption of the differences between the white and the native is, according to, Suberamaniam, exercised in the colonial text through which the white coloniser maintains his superior position, intellect and integrity in contrast with the native which is weak, immoral and deceitful.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY, DIFFERENCE, AND HYBRIDITY

The notions of 'cultural diversity', 'difference', and 'hybridity' are key concepts in this study as they help understanding various aspects of cultural contacts, and help arguing against the singularity of "culture" *per se*. They are also central to understand the kind of the relationship between readers (students) in post-colonial contexts and the foreign literatures they study at institutional and academic settings. Although the three concepts account for a rather different understanding of cultural contacts, they include a general theme or a discursive mode of understanding cultural issues when two or more cultures meet.

The concepts of 'cultural diversity' and 'cultural difference' have been contrasted and debated in the post-colonial discourse that rejects the first in favour of the second. Post-colonial theorists, reject cultural diversity for its inability to define the boundaries of cultures. Bhabha (1994, 1996) argues against the Western designation of institutional power and ideological Eurocentricity that universalise their meanings within their own cultural and academic discourses. His criticism of Western critical theory departs from the notion of 'cultural diversity' as embodied in the argument of critical theories because for him "they all recognise that the problem of cultural interaction emerges only at the signifying boundaries of cultures, where meanings and values (mis)read or signs are misappropriated" (1994, p. 34). Instead, he draws on the concept of '*cultural difference*' as an authoritative process of cultural enunciation that is adequate to construct cultural identity.

Bhabha contends that colonial discourse failed to

establish fixed and stable identities since cultural systems of representation cannot exist in isolation from their ideological categories. Instead they are embodied in other systems of representation and not dependent on external referents outside discourse which makes the idea of authenticity indefensible (Andreotti, 2006). Cultural difference, however, reveals the ambivalence of the authority of “culture” that attempts to dominate by adopting a view of cultural supremacy, which is in itself produced only in a moment of differentiation. This moment, Bhabha argues, is a moment of enunciation which introduces a split in the way “culture” is identified as a traditional model (traditions, community, stable system of reference) and in the articulation of its cultural demands (meanings, strategies, political presence, practice of domination, resistance). Enunciating cultural difference, therefore, problematises and disrupts the binary division of tradition and modernity. Bhabha recalls Fanon’s evocation of cultural uncertainty and its inability to decide upon self-representation or signification at the times of liberation:

But [native intellectuals] forget that the forms of thought and what [they] feed... on, together with modern techniques of information, language and dress, have dialectically recognised the people’s intelligence and the constant principles (of national art) which acted as safeguards during the colonial period are now undergoing extremely radical changes... [we] must join the people in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to... which will be the signal for everything to be called into question... it is the zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come (cited in Bhabha, p. 35).

The problem that this enunciation creates is “how in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic” (p. 35). This rehearsal negates the sense of origin and undermines the sense of homogenising cultural symbols and their effect, and hence, questions the authority of cultural synthesis in general. The instability of the mystical affirmation of the authenticity of “culture” “suggest[s] a possible critique of the positive aesthetic and political values we ascribe to the unity or the totality of cultures, especially those that have known long and tyrannical histories of domination and misrecognition” (p. 35).

Bhabha claims that understanding “culture” as such is unattainable since a cultural text or system of meaning cannot be sufficient unto itself. What counts then for understanding “culture” is the ‘place of utterance’, which goes beyond an anthropological tradition. The place of utterance is the ‘Third Space’ of enunciation; that is, not the content of symbols, but the structure of symbolisation.

For conceiving the notion of the ‘Third Space’, Bhabha provides us with a discrete analogy of linguistic difference that informs ‘cultural difference’. He contends that linguistic difference is dramatised in the common semiotic account of the disjuncture between the subject of proposition and the subject of enunciation. It is a disjuncture that is not represented in the statement, but the acknowledgement of the discursive embeddedness of address, its cultural positionality, and its reference to time and space. Therefore, *the act of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the you designed in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilised in the passage through a Third space, which represents both the general condition of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot ‘in itself’ be conscious.* (p. 36).

The implication of this enunciative split for cultural analysis is its temporal dimension, since the split destroys the logic of synchronicity and evaluation that traditionally give authority to the subject of cultural knowledge. Materialists and idealists have often taken for granted that the value of “culture” is an object of study, and the analytical activity of “culture” lies in the ability to reach a cross-referential, generalisable unity that signifies the progression of ideas-in-time, and the critical self-reflection on their determinants. This makes the intervention of a ‘Third Space of enunciation’ a reference for both meaning and reference as ambivalent. Bhabha believes that “it is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of “culture” have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew” (p. 37). The intervention of the ‘Third Space’, therefore, destroys the mirror of representation of cultural knowledge as a fixed, integrated, open and expanding code. It also deconstructs and challenges the historical identity of “culture” as a homogenising and unifying force. An understanding of cultural statements and systems as constructed in such a contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation refutes the hierarchical claims of the inherent ‘purity’ of cultures, and thus confirms their hybrid nature. In short, the concept of the ‘Third Space’, as Bhabha describes it, is the way in which colonial and imperial discourse is inherently unstable, ‘split’ in its ‘enunciation’, so that in the very practice of domination, the language of the master becomes hybrid, and unstable in an instance of the deployment of imperial authority (Kapoor, 2002).

Drawing on the above, ‘cultural difference’ is a concept that needs to be complicated, particularly in contemporary post-colonial contexts where cultural views of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ play increasingly significant roles in cross-cultural encounters. A simple and fixed view of ‘cultural difference’ which legitimates or critiques invisible

norms of power is an idealised and apolitical way of perceiving the relationship between individuals and cultural products (Weedon, 1987). The discursive construction of knowledge, multiple subjectivities, and power relations further encourage politicisation of 'cultural differences'. They help students explore how perceptions of 'cultural differences' in literature are perpetuated in a larger arena of politics and relations of power. They show how students appropriate or resist discourses and power, and how to negotiate their subjectivities while studying foreign literature. Weedon asserts that rather than viewing particular knowledge about language, "culture", and (literature) as neutral, objective, and apolitical, these concepts and truth-claims regarding cultural difference are constructed in discourses. In fact such theorising helps to explore how cultural differences are implicit assumptions of the superiority of English literature, and how it is constructed within traditional institutional spheres. This view does not deny the existence of cultural difference, but conceives assumptions regarding cultural difference as discursively constructed, rather than objectively true.

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY

Cultural hybridity may be said to occur when an individual or group is exposed to and influenced by more than one cultural context. The concept of hybridity, referring to the basic sense of mixture, originates from biology and was subsequently employed in the nineteenth-century linguistics and racial theory. As the term originates from Latin, *hibrida* is the bastard child of a Roman and a slave; hybrids have traditionally been despised, hidden from view and excluded from power (Clothier, 2006, p. 19). Early debates on hybridity emerged in the nineteenth century in the context of interracial contacts resulting from overseas conquests: "Grounded in comparative anatomy and craniometry, these early speculations on the hybrid were chiefly concerned with the perceived contamination of White Europeans by the races they colonised" (Kraidy, 2002, p. 319). Such 'scientific' models further argued that Africans and Asians were radically inferior to Europeans and they warned that the 'miscegenation' which followed through the offspring of racial interbreeding would result in the dilution of the European race. Young (1995), tracing the historical debates of the concept, demonstrates the various opinions regarding the vitality of hybrids, oscillating between 'hybrid vigour' and 'hybrid sterility', which commonly invoked biology to justify ideologies of White racial superiority and to warn of the danger of interracial breeding described as 'miscegenation' and 'amalgamation'. Young argues that early hybridity notions and discourses were symptomatic of the Enlightenment's failure to come to terms with its racist underside.

Contemporarily, hybridity took on new meanings

emerging from the flows of people, ideas, and cultures and diaspora to and from the West. The most important meaning of the concept, however, comes through its emergence with post-colonial discourse, which is characterised by literature and theory and which focuses on the effects of mixture upon identity and "culture". Bhabha's contribution to the concept is vital to understanding and challenging the essentialism of cultural discourses as he displaces the concept from its racialised connotation to the semiotic field of "culture". Relying on cultural and literary theory, he explores the concept in the context of the post-colonial novel, "celebrating it as the resilience of the subaltern and as the contamination of imperial ideology, aesthetics, and identity, by natives who are striking back at imperial domination" (Kraidy, 2002, p. 319). He explains that hybridity challenges the colonial authority to manipulate and to interpret the colonised identity within a singular universal framework. Emphasising the ability of the concept to subvert the appropriateness of dominant discourses, he affirms that "the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (1994, p. 2). Therefore, hybrid cultures are not the simple intermingling of two parent cultures, but embodiments of the 'third space' of hybridity, which arises in between and gives rise to aspects that are unique to the hybrid (Clothier, 2006). Bhabha (1990) contends that:

the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original movements from which the third emerges, rather hybridity ... is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom ... The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation (p. 211).

Bhabha emphasises this conceptualisation (1994, 1996) by postulating hybridity as a form of in-between space, where the 'cutting edge of translation and negotiation' occurs in the 'third space' of enunciation.

In fact, the strength of the concept of hybridity lies in the notion of the 'third space', since authenticity and hybridity are not opposites but are natural extensions of each other. "Hybridity produces new forms of authenticity and is inherent in processes of social and cultural dynamics in which various cultures confront each other" (Clothier, 2006, p. 20), and enable other positions to emerge (Meredith 1998, p. 2). It is a mode of articulation and a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new possibility. It is an interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative space of new forms of cultural meaning and production, blurring the

limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorisation of “culture” and identity (Bhabha 1994).

Nonetheless, the concept of hybridity is critiqued for operating on ontological and political levels. To avoid the risk of approximating the concept, I highlight those criticisms which encourage a thorough employment of the concept within the field of cultural studies. As a widely used concept, there exists a potential risk of using it merely as a descriptive device. I avoid engaging with the concept simply as a site or a notion where two cultures can mix since such employment would create ontological and political uncertainties. At an ontological level, a descriptive approach sees hybridity as a clear product of the interaction of students and the literature they study. I understand hybridity as a practice constitutive of and constituted by mutual interaction, and recognise that cross-cultural relations are complex and dynamic. At a political level, although the term is deeply rooted in political agendas, hybridity is a space where intercultural and cross-cultural meanings are constantly negotiated in interactions of differential power. Within this framework, I see cultural hybridity, after Clotheir (2006), as a zone of cultural difference as dynamic anarchism found in the overlaps and in the in-between places between two or more cultures. Therefore, I deem readers’ engagement with foreign literature in cross-cultural encounter as a case for the possibility of a hybrid process, which could result in unique enunciative spaces from which they might construct their new meanings. Their encounter with external cultural influence, in the process of approximation and through the new space, cultural influence may be adapted or adopted, and is subject to consistent change and mutation, rather than seen as determined and fixed.

Within the notion of cultural hybridity, the anti or post colonial text, according to Boehmer (2005) has become a rallying cause, an enabling context, and a focal subject. Those writers deemed the role of culture an important metaphor to help transform social life, and, in turn, social transformation had the potential to regenerate a marginalised culture. While they depended on the retrieval of their indigenous heritage, they used a sort of imagined identities that would resist the hegemony of the colonial discourse. Nonetheless, crossing the adventures of indigenous gods with European realism, superimposing images from other worlds on Westernised city landscapes, post-independence writers relied on an intensely practical Hybridity- the blending of their different cultural influences, and upfront and active syncretism- to unsettle the inheritance of Europe (Boehmer, 2005, p.194)..

In post-colonial discourse, the term Hybridity refers to a bewildering array of different kinds of mixing. Post-colonial writers’ efforts at reclamation in a post-colonial society aimed to resist the corrosion of the colonial myth regarding cultural purity. For, example, the interactions between European modernism and indigenous themes

such as those found in the texts of Rushdie, Ben Okri and Soyinka shows that cultural mixing was intrinsic to the process of how post-colonial world is understood.

CULTURAL ‘IDENTITIES’

The question of identity has become one of the most crucial issues in our contemporary world (Giddens, 1991; Morley and Robins, 1995; Hall, 1996a; 1996b, 1996d; Bauman, 1996; Rose, 1996; Bhabha, 1996; Gilroy, 1997; Holland et al., 2003; Castells, 2004). Gilroy (1997), for example, speaks of the magnitude of identity since “we live in a world where identity matters. It matters as it constitutes the person’s sense of ‘self’ and how it relates to all other surroundings, and matters as a contested fact of contemporary political life” (p. 52). Like the concept of “culture”, the concept of stable and ‘pure’ identity must be put under pressure. Static models of identity formation are questionable in comparison to processional models of resistant or subversive ‘realities’. Mercer (1990) contends that the concept is contested and commonly invoked in crisis when it is assumed to be fixed, coherent, and stable, and therefore, displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty.

Hall (1996a) conceptualises identity as the names individuals give to different ways they are positioned within the continuous play of history, “culture”, and power. He argues that while there are many points of similarity, there exist also critical points of deep and significant difference which all constitute ‘what we are’, and since history has intervened, ‘what we have become’ (p. 225). In this sense, he argues that “we need to understand [identity] as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies” (1996, p. 4). Identity is not a fixed essence, but one that is strategic and positional, and is a scene of temporary attachment to a subject position within available discursive practices. An individual’s identification with a particular subject position is by no means a stable and continuous process, but a fragmented and ongoing one as individuals move in and out of different and competing discourses and subject positions. In fact, the singular use of the concept identity is misleading as the ways one takes up being in the world are never singular (Kocatepe, 2005). They are “multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall, 1996e, p. 4).

Additionally, the construction of identity involves excluding particular characteristics, meanings, and people from a ‘self’ category and assigning them as ‘other’ (Kocatepe, 2005). The construction of an ‘other’, then, is simultaneous with the construction of a ‘self’, where the ‘self’ is defined in terms of the ‘other’ (*ibid*). For example, Fanon (quoted in McLeod, 2003) describes how the gaze of the ‘other’ fixes him in a racial identity; he is fixed into

an awareness of the colour of his skin through his 'otherness' to the owner of the gaze. This suggests that the 'other' is not only outside, but also inside the 'self'. The construction of identity, then, can be described as "the relationship of the other to oneself. Only when there is an 'other' can you know who you are" (Hall, 1996b, p. 345).

Bhabha (1994) offers a conception of hybridity as a negotiation of the multiplicity and fluidity of identities. He posits that meanings and identities are formed in the interstices of the categories of difference and identity, the past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. It is in these in-between spaces, which are "in excess of the sum of the 'parts' of difference" that subjects are formed (p. 2). Emphasising the psychic process of identification, hybridity becomes an interpretive mode to deal with the juxtapositions of space, and the combination of 'time lag' out of which is constructed a sense of being that constantly oscillates between the axioms of foreign and familiar (*ibid*). Hybrid identity, however, is not formed in an accumulative way in which the essence of one identity is combined with another; instead, the hybrid is formed out of a dual process of "displacement and correspondence in the act of translation" (*ibid*, p. 219). In a similar vein, Hall (1996b) conceptualises cultural identity as always hybrid, where hybridity operates on two levels. On one level, it refers to the ongoing process of differentiation and exchange between the centre and the periphery and between different peripheries. On the other, it serves as a metaphor for the identity being produced from those conjunctions. For him, hybrid identities are never complete and are always in the process of becoming without aspiring to a sense of wholeness.

Spivak (1993) distinguishes herself from both Hall and Bhabha in that she draws a sharp distinction between the diasporic communities in the 'First World' and the subaltern in the 'Third world'. In her view, the diasporic and the subaltern live in two incommensurable worlds, so applying hybridity to the latter can be misleading. She argues that there is no process in which the experiences and realities of Indian subalterns can be translated into Western categories. In response to this view, hybridity could be used in relation to three images that picture the existence of identities between two 'competing cultures', the image of a 'third space', liminality (the border on which the subaltern lives), and 'border-crossing' (constant border-crossing without a place or condition of its own) (Grossberg, 1996).

CONCLUSIONS

In these 'new times', dramatic changes in the social, cultural, and economic spheres have led not only to the fragmentation and growing pluralism of societies, but also to the emergence of new identities which render

normative and stable meanings and discourses problematic. With this in mind, I reviewed the ways the concept of "culture" in the western academy and beyond has been theorised. I have argued that the construction of the trajectory of the concept involves essentialised and 'normative' discourses, which have failed to explain the multiplicity and diversity of cultural groups. The concept reflects single, fixed, categorical, stereotypical, and hierarchical constructions of people's lives. In this sense, I have argued that static and monolithic discourses fail to capture the multiplicity of human groups, confirming the invalidity of normative discourses to capture pluralistic understandings of cultures.

Within a post-colonial repertoire, I recognise the concept of "culture" is multiple and includes complex alternatives through the negotiations of cultural difference, hybridity, and diaspora. The strength of post-colonial approaches stems from questioning the baselines of the western knowledge and its claim of objectivity while theorising the concept. As I have attempted to demonstrate, the case against "culture" is *prima facie* a strong one for post-colonial theorists. Therefore, rather than taking "culture" as a static or essentialist notion, it becomes hybrid, dynamic, productive, and not a noun, but a verb, a strategy of survival that is both transnational (*carrying marks of diverse experiences and memories of dislocations*) and translational (*as it demands a re-signification of traditional cultural symbols that were associated with cultural references of a homogeneous and holistic "culture"*) (Souza, 2004, p. 125-126).

Drawing on these conclusions, the canonicity of both "culture" and literature places itself in an indefensible position, and leaves the door open to question the ways through which the canon of the English literature was both a source and representation for most of these assumptions regarding "culture" in its western version. "Culture" and literature (the English literary canon) continue to perpetuate synchronically and diachronically in 'post-colonial' academic institutions, and still treated as if unproblematic. This discourse, ranging from anthropology to literary studies as sources of understanding "culture", encompasses the early project of Enlightenment ideals of history, reason, and universality, and continues to be repeated today. A case which seems to be true for most 'post-colonial' settings, which, through insisting on one version of English literature, the canon in its strict form (or the Anglo-American literary tradition), and after long years of heated debate and argument aiming to deconstruct its notions, raises a pivotal question of how monolithic assumptions of "culture" (high cultural approach) are being engaged with such contexts. Since in its current status, the canon of the English literature in these bears the parameters of 'Arnoldian' notion of "culture" which "is often assumed to involve the propagation of high culture in the service of an organic nationalism... [and] have generated the very philistinism it wished to vanquish" (Young, 1995, p. 55).

I deem the practical implication of the study in that it encourages individuals to challenge the circulation of hierarchical, stereotypical, and essentialised categorisation of "culture" and to recognise the value of cultural hybridity and dynamicity. A reconsideration of the latent constructions of cultural embodiment of both 'us' and 'them', and to question the colonial, monoculturalist, racist, elitist, and sexist assumptions underpinning these constructions.

In sum, I deem that "culture" and 'canonical ideology' (Abu-Shomar, 2012) as a replica of archaeology of 'knowledge' that was manufactured by eighteenth-century colonialist assumptions, and reflect a case of determinist discourses of universality and stereotypes. Any attempt to deconstruct such discourses, therefore, requires a reconsideration of an existing matrix of power relations in academia that claims authority over knowledge. Such authority bears witness to the signs of racist constructions of people around the globe.

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