Full Length Research Paper

Hybridity and trepidation of multiculturalism in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *Of Love and Other Demons* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*

Arif Karima
Feminist Utopian Studies, Postcolonial Studies and American studies. Tunisia.

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Limiting this analysis to the challenging issue of identity, this work intends to account for how hybridity implies a great sense of trepidation, “cultural anxiety”, othering and shadowy multiculturalism. Running against the contention that hybridity opens up horizons and fertile grounds of cultural negotiation, the author argues that hybridity does not resolve identitary questionings and enigmas inasmuch as it obfuscates the quest for a gravitational center from which to launch a civilizational project. There is, therefore, a demanding need for retrieving the specificities of national culture as Frantz Fanon posits, which is only guaranteed through solidifying a sense of belonging to a well-defined cultural context.

With this in mind, the author proposes to build his arguments on Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *Of Love and Other Demons* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as two case studies. Both novels tackle the issue of hybridity in Latin American and African contexts. The figures of Sierva Maria and Kurtz are, in fact, emblematic of false catalysts of cultural mobility. This can be inferred from their conducts and responses to their surroundings. Their madness and irrationality allude to the pathological drawbacks of an identity fraught with cultural duality. To this point, it is obvious that the scope of this study is to account for the fallacy of multiculturalism once associated with hybridity. The corollary pursuit of this hypothesis is both characters do inhabit two cultural realms without being able to fully situate themselves into one of them either.

**Key words**: Identity, hybridity, irrationality, colonial culture and postcolonialism.

It is to be made clear that the talk of hybridity is not exclusively bound up with its racial implication. It is rather an extended metaphor of all forms of doubling, manicheism and ambiguity that both novelists, Marquez and Conrad unveil in their narratives. Following this reasoning, the author upholds the view that multiculturalism ought not to be a neutral acceptance of difference or a pill that hypnotizes a minor voice, group or a given diaspora. He suggests instead that hybridity is, as a racial metaphor of cultural diversity or “chutnification”, to use Rushdie’s oft-cited term, to be premised on an interactive relationship between the self and its alter ego. The process of multiculturalism should not be seen as a mere politics of social tolerance or race mixing but rather as an ethical enterprise in which the self can successfully grasp what lies beyond it in a responsible way.

Limiting this analysis to the troublesome question of identity, the author intends to account for how hybridity implies a great sense of trepidation, “cultural anxiety” or “liminality” which leaves no room for the working of multiculturalism. Running against the alleged position that hybridity opens up channels of cultural compromise and affirmative action, he argues that it does not resolve identitary questionings and enigmas insofar as it disturbs the quest of a gravitational kernel. The inimical effect of cultural doubling negates the stance of multiculturalism.
which can only be recuperated via establishing a national culture as Frantz Fanon posits, that is to invigorate a sense of belonging to a well-defined cultural paradigm and establish a cultural symbiosis between the mimicked and the mimic.

The working hypothesis is that hybridity does not sustain a cultural cause insofar as it breaches the gulf between all binary oppositions including the self and its alter ego, the center and the periphery instead of braiding them within a symbiotic logic. Hybridity seems to be a blessing foredoomed to be a curse for their bearers are briskly struck by its spell and fake promises when it turns out to be a mere bric-à-brac- an eclectic grip that welcomes differences without providing transitions between them. As such, it stands for a ‘pandora’s box,’ which creates many new but unfortunately unexpected problems.

With this in mind, the arguments are built on Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s (1994) Of Love and Other Demons and Joseph Conrad’s (1944) Heart of Darkness as two case studies. Emanating from a postcolonial consciousness and colonial historical backgrounds, both novels tackle, so to speak, the issue of hybridity in Latin American and African contexts. The figures of Sierva and Kurtz are, for instance, emblematic of false catalysts of cultural mobility or multiculturalism. This can be poignantly inferred from their conduct and response to the tokens of hegemony. Their madness and irrationality allude to the lethargy of cultural duality. To this point, it is obvious that the scope of this study is to demonstrate the fallacy of multiculturalism once associated with hybridity, which is synonymous with inhabiting two cultural paradigms without being able to incorporate/identify with one of them either.

From a postcolonial vantage point-the theoretical and historical backdrop from which the novels into question stem- hybridity is perceived from two divergent angles: firstly as a tool of empowerment, resistance and possibly transgression as the colonized imitates the colonizer by way to subvert his logic of oppression and secondly as an instance of ambivalence and cultural effacement when the self loses track of its referentials. In this particular context, the focus is on the African and the Latin American contexts which as representatives of the Third world further generate insights as to the intricacy and haziness of multiculturalism knowing that the latter is a Western construct par excellence—attempting at incorporating the other and making him fit into the larger dominant paradigm and not crediting him/her a valid and valuable contribution to the mainstream culture.

The term trepidation defines a sense of scepticism raised towards hybridity as a discourse reckoned to give a voice to the dispossessed and marginalized. The corollary of this pursuit is that multiculturalism does not ensure pluralism but rather legitimizes a logic of a violent assimilation or containment. Starting from this position, one can claim that post-colonialism is no less a re-inscriptive discourse than a propaganda for multiculturalism itself. Being a container of difference theories and a global discourse- based on interdisciplinarity and cross-cultural discourses-, multiculturalism cannot be credited through hybridity. The latter is but a vehicle that normalizes heterogeneity and marginalizes indigeneity altogether. There is more to the ethos of multiculturalism to what mere hybridity and hybridizing convey.

In Heart of Darkness, hybridity relates to what is inscrutable, disconcerting and unspeakable about the journey Marlow and Kurtz undertake in Africa, the heart of darkness. Unexpectedly, the civilizing mission assigned to the European man will be somehow suspended as the lure and exoticism of the African wilderness which Marlow and Kurtz—two questers--set out to tame will paradoxically appeal to them at a moment of fury or perhaps revelation. Marlow, acknowledges what follows, “True, by this time it (referring here to Africa) was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery...it fascinates me as a snake would a bird—a silly little bird” (11-12). Hence, instead of conquering and piercing darkness, they are paradoxically conquered by it. Kurtz is a colonizer who is “opening his mouth horaciously...of a conquering darkness.” This being the case, the trepidation of multiculturalism materializes a random encounter with the other because of the self’s enigmatic duality. Kurtz, a man who is stranger than a shadow seems to wear a “black mask” (my emphasis) and “orientalize” or say “de-westernize” (my emphasis) himself, as he surprisingly washes himself black when he refuses at the end to leave the African jungle and scribble us this language that is Cruseon in inspiration.

The tantalizing and chilling experience of “the horror” in Africa is an undeniable indictment of Western imperialism and more specifically of Kurtz’s weird response as to the real motives of his quest, on the one hand and his alter ego on the other. As we go deeper into his recesses, we are gradually confronted with an alienated self whether domineering or dominated. The natives and the European messengers/questers alike are entangled in either a hierarchical relationship or an utterly ambiguous one. A case in point is that of Kurtz and his African wife.

The discontents hybridity generates reverberate throughout irrationality, madness and phantasmagoria engulfing both Kurtz and Sierva as they are depicted as grotesque and mad. These effects are concomitant with the aberrations of lending oneself to two orders without having a historical sense firmly grounded in the sum total of myths of the nation. The pathological outbursts of Sierva point out her thorough cultural impoverishment for she finds it difficult to project herself. She lives in non-space at first due to her ignorance of her double belonging, mainly her Spanish ancestry. Then she became withdrawn and pensive, hardly speaking with anyone except with her healer Father Caytano Delaura. Her
confinement in the asylum of lunatics where the interred of life live already signals to her state of cultural trouble in the New Granada which is not only the residence of Spanish viceroys, priests, scientists but also the indigenous communities of the Americas.

Caught in the labyrinths of hybridity, the self is faced with the enigma of positioning and negotiating itself. The boundaries between the past and the present are blurred. In *Of Love and Other Demons*, Sierva Maria finds herself at a cross-roads situation in which she could no longer bear the restraints of Mandingo mores and the Christian cults. Likewise, Bernarda Cabrera, her mother displays a traumatic response to the bitter truth that she has a polyglot identity. When meeting the Marquis, she "reminded him that she was not black but the daughter of an astute Indian and a white woman from Castille." (42)

The burden of hybridity also weighs heavily on Sierva’s father who is made to experience the pain of seeing his only daughter gradually clinging to the African pattern of culture such as sleeping in "the hammock of Indian royal palm," or "dancing with more grace and fire than the Africans."

The protagonist is depicted as being out of time and place at several removes from history due to her confusing inhabiting of two cultural worlds: one that is black and native, while the other is Western and white. This fact has not only strained her but also her mother and father whose dream of bringing their lone daughter as a true American-born aristocrat turns into a failure. It is her intricate cultural background that condemns her to a life of confinement, madness and contempt. After the Marquis’s abrupt awareness that he abandoned his daughter, Sierva was compelled to comply with the white order which she barely knew. It follows then that hybridity is destructive in that it leads to a state of cultural dislocation and uprootedness. In the shacks of the slaves Sierva has never identified herself neither as white nor as black. The plurality of signs each culture conceals confuses and prevents her from either regaining her ancestral ties, or incorporating the black customs and rites.

The mindless creature-dispossessed and possessed by the demons-is a prototype of an historical subject severed from both maternal and paternal warmth and belonging. Thus, her violent outbursts of insanity emanate first from her inability to position herself in history, be it the miniaturized world in which she is brought up in or the collective one.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad envisions a dichotomous imperialist enterprise as Kurtz, whom "all Europe contributed to him" (97), a prototype of the rational elitist being undergoes a process of 'self-cannibalization’. His irrationality and fall into savagery pinpoint gaps the postcolonial discourse inevitably conceals. Kurtz is in a position that relativizes his imperialist motives and raises doubt as to his Africanized self. Marlow in his turn is recounting a tale which he supplements with some lies by way of defending the so-called civilization mission. To this extent, it becomes obvious to the mind that hybridity can by no means be a sign of a double articulation intended to democratize the presence of the minor self into the realm of its oppressor. Pondering over the complexity of the concept, Homi Bhabha (1994) makes it clear that hybridity "is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonial discourse, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rule of recognition.”

The demonic sickness of rabies that inflicts her further deepens her non-existence in a world filled with contradictions and equivocations. It is via madness that the last lost descendent of a decaying viceroyal family will respond to her surroundings in which “she had begun to blossom under a combination of contradictory influences.”(9) Once she starts to display symptoms of rabies, Sierva has disentangled herself from her mother’s contempt, her father’s abandon and her ambivalent ties to the slaves. Yet, this propensity is not to be considered as a vehicle of a third discursive space where the possible might be within the reach. Ironically enough, the rabies, the painful sickness Sierva was afflicted by as she was bitten on the ankle by a rabid dog does portray a good illustration of cultural clash between the Spanish/European reasoning and the indigenous/Latin American one and negates as such a promised multiculturalism. This misunderstanding revolves around the conceptualizing of the sickness of Sierva. While the Africans consider it quite mundane, the Spaniards read it as purely demonic because of their belief in the superstition of fearing animals and what relates to animalism inherent in human beings. Therefore, the issue of being possessed by the demons dramatizes a trepidation vis-à-vis the other and his/her pattern of myths or things before history. If this view is brought to the forefront, it becomes so obvious that a multicultural discourse or performance is already derailed.

One of the most comprehensive definitions of hybridity is set by Bakhtin (1981) who describes it as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance...separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor.” Such blending is not dialogic, with regard to the discontinuities of the self-other encounter, but rather defamiliarizing. The imperialist gaze is turned upon itself in *Heart of Darkness*. This ambivalent reversal of power is nevertheless unsettled. Marlow lies to the intended fiancé to defend the reputation of Kurtz. At this level, we are faced with a double hybridity: one that is inherent in the colonial discourse itself, the other unfolds the confusing encounter between Kurtz and the African natives. The ethics of responsibility is undeniably violated for Kurtz despite his weird emotional involvement in Africa has really conducted a depraving economic affair that is ivory trade hinging on the heads of slaughtered Africans that
refurbish his painting workshop. To some varying degrees, Sierva Maria has though espoused a nonchalant propensity by inhabiting an ahistorical space destitute of cultural signs proper to her hybridized ancestry. Taken together, Kurtz and Sierva can hardly be agents of cultural mobility.

The instances of undecidability the novella abounds with bespeak the fallacy of charting an arena of multiculturalism, for the simple reason that the presence of the self is metonymical. This means that there is no thorough re-appropriation of the term in relation to its alterities. The resultant gaps in the colonial discourse Bhabha (1994) considers as The signs of a discontinuous history, an estrangement of the English book. They mark the disturbance of its authoritative representations by the uncanny forces of race, sexuality, violence, cultural and even climatic differences which emerge in the colonial discourse as the mixed and split texts of hybridity. If the English book is read as a production of hybridity, then it no longer simply commands authority.

Drawing on this hypothesis, the hybrid colonized subjects fail to de-authorize the dominant colonial or neo-colonial order or to incorporate it. Thus, they are brought to a struggle against themselves, their moldered spaces which is the case of Kurtz. Concepts as melange, hodgepodge, impurity cannot clear up the possibility of establishing third space their promise of and engagement with newness are not consonant with the demands of a constructive multiculturalism taking into account the premise of authenticity as a starting point for all cultural negotiations or appropriations. The creation of a third space where the hybrid self can slough off the skin of its oppressor seems to be a painstaking struggle that ends being suspect. In Heart of Darkness, Marlow ends the narrative with “his inconclusive experiences.” (10) This lays credence to the manipulating workings of a double colonial discourse which tends towards mystifying its purposes and the disambiguation does speak for itself.

REFERENCES

Primary Works

Secondary Works