

Hybridity and Cultural Rights: Inventing Global Citizenship

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Abstract

This article examines the contribution that Homi K. Bhabha's understanding of hybridity makes to discussion of cultural rights and global citizenship. It argues that the postcolonial perspective renders these entities uncanny through its insistence on process and retrospective construction. The article pursues a close reading of selected recent writings by Bhabha, situating them in the context of ideas drawn from the work of Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor. In doing so, it also reconsiders key ideas from Bhabha's work, suggesting that his conceptualisation of hybridity is less celebratory and more strictly critical than is often assumed. There has been much scepticism about the 'hybridity paradigm' advanced by postcolonial theory, specifically relating to its relevance in an avowedly transformed world. Bhabha's recent work demonstrates the consistency with which this paradigm challenges us to re-think important issues relating to globalization, democracy, cultural rights and global citizenship. In short, the hybridity paradigm supplements discourses of cultural rights and global citizenship.

Introduction

The notion of hybridity has become central to cultural theory, although its merits have been controversial. In postcolonial criticism in particular, the term has been criticised for exemplifying a particular postmodern critical position. And, within postcolonial criticism, it is the work of Homi K. Bhabha that seems to draw the most attention, much of it rather hostile. I will argue that Bhabha's work, with its emphasis on hybridity, is much more complex and productive than it has appeared, and to make this argument I will follow the intricacies of his more recent discussions of cultural rights. First, however, it is necessary to revisit the question of exactly what Bhabha means by hybridity, something too easily taken as read. Bhabha's work is closely identified with the position that contemporary cultures are hybrid. However, this position does not imply that cultural difference simply blurs into 'indifference.' Instead, cultures should be seen as *retrospective* constructions, meaning that they are consequences of historical process. Hybridity is a process, and its study requires a certain kind of critical approach, one typified by Bhabha's own difficult work. Interviewed for the journal *Art in America*, he suggests the following about his own writing:

The postcolonial perspective resists attempts at holistic forms of social explanation. I question the traditional liberal attempt to negotiate a coming together of minorities on the basis of what they have in common and what is consensual. In my writing, I've been arguing against the multiculturalist notion that you can put together harmoniously any

number of cultures in a pretty mosaic. You cannot just solder together different cultural traditions to produce some brave new cultural totality. The current phase of economic and social history makes you aware of cultural difference *not* at the celebratory level of diversity but always at the point of conflict or crisis.¹

Here Bhabha is making a strong connection between totalising theories and one version of multiculturalism, which imagines a telos of cultural harmonization: cultural diversity as opposed to cultural difference. However, the final sentence emphasizes the fact that those disparate cultures are not pre-existing, but are instead an effect of historical change, specifically of colonialism and postcolonialism: *that* is what is meant by the 'point of conflict or crisis.' Cultural hybridity is not therefore something absolutely general: it may appear to go all the way down, in all cultures, but that would indeed blur all difference into indifference. That version of the politics of difference undermines critical differentiation and distinction. Bhabha's theory of hybridity denies that there were bounded and self-present cultures that at a later date became hybrid; he thereby retains a critical perspective, and resists a facile relativism. We can see this in 'Signs Taken for Wonders,' where he writes the following:

[C]olonial hybridity is not a *problem* of genealogy or identity between two *different* cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition. Again, it must be stressed, it is not simply the *content* of disavowed knowledges – be they forms of cultural otherness or traditions of colonialist treachery – that return to be acknowledged as counter-authorities. For the resolution of conflicts between authorities, civil discourse always maintains an adjudicative procedure. What is irremediably estranging in the presence of the hybrid – in the revaluation of the symbol of national authority as the sign of colonial difference – is that the difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply *there* to be seen or appropriated.²

This passage clarifies two significant points. First, when we study hybridity we do not start with two or more cultures, and then trace their historical movements of hybridization. In the colonial situation, the production of cultures is an inevitable consequence of contested authority. So, as is well known, 'Signs Taken for Wonders' explores attempts to impose the so-called English Book: an apparently absolute cultural difference is actually a product of the strategies adopted by both sides. In different ways, the two different cultures are 'not the *source* of conflict' but are instead 'the

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Art and National Identity: A Critics' Symposium', Interview with Brian Wallis, *Art in America*, 79.9 (Sept. 1991), p.82; emphasis original.

² Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.114; emphasis original.

effect of discriminatory practices.³ We have to recognise that cultures are effects of stabilization produced by authority, but that recognition does not make those cultures any less real. The second point is the following: this shift of emphasis needs to be incorporated into our accounts of culture, so we cannot take discussions of cultural difference at face value, and we cannot write as if different cultures simply exist for us to study disinterestedly and discretely. Bhabha believes that hybridity calls into question traditional analyses of colonialism, which tend to merely reverse the terms of colonial knowledge. Again, hybridity is not a consequence of other, apparently 'pure' positions that have been, for one reason or another, thrust together.

The consequences of Bhabha's position are multiple, and of course the position itself is not without its complexities and controversies. Nonetheless, its implications can be traced in particular contexts, and Bhabha himself has recently pursued them through cultural rights. If cultures are hybrid in the way I have described, then this hybridity cannot only be confined to the level of *culturalist* discourses. This hybridity is found in many unexpected locations, for example in discussion of technological change. In the context of comments on Jacques Derrida, Bhabha expresses reservations about what might be called the digital technological imaginary:

If the virtual community shares the essential *temporal* structure of the modern national-form and its social imaginary, then what will prevent the reproduction on the Net of the worst excesses of nationalism and xenophobia? the agonisms of center and periphery? the travails of majoritarianism and minoritarianism? Although cyberspace communities do not have the territorial imperatives of nationalism, it is interesting how active xenophobic nationalists are on the Web, often in the cause of nations to which they no longer belong, but to which they now turn to justify their fundamentalist aspirations.⁴

In certain ways, then, Bhabha is suspicious of the ideologies of digital capitalism, ideologies that obscure homologies of temporality quite in keeping with the reproduction and extension of modernity's worst features. It is important to maintain that stress on temporality, however, for Bhabha is not being simply dismissive of these ideologies. To explain what I mean, first it is necessary to recall how Bhabha understands national narrative, which is, as is well known, both pedagogical and performative. The first 'teaches' the nation-people as a bounded, self-identical formation, moving through empty, homogeneous time. The second, meanwhile, emphasises the myriad ways that this national identity is tweaked everyday, sometimes violently transformed. The first is a question of being, the second of becoming or

³ Bhabha, *Location*, p.114; emphasis original.

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Arrivals and Departures', in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place*, ed. by Hamid Naficy (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.vii-xii (p.ix; emphasis original).

doing. For the pedagogical, the nation moves through time but remains untouched by it, unmoved by the diversity and disjunction of multiple times. The performative, on the other hand, reintroduces these multiple times, and so reintroduces a sense of community-in-process. While the pedagogical is from the start drawn into an economy of the performative, the two remaining locked together, there is no doubt that Bhabha generally places more emphasis on the performative, because that is what is denied or excluded in the attitudes against which he writes. Accordingly, if virtual communities seem to reproduce the pedagogical structure, and deny the performative, this can only be a problem. So, although we can imagine a version of global citizenship enabled by accelerated changes in communications technologies, there are ways in which such changes might actually reproduce some of the least desirable features of imagined communities. This reproduction is hardly inevitable, of course, and in much the same way discourses of universal rights, although often implying the normativity of national belonging, are open to hybridization, as I will suggest.

Bhabha's interrogation of rights discourses actually derives from his questioning of that pedagogical understanding of the nation-people. Modernity, he implies, has been conceived in much the same way as a nation – in other words, modernity has been unproblematically seen as essentially European. A properly historical perspective on modernity must incorporate its excluded disjunctive or 'unofficial' histories, and the discourse of rights must look to its own excluded but necessary peoples. Accordingly, the discourse of cultural rights is another location where the notion of hybridity can be put to work, following some of Bhabha's own suggestions. For example, in *The Location of Culture* he writes the following:

Current debates in postmodernism question the cunning of modernity – its historical ironies, its disjunctive temporalities, its paradoxes of progress, its representational aporia. It would profoundly change the values, and judgements, of such interrogations, if they were open to the argument that metropolitan histories of civitas cannot be conceived without evoking the savage colonial antecedents of the ideals of civility. It also suggests, by implication, that the language of rights and obligations, so central to the modern myth of a people, must be questioned on the basis of the anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to migrant, diasporic, and refugee populations. Inevitably, they find themselves on the frontiers between cultures and nations, often on the other side of the law.⁵

Under globalisation, the international language of rights apparently undermines the centrality of the nation state. However, at the same time this language develops out of liberal assumptions about internationalism. One version of liberalism sees internationalism as, predictably and reasonably, the

⁵ Bhabha, *Location*, p.175.

interplay of pre-existent nations, and so, in terms of cultural rights, of national cultures. Bhabha's concern is that this language does not adequately cover many of the people most in need of protection, precisely because they cannot be so straightforwardly located within any national culture. Accordingly, the migrant perspective has to be incorporated into discussions of rights. Further, there is something about the migrant perspective on cultural rights in particular that gets to the heart of the problem. But that assumes that there *is* a problem, which is to assume too much: so, to fully appreciate the importance of the migrant perspective, we need first to look at human rights discourses.

A Liberal Formulation of Minority Rights

The last twenty years have seen increased liberal philosophical development of frameworks on minority rights, development complementing that of legal provision. A leading thinker in this area has been Will Kymlicka, whose work will be discussed here as a useful introduction to Bhabha's own perspective. Kymlicka's thought operates in a framework of nations, and his conception of minority rights works against the idea of the nation as *neutral* space. Rather than assuming that a nation's institutions are ethnoculturally neutral, for Kymlicka it is important to acknowledge that within such institutions there is a process of *nation-building* at work, producing what he calls *societal cultures*: 'a territorially-concentrated culture, centred on a shared language which is used in a wide range of societal institutions, in both private and public life (schools, media, law, economy, government, etc.).'⁶ Claims to minority rights are reactions to this 'invisible' or unremarked nation-building process, and accordingly are not a question of special treatment but rather equal opportunity. Such demands are, then, consistent with classical liberal principles. Kymlicka writes the following: 'All else being equal, national minorities should have the same tools of nation-building available to them as the majority nation, subject to the same liberal limitations.'⁷

Kymlicka's discussion explicitly operates in the context of the nation; additionally, his discussion makes at least some reference to practical policy, and has implications for the reformulation of such policy. Given this emphasis, Kymlicka's examples are what he defines as 'standard' cases, and he specifies three central examples of minority rights demands:

⁶ Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.25.

⁷ Kymlicka, *Politics*, p.29.

ethnoreligious sects, immigrants, and national minorities. Kymlicka acknowledges that many other examples are significantly more complex than these three standard examples, and he suggestively refers to these other cases as 'in-between' cases. However, he insists, the standard cases will help us think about the complex in-between cases because, 'the demands of in-between groups are often a complex hybrid of different (and sometimes contradictory) elements drawn from the more familiar models of ethnoreligious marginalization, immigrant integration, and separatist nationalism.'⁸ In other words, these standard examples will contain all the constituent aspects of the more complex cases. This use of examples would not seem quite so obvious to Bhabha, as I will suggest. Further, it is well known that Bhabha's work also questions the defaulting of so many discussions into nation-state terms. At the same time, there are clear points of contact between Kymlicka's liberal formulation of minority rights and Bhabha's discussions, and these points of contact have only become clearer as Bhabha has discussed cultural rights more explicitly in recent work. In this specific context, one point of contact is the mobilisation of the term hybridity: it is interesting that Kymlicka should use the term 'hybrid' to characterize the complex cases which might divert us from our standard cases, but he does not follow through the implications of this use. Bhabha's sense of hybridity would refer not only to the complexity of certain demands for rights, but also the complexly hybrid histories from which those demands issue.

In one sense hybridization is everyday banality, and so many of the least extreme examples can quite easily focus debate on minority rights. At the same time, hybridization is not *only* everyday banality, especially not in terms of international law. Those extreme, in-between cases that Kymlicka explicitly brackets are not merely complex versions of the nominally standard cases he does consider. Those cases, suspended in-between nations, are not exceptions but are increasingly the norm, especially for a language of human rights that ought to operate transnationally rather than internationally. Minority rights can and must be thought of in terms of national frameworks, as explored in liberal philosophy; however, they must also be thought of in terms that exceed nations, and this is because so many people are being excluded and written off as *excessive* to nations. This raises the question of how to revise such discourses. The question is usefully approached in the context of cultural rights, and this is where Bhabha makes his contribution. If cultures are, as Bhabha suggests, the consequence of hybridising processes, then this demands a rethinking of international rights discourses.

⁸ Kymlicka, *Politics*, p.31.

The most direct and predictable way to approach such discourses is to consider the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights.' As is well known, Article 27(1) of the Universal Declaration, specifically protecting cultural rights, says the following: 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.'⁹ The status of this 'community' is apparently open, but perhaps rather easily defaults to the national community. Costas Douzinas makes the following comment about the production of human rights discourse in the period after 1945: 'While the major powers fought tooth and nail over the definitions and priorities of human rights, they unanimously agreed that these rights could not be used to pierce the shield of national sovereignty.'¹⁰ This problem has particular significance when it comes to cases in, for example, a war crimes tribunal. The International Criminal Court was set up by treaty in 1998, and yet the US (and six other countries) voted against the treaty, apparently because of fears that politically motivated accusations would be made against the US military. It seems that the priority of the nation remains in place, and might well impede the processes of justice. For Bhabha, this priority of the nation is a problem in a different way. For him, article 27 operates on the assumption that there are well-defined and bounded cultures, an assumption that the idea of hybridity undermines. If such an assumption remains in place, then human rights discourses will retain certain structural problems making them inadequate to the tasks for which they have been formulated.

For example, in 'On Minorities: Cultural Rights,' Bhabha begins by exploring two terms derived from the work of Charles Taylor, who writes of the 'whole society' being achieved through the exclusion of 'partial milieux.'¹¹ On this view a whole society is essentially a national society, achieved through the assimilation of minority identities, thought of as 'partial milieux.' In much the same way, Article 27, Bhabha suggests, places emphasis on the preservation of majoritarian identities at the expense of the minoritarian. Article 27, it seems, is unconcerned with the production of minoritarian identity, implying rather that such identity is an excess that is always to be assimilated. However, given the alleged focus of such international agreements, they are too quick to take nation-state organizations as natural. In one way, this assumption merely reminds us that international agreements are simply agreements between nations. Nonetheless, another

⁹ 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', UN General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948. Accessed 22 Dec. 2005. <<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>>.

¹⁰ Costas Douzinas, 'Human Rights, Humanism, and Desire', *Angelaki*, 6.3 (2001), 183-206 (p.185).

¹¹ Homi K. Bhabha, 'On Minorities: Cultural Rights', *Radical Philosophy*, 100 (Mar./Apr. 2000), 3-6.

sense of 'between nations' is what concerns Bhabha: people who are, for various reasons, between nations legally, culturally, or otherwise. These in-between people are not only marginal examples, unimportant to the central business of human rights discourses. In fact, 'partial milieux,' apparently destined for assimilation, are increasingly both intra- and internationally central; according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, at the end of 2004, the number of 'People of concern to UNHCR' was 19.2 million.¹² It would seem that if cultures are to be protected, this protection must be extended beyond national cultures.

It is clear that Bhabha's ideas about the hybrid and the national could transform cultural rights discussion, and this potential transformation derives from his balanced understanding of the pedagogical and the performative. In Bhabha's conception of national narration, its movements are simultaneously pedagogical and performative. As in his discussion of national narratives, when Bhabha discusses cultural rights it is clear that a precarious balance between the two is necessary: here it is reformulated in terms of individual and collective rights. Bhabha writes that, '[t]he property of the human being is the collective or the transindividual construction of her or his individual autonomy; and the value of human agency arises from the fact that no one can be liberated by others, although no one can liberate herself or himself without others.'¹³ In other words, human rights discourses and institutions simultaneously require what we might call a poetic individualism and a governing, administrative rationality. So, on the one hand there is a poetic element that exceeds legal frameworks, figuring the individual's irreducibility to mere example of the group; on the other hand, this singularity is simultaneously drawn into the administrative and the pedagogical. This is of course a level of discussion seemingly far removed from concrete legislation, and indeed the practical implications of hybridity for cultural rights usually remain implicit; nonetheless, there are sufficient pointers for us to draw certain conclusions:

The creation of new minorities reveals a liminal, interstitial public sphere that emerges *in-between* the state and the non-state, *in-between* individual rights and group needs; not in the simpler dialectic between global and local. Subjects of cultural rights occupy an analytic and ethical borderland of 'hybridization' in a partial and double identification across minority milieux. In fact, the prevailing school of legal opinion specifically describes minority cultural rights as assigned to 'hybrid' subjects who stand somewhere in-between individual needs and obligations, and collective claims and choices, in partial milieux.¹⁴

¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Basic Facts'. Accessed 22 Dec. 2005. <<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/basics>>.

¹³ Bhabha, 'On Minorities', p. 6.

¹⁴ Bhabha, 'On Minorities', pp.4-5; emphasis original.

The minoritarian perspective entails a thinking of what Bhabha calls the social as processual or performative. Bhabha's article actually distinguishes between *thinking* the problem and *describing* it. The first is a matter for poetry, the second for law: we are invited to see a difference between intervening in a situation and describing the situation. The poetic translation of the partial, dependent identification of the minority is the former: the minoritarian is not a matter of essence (pedagogy) but of practice (performativity). The elevation of the poetic in this context is both fascinating and surprising, and requires some more detailed exploration.

Cultural Rights and the Poetic

In his Oxford Amnesty Lecture, Bhabha returns to the distinction between the pedagogical and the performative. He suggests that the first is on the side of law and the second is on the side of literature. However, this is no simple hierarchy – a fact easy to miss when reading his work. Bhabha asks: 'Can the culture of rights and the writing of culture be made to converse with each other, to convey, in collaboration, the human spirit?'¹⁵ It is worth stating that his criticisms of human rights discourse do not constitute a dismissal of that discourse. Accordingly, the answer to his question is that the categories of rights and writing *must* be brought together constructively.

Again, Bhabha considers Taylor's thoughts on partial milieux. In Bhabha's reading, Taylor conceives of respect due to 'whole' societies, their wholeness partially dependent on longevity and holism. For Bhabha, Taylor's conception is only the latest example of how human rights discourse betrays, 'an inability to conceive of the "cultural options of the minority" outside of the national, even nationalist, frame.'¹⁶ References to whole societies always imply the national. There is, in fact, a 'prescriptive imperative to nationhood and national culture,'¹⁷ evidenced by early attempts by some nations to amend the Universal Declaration so that immigrants would not be considered minorities. Article 27 still, however, elevates a notion of stability for minority cultures distant from the realities of many partial milieux. The Universal Declaration is what it says it is: universal, and therefore applicable to humans everywhere. However, its universality is deceptively complex. Although emphasis on the most general level of being human, the 'merely human,' would seem to forestall any recourse to discourses of nationalism,

¹⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, 'On Writing Rights', in *Globalizing Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1999*, ed. by Matthew J. Gibney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.162-83 (p.164).

¹⁶ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.166.

¹⁷ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.167.

Bhabha maintains that behind this most general vocabulary there is a familiar figure: 'it is my view that behind the "universal" language of the merely human there is a very specific idea of a "national" culture that becomes the inevitable basis of cultural judgement and cultural justice.'¹⁸ Even if the figure of the nation is only implicit, it is still effectively normative: there is an unspoken expectation that we will all belong to a nation, however complex such belonging may be. Of course, clearly we do not all belong to nations in the same way, and those of us who do are intuitively least likely to require the protection of the Universal Declaration. Further, there are other problems related to this implicit presence of the nation in a discourse of supposed absolute generality, and these problems are problems of *time*. The problem is one of what Bhabha calls, summarizing Joseph Raz, 'tension in the creation of community.'¹⁹ Of course tense negotiation – agonism – is for Bhabha both necessary and ongoing. Such agonism is best exemplified in the migrant experience, it might be argued. While we should not romanticize the migrant – and should always remember that there is no *one* kind of migrant – we should remain open to the perspectives opened by experiences of migrancy. Unsurprisingly, for Bhabha there is a lesson for human rights culture in the problems of minority cultures. Unlike Kymlicka, who relegates the significance of hybrid, in-between examples, Bhabha makes them central. Such cultures have, he writes, 'a profound sense of the partial and the processual in the self-fashioning of political subjecthood and cultural identification.'²⁰ To understand hybridity as process, we need to look in this context to minoritarian perspectives.

To explain how Bhabha understands this process, we can look to dictionary definitions, specifically of the 'mere' to which we refer when we say 'merely human.' *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* gives us our everyday sense of 'nothing less than,' or 'nothing more than.' It also gives us the archaic or dialectal sense of 'boundary' or 'landmark,' sometimes even a 'green balk or road, serving as a boundary.'²¹ Bhabha is interested in possible interplay between the modern and archaic meanings, although he does not mention the sense of a *road* serving as a boundary, a sense which helpfully reinforces his argument. He argues that, '[w]e continually shuttle between these two meanings in the making of culture – the human as an ethical or moral horizon beyond everyday life, and the human as constituted through the process of historical and social time.'²² This structure is again that of the

¹⁸ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.170.

¹⁹ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.171.

²⁰ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.168.

²¹ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by William R. Trumble, Lesley Brown, and Angus Stevenson, 5th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²² Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.170.

pedagogical and the performative, the former associated with universal humanity, the latter with quotidian humanity. Universal categories are necessary constructions that we know will necessarily fail to account for every last example of individual human agency. Accordingly, there is a need for translation between the two levels of description. This translation or shuttling is precisely the movement between pedagogy and performative that seems to organise Bhabha's work in general. In terms of national narrative, the pedagogical seems to be all that is necessary for the sense of the nation-people, but is in fact continually drawn into an economy of the performative, and the same is true here:

In complex multicultural societies, the 'culture of humanity' requires that we continually translate the 'merely' human, the more metaphysical sense of meaning and identity, into 'mere humanity' as the border between various social and historical forces that produce the 'human' as a multicultural category.²³

Both senses of being human need to be retained, allowing the open poetic becoming of culture to coexist with its necessary institutional defence. And, in terms of rights discourses, minority group rights must retain both individual and group levels.

Gender and Hybrid Cultures

Perhaps this discussion too readily assumes the desirability of minority group rights. There are, after all, well-developed objections to the idea of such rights, often focusing on the apparent neglect of the individual level. For example, many liberal thinkers question the defence of minority cultures when these cultures apparently conflict with majority attitudes. This conflict is often explored in the context of gender issues, as in the question asked by Susan Moller Okin: 'Is multiculturalism bad for women?'²⁴ Okin engages specifically with Kymlicka's work. Her suggestion is that feminism and multiculturalism are not by any means coterminous. She argues this because although minority groups would still be fulfilling the same criteria as the majority culture when it comes to the public sphere (politics), there are no guarantees of that fulfilment in the private sphere (the home). In other words, because gender inequality is often a feature of the private sphere, for example in terms of reproduction, it is possible that group rights will defend gendered cultures – minority cultures that can be much more heavily gendered than the

²³ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.171.

²⁴ Susan Moller Okin, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' *Boston Review*, 22.5 (1997). Accessed 22 Jun. 2004. <<http://bostonreview.net/BR22.5/okin.html>>.

majority liberal culture. Okin considers examples like child marriage and polygamy, around which minority cultures come into direct conflict with majority liberal cultures. These cultural phenomena, continues Okin, may be defended by the (often male/aging) leadership of a minority culture, but women (particularly young women) often see them in a different light. Okin suggests that, 'by failing to protect women and sometimes children of minority cultures from male and sometimes maternal violence, cultural defences violate their rights to the equal protection of the laws.'²⁵ In other words, cultural rights are potentially in conflict with individual legal rights.

In 'Liberal Complacencies,' Kymlicka responds to Okin by arguing that group rights are only permissible when they are claimed to defend a vulnerable minority culture against the majority culture. They are not permissible if they impose restrictions within the minority cultural group.²⁶ Bhabha's response to Okin is quite different. Elsewhere Bhabha discusses the importance of the domestic sphere in the rewriting of law, politics, and the public sphere.²⁷ Bhabha obviously, then, has sympathy for aspects of Okin's argument; however, he suggests that Okin's perspective is comparable to that of patriarchal minority group leaders, in that she imagines minority groups to be external to or isolated from 'the great storm of Western progress.'²⁸ Minority cultures are, Bhabha suggests, given essential identities which mean they are never quite part of present historical processes: majority discussion of minority cultures is too frequently 'allochronic.' Okin's argument is one version of this discussion: instead of seeing minority cultures as being part of the same processes as majority cultures, there is an implied distance. Okin then casts all relations between liberal majorities and minority cultures in terms of conflict, without thought for the liberalisms already present within minority cultures. These minority liberalisms have, Bhabha insists, for a long time debated the *de facto* inequalities that continue in Western liberal cultures, despite their legal provisions for equality. More importantly, these minority liberalisms are examples of cultures on the move, progressing in ways that are not simply measurable against the standards of Western liberalism. Of course there is nothing to stop the leaders in any given culture defining that culture as just as stable and fixed as nationalism claims nations to be. This raises the question of who controls any given culture's stories. It can be argued that his work neglects gender issues, but here at least Bhabha

²⁵ Okin, on-line.

²⁶ Will Kymlicka, 'Liberal Complacencies', *Boston Review*, 22.5 (1997). Accessed 22 Jun. 2004. <<http://bostonreview.net/BR22.5/kymlicka.html>>.

²⁷ Homi K. Bhabha with Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Cosmopolitanisms', *Public Culture*, 12 (2000), 577-89 (p.584).

²⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Liberalism's Sacred Cow', *Boston Review*, 22.5 (1997). Accessed 22 Jun. 2004 <<http://bostonreview.net/BR22.5/bhabha.html>>.

engages with the question of the gendered control of cultural self-definitions. Bhabha is making the case for recognising the processes animating minority cultures, implying a right to free up the stories told about those cultures, and the standards by which they might be judged. In short, he is discussing minority cultures in terms of a *right to narrate*.

Cultural Narration

We are able to understand Bhabha's discussion of cultural rights in terms of cultures in process – or cultures as being narrated. So, Bhabha has recently written of a right to narrate, something very familiar from his work on the nation but perhaps less familiar in this context.²⁹ Again, Bhabha approaches some of his questions through unexpected avenues, for example developing the idea of the right to narrate through discussion of Adrienne Rich's poem 'Inscriptions' (1995). Bhabha is fascinated by the poem's insertion of the second person into the first, i.e., its introduction of the temporal dimension. Rich's poem is a meditation on the individual and belonging, specifically around questions of 'Race class...all that.' Bhabha suggests that Rich's poem shows us, 'that to belong to a movement, in the collective or political sense of the word, demands a renewed sense of self-recognition that disturbs the language of self and Other, of individual and group.'³⁰ In other words, to belong to a movement is also to be in movement. Bhabha refers to 'a negotiated (un)settlement [...] between the subject as first person – I – confronted by its split double – You – that is future's part, the politicised "person to come."³¹ Through Rich's poem Bhabha evokes the sense in which cultural rights are not a question of multicultural rights, but of *intercultural* rights. Rich works to open 'the space of what I call a chiasmatic, diagonally crossed, lateral "side-by-side" solidarity where differences do not aspire to be represented in sovereign autonomy.'³² Differences and hybrid identities are not absolute horizons of meaning – and so they are not ends in themselves. 'Inscriptions' suggests that class (for example) is one among many elements of difference, to be brought together, without guarantees, in a politics that is, 'a process of making connections between partial cultural milieux.'³³

²⁹ Homi. K. Bhabha, 'The Right to Narrate', University of Chicago, Reflections 2000. Accessed 5 Dec. 2003. <http://www.uchicago.edu/docs/millennium/bhabha/bhabha_a.html>.

³⁰ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.172.

³¹ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.174.

³² Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.175.

³³ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.174.

It is apparent, then, that Rich's poem thematically coincides with many of Bhabha's most familiar concerns. Alongside this reading of Rich, there is the perhaps more predictable reading of Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1999), through which Bhabha suggests that, 'narrative invests language with the "right" to explore and endure, to survive and savour a complex revision in the community of meaning and being.'³⁴ Through his reading of *Paradise* he makes a case for literature's qualities as a *supplement* to law. More specifically, he is suggesting that literature is what gives the language of law access to the right to narrate, which is essentially a right of intervention in the telling of histories. The programmatic definition of that right is given as follows, and immediately broadens the scope of that narration, reminding us why it is appropriate that a poem as much as anything else should frame these theoretical reflections:

By the 'right to narrate,' I mean to suggest all those forms of creative behaviour that allow us to represent the lives we lead, question the conventions and customs that we inherit, dispute and propagate the ideas and ideals that come to us most naturally, and dare to entertain the most audacious hopes and fears for the future. [...] Suddenly in painting, dance, or cinema you rediscover your senses, and in that process you understand something profound about yourself, your historical moment, and what gives value to a life lived in a particular town, at a particular time, in particular social and political conditions.³⁵

So there is nothing that specific about modes of literary narration, in this context. The right to narrate is expressed anywhere that process or the temporal is re-emphasised: the right to narrate is a right to the hybridity and open-ness of storytelling. Narrative is, Bhabha insists, 'a moving sign of civic life.'³⁶ If it is stifled, by those either against narration (who do not want the truth to be told) or those apparently in favour of its reassertion (wanting the unified truth, contradictions and negotiations excised), then the result is the totalising sociological explanation, or the authoritarian political culture: 'When you fail to protect the right to narrate, you are in danger of filling the silence with sirens, megaphones, hectoring voices carried by loudspeakers from podiums of great height over people who shrink into indistinguishable masses.'³⁷

³⁴ Bhabha, 'On Writing', pp.179-80.

³⁵ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.180.

³⁶ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.181.

³⁷ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.181.

Hybridity and Democracy

The situation Bhabha is describing may be familiar enough. It may be a situation, in fact, that puts in question the 'hybridity paradigm.' Writing before 9/11, Marjorie Perloff suggests that although there are many problems with his work, '[i]n its general outlines, Bhabha's hybridity paradigm has enormous appeal',³⁸ however, more recently she argues that the post-9/11 world proves the poverty of postcolonial theory, and specifically of Bhabha's work.³⁹ Perloff understands Bhabha's basic position to be that all cultures are hybrid – and so, cultures cannot be polarized. If that is the case, Perloff suggests, the apparently polarized world-views now evident undermine the postcolonial position. There are many instances of a similar perspective on present global concerns, working with the ubiquitous thesis extended by Samuel Huntington that this century will see a clash of civilizations.⁴⁰ However, as I suggested earlier, for Bhabha hybridity is everyday banality. In addition, Bhabha's work actually does focus on moments of clash, of polarization, and of stasis. It is unsurprising that he has offered thoughtful comments on this supposed clash of civilizations. His recent work questions a cultural racism that divides the world into discrete cultural *spaces*: again, Bhabha wants to reinsert a *temporal* dimension into debates.

A particularly clear example of this reinsertion is the essay 'Democracy De-realized,' which begins by outlining our apparent situation – although this 'our' implies the pre-existent divisions between self and other that the essay challenges, and so obviously has to be qualified. We are often offered 'the stark choice of civilizational clash – between Faith and Unfaith, or Terror and Democracy.'⁴¹ The responses to processual truth outlined in the previous section are two aspects of the same attitude, and therefore remind us that what Bhabha calls 'the embattled and embalmed narrative of civilizational clash'⁴² is really a narrative without movement or opposition. What Bhabha argues about cultural rights gets to the heart of the post-9/11 world picture, or more precisely to the heart of many controversial theories of that world picture, particularly the idea of inevitable conflict between civilizations. Importantly, the implications of his work are far more interesting and far-reaching than the facile assertion or acknowledgement of cultural hybridity.

³⁸ Marjorie Perloff, 'Cultural Liminality/Aesthetic Closure? The "Interstitial Perspective" of Homi Bhabha.' Accessed 20 Mar. 2002.

<<http://www.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/bhabha.html>>.

³⁹ Emily Eakin, 'Homi Bhabha: Harvard's Prize Catch', *New York Times*, 17 Nov. 2001, A21.

⁴⁰ See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

⁴¹ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Democracy De-realized', *Diogenes*, 50.1 (2003), 27-35 (p.31).

⁴² Bhabha, 'Democracy', p.27.

So, Bhabha insists that the best place to learn our lessons regarding democracy is not where democracy is most vociferously proclaimed, but rather where it has been most ambiguous or even damaging in its effects:

when faced with the crises of progress or the perils of democracy, our lessons of equality and justice are best learned from those marginalized, peripheralized peoples who have harvested the bitter fruits of liberalism in its project of colonization and slavery, rather than those imperial nations and sovereign states that claim to be the seedbeds of Democracy.⁴³

Things are never quite as new as they seem, and things are never simply new: 'Unless we recognize what is old and weary about the world – those "long histories" of slavery, colonization, diaspora – we are in no position to represent what is emergent or "new" within our contemporary global moment.'⁴⁴ The postcolonial perspective on democracy, the parallax view from which democracy will appear so different, is a matter of what Bhabha calls the de-realization of democracy. The realization of democracy would be a familiar goal: either democracy needs to be realized in as many countries as possible, or we need to work hard to realize democracy here and now, as previous efforts have been flawed. The term de-realization is not, however, a mere play on this expected usage. Bhabha uses the term in two related ways. First, after Brecht, it refers to, 'a critical "distance" or alienation disclosed in the very naming of the formation of the democratic experience and its expressions of equality.'⁴⁵ In other words, at the moment when democracy is declared, it betrays evidence of excluded others. Secondly, in the manner of Surrealism, it means, 'placing an object, idea, image or gesture in a context not of its making, in order to defamiliarize it, to frustrate its naturalistic and normative "reference" and see what potential that idea or insight has for "translation."'⁴⁶ So, we also de-realize to disclose what democracy might be, instead of simply assuming we already know what it should be. If we assume that we already know what democracy is, and what it can be in future, then we will be unready for what is coming from the future, the genuine changes that will come.

Relatedly, Bhabha thinks that cosmopolitanism is always *yet to come*: it is not something that exists in the present, nor is it something that could exist fully in any future present. It is not an object about which we have theories; instead it is a *project*, like democracy: 'specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an unc cosmopolitan thing to do.'⁴⁷ If we already

⁴³ Bhabha, 'Democracy', p.28.

⁴⁴ Bhabha, 'Democracy', p.30.

⁴⁵ Bhabha, 'Democracy', p.29.

⁴⁶ Bhabha, 'Democracy', p.29.

⁴⁷ Bhabha et al., p.577.

know what cosmopolitanism is, in a traditional intellectual history beginning perhaps with Kant, then we limit ourselves to a specific cosmopolitanism. This version of cosmopolitanism denies the constituent mediation in every culture, assuming it can partake of different and discrete, 'pure' cultures. It is a Eurocentric cosmopolitanism, and is therefore inadequate to a world in which, 'centers are everywhere and circumferences nowhere.'⁴⁸ Adequate to that world is what Bhabha calls a *vernacular* cosmopolitanism, or what we might call cosmopolitanism hybridised, which would begin by finding its cosmopolitan lessons in many cultural contexts, 'outside the box of European intellectual history.'⁴⁹ Cosmopolitanism would be de-realized itself, and this de-realization would be the beginning of a project to develop models of global citizenship. What we think we know about citizenship needs to be relativized, if we are not to produce further total theories that exclude vast numbers.

Global Citizenship

If citizenship is the right to rights generally, the idea of global citizenship is clearly central to the population movements of globalisation. Again, as throughout Bhabha's work, minority perspectives seem most useful in the formulation of such a citizenship. Some examples just are the best examples of a given phenomenon, and when it comes to the strange case of the global subject, the postcolonial provides examples of the ongoing experience of transition. 'The territoriality of the global "citizen" is, concurrently, postnational, denational or transnational.'⁵⁰ This global citizen is difficult to describe. Bhabha's description is less important for the words it chooses than the relationship it sets up with the 'normal' case of nationality: its form is as important as its content. Bhabha discusses this citizenship in terms drawn from contemporary legal theory, which has formulated an 'effective nationality,' a nationality *adjacent* to 'formal nationality.' This nationality has status in the context of international rights legislation, and although it seems to be in a relationship of dependency or even subservience with formal nationality, its adjacency is less a poor substitute and more a necessary supplement. The global citizen is necessarily disjointed, not quite at one with itself. Effective nationality is, in other words, contiguous, and its relationship with formal nationality is one of metonymy.

⁴⁸ Bhabha et al., p.588.

⁴⁹ Bhabha et al., p.586.

⁵⁰ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.30.

This reference to metonymy allows us to understand Bhabha's introduction of Antonio Gramsci at this point. Of course, Gramsci is most closely associated with the idea of *hegemony*, emphasizing the ways power is not only a matter of domination but also of consent. As is well known, according to Gramsci, in trying to create consent, hegemony encounters inevitable dissent: accordingly, cultural meaning is negotiated, and is not something that can be simply imposed by ruling classes.⁵¹ To answer the question of who exactly conducts these negotiations under globalisation, Bhabha evokes a 'philosophy of the part,' a philosophy given institutional expression in the idea of 'the cultural front': 'A cultural front does not have a homogeneous and totalizing view of the world.'⁵² The cultural front transforms the meaning of hegemony, because it undermines the idea of pre-given political identities. The relationships of hegemony may be complex negotiations, but they are still complex negotiations between fairly stable classes. This stability is often assumed to have been undermined by the shift to postmodern social conditions. Nonetheless, political collectivities obviously retain their importance. It is just that there is a need to *imagine* collective subjects, and not simply reduce these subjects to effects of rational contracts between fully conscious individuals: in other words, a cultural front is an alliance that is narrated, and indeed is explicitly so.

Bhabha is specifically interested in how the hegemonic imagination is translated when coupled with Gramsci's idea of the *subaltern*. Indeed, it is of course through this latter category that Gramsci's influence is usually felt in postcolonial criticism, for example in the work of the Subaltern Studies group and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Here, Bhabha emphasizes the ways in which subalternity is connected to the philosophy of the part: 'Subalternity represents a form of contestation or challenge to the status quo that does not homogenize or demonize the state in formulating an opposition to it.'⁵³ Rather than resorting to simplistic polarities, the cultural front places itself in a relationship of negotiation with the status quo: accordingly, it does not simply reject the status quo. Instead, there is a demand for the recognition of process and partiality. The partializing presence, the metonymy that Bhabha apparently privileges over metaphor, is here refigured as subaltern contiguity, or a translation between political contexts that is always provisional and ongoing. This translatability is what allows so many different experiences to be called *postcolonial*: it is not to say that they are all 'the same,' but to recognise that translations and affiliations between contexts can be expedient in political transformation.

⁵¹ See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

⁵² Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.31.

⁵³ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.32.

Grouping these examples together constructs a form of counter-hegemony: such a postcolonial cultural formation must be constructed with care, but its potential justifies that effort. This is because the postcolonial perspective has so many insights into the experiences that characterise the present. So, Bhabha suggests that the time of the contemporary, the feeling of time in the contemporary moment, is best imagined through the examples afforded by partial milieux, subjects and collectives who experienced those tired, old histories of slavery and colonialism. He argues that, '[t]he uneven and unequal playing field of the global terrain – "partial" and "incipient," neither past nor present but "incubational" – is nonetheless encountered and experienced as living in, and through, a shared historical time of "transition."' ⁵⁴ It is this feeling of partiality and transition that should, for Bhabha, be built into the idea of global citizenship: the subaltern negotiates from a position of partiality and hybridity, without the guarantees of rootedness. Only through emphasizing the interconnectedness and incompleteness of our identities can we construct a model of citizenship that will not revert to default assumptions about the permanence and pre-eminence of national identity.

Conclusion

What I have traced through Bhabha's more recent writing is the way in which the idea of hybridity has practical implications for a particular discourse of human rights. In other words, I have followed the way in which hybridity informs a kind of intervention, rather than constituting a description of something already present, out there waiting for study. Earlier I quoted Bhabha arguing that hybridity demands a particular model of critical practice, which we can now see as a particular form of critical reading. Some of the texts read may well appear incongruous in a discussion of rights discourses. Perhaps it is the form or the logic of these texts that makes them attractive to Bhabha. Indeed, in terms of rights his interest lies less in what is said than in the possibility of saying anything at all. This, he argues, is one distinction between individual and collective rights:

Freedom of expression is an individual right; the right to narrate, if you will permit me poetic license, is an enunciative right rather than an expressive right – the dialogic, communal or group right to address and be addressed, to signify and be interpreted, to speak and be heard, to make a sign and to know that it will receive respectful attention. ⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.31.

⁵⁵ Bhabha, 'On Writing', p.34.

In the end, then, the cultural right to narrate is a right to be read in a strong sense. The right to narrate is not being recognized by interpretations that follow the standard, customary rules, fitting whatever object is under consideration into the expected box, and excluding what it cannot understand from all categories. Hybridity requires us to read *and* legislate with greater attentiveness to that which moves in between.

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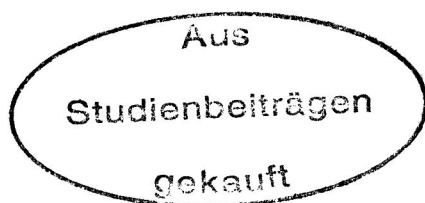
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Reconstructing Hybridity

Post-Colonial Studies in Transition

Edited by
Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman



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