

Localizing cultures in globalized communities

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Reevaluating the discourse on cultures

- Postcolonial studies with Saïd (1978) with the critics of Western perceptions of the Orient
- Discourse analysis (attention paid to the narratives)
- Discourse: ideological conception where the perception of the social reality is rationalized through categories
- Discourse: a justification of a specific perception of reality
- Homi K Bhabha (1949-), specialist in literature, was influenced by the French theory
- He followed the paths of Saïd and Anderson (2016) to elaborate a postcolonial theory with an analysis of cultural representations.



Question

- Why is Bhabha such a central reference in postcolonial theories and in cultural studies?
- The question of “location” is the hermeneutic key to rewrite the myth of the nation and perceive rather a dissemiNation
- 1) The clash of narratives
- 2) The location of culture



The clash of narratives

- Necessity of deconstructing dominating discourses
- The question of points of views: the discovery of the Americas or the colonization of new territories and genocides?
- Bhabha questions the hegemonic narratives
- The romantic myth of nations



The clash of narratives

- « Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation – or narration – might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west » (Bhabha, 1990, p. 1)
- The idea of the DissemiNation (Bhabha, 1994, p. 199)
- Discourse on nationhood



The clash of narratives

- “I am attempting to write of the Western nation as an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture. This locality is more *around* temporality than *about* historicity: a form of living that is more complex than ‘community’; more symbolic than ‘society’; more connotative than ‘country’; less patriotic than *patrie*; more rhetorical than the reason of State; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centred than the citizen; more collective than ‘the subject’; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications that can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism” (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 200-201)



The multiplicity of narratives

- The nation could be seized in very neutral descriptions of localities.
- Location / localization / localities / local
- Vernacular cosmopolitanism
- Question of place, question of the assignation
- Literary analysis of the nation (as an unconscious framework which is validated)
- Investigation of the “cultural liminality” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 212)
- Semiotic revolution with a redefinition of the pluralities of nations
- Narratives of the margins (breaking the accumulation of pre-given notions of the nation). Geography of liminal spaces



The location of culture

- “The canonical ‘center’” (Bhabha, 1994, p. XI)
- “I do not mean, in any sense, to glorify margins and peripheries. However, I do want to make graphic what it means to survive, to produce, to labor and to create, within a world-system whose major economic impulses and cultural investments are pointed in a direction away from you, your country or your people” (Bhabha, 1994, p. XII)
- References to V. S. Naipaul. The Caribbean: the culture of a survival
- Vernacular cosmopolitanism: “measures global progress from the minoritarian perspective” (Bhabha, 1994, p. XVII)



The location of culture

- Foreword (critics against IMF regulations which contribute to create dual economies).
- Dual economies are not “developed” economies
- Vernacular cosmopolitanism: attention to the recognition, new forms of symbolic representation
- W.E Du Bois / Adrienne Rich
- Those who are in a minoritarian position in the world
- Globalization as a “minoritization” (Bhabha, 1994, p. XXI)



The location of culture

- Postcolonialism /
- postmodernism /postfeminism
- The present : “expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7)
- Transnational “sense of the hybridity of imagined communities” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7).
- *Rasquachismo* (Bhabha, 1997, p. 10) – hybrid chicano aesthetic
- References to Fanon



The location of culture

- “The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 17).
- Reference to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* / Morrison, *Beloved*
- “The ‘true’ is always marked and informed by the ambivalence of the process of emergence itself, the productivity of meanings that construct counter-knowledges *in medias res*, in the very act of agonism, within the terms of a negotiation (rather than a negation) of oppositional and antagonistic elements” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 34).



The location of culture

- Critic of binary positioning, attention paid to dialogical cultures where other voices are heard
- Critic of how the Other is described, exoticized in Western narratives (Bhabha, 1994, p. 46). Barthes' Japan, Kristeva's China, Derrida's Nambikwara Indians
- The ethnocentric location of culture even in its antiethnocentric tendencies
- Necessity to rehistoricize social theory. "This can only happen if we relocate the referential and institutional demands of such theoretical work in the field of cultural difference – *not cultural diversity*" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 48)



Relocating cultural differences

- Commentaries on Fanon's work with many references to Lacan.
"The phobic image of the Negro, the native, the colonized, deeply woven into the psychic pattern of the West" (p. 90)
- Psychotic alienation with the White man in his superiority and the Black man in his inferiority
- Human identity / frames of mirrors of selfhood (p. 70)
- Subversion of the dialectics by the irruption of subaltern instances (p. 80)
- A question of infinite perspectives (p. 82) Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533)





No essentialistic claim

- Constructed images of realities
- “Like the mirror phase ‘the fullness’ of the stereotype – its image as identity – is always threatened by ‘lack’” (p. 110)
- Construction of a colonial discourse with “tropes of fetishism”. Metaphores, metonymies, elliptic constructions
- Mimicry, *trompe-l’oeil*
- “the *fixation* of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse” (p. 130)
- Critic of hybridity which is a way of reinforcing the colonial alienation (p. 167) and which causes the “loss of the narrative of cultural plurality” (p. 180)



The tricks of cultural discourses

- “Culture is *heimlich*, with its disciplinary generalizations, its mimetic narratives, its homologous empty time, its seriality, its progress, its customs and coherence. But cultural authority is also *unheimlich*, for to be distinctive, signifiatory, influential and identifiable, it has to be translated, disseminated, differentiated, interdisciplinary, intertextual, international, inter-racial” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 195)
- Culture as a strategy of survival, “transnational and translational” (p. 247)



Conclusions: the relocation of subjects in postcolonial perspectives?

- Ambivalent temporality
- Agency (relocating: reempowering new subjects)
- *In-between*
- Narratives of resistance, mutiny
- *Extimité* (Bhabha, 1994, p. 296). Inside/out/outside (Lacan)
- Need for a global analysis of culture (p. 309)
- Many images coming from architecture
- The search for newness



Conclusions

- “Translation if the performative nature of cultural communication. It is language *in actu* (enunciation, positionality) rather than language *in situ* (*énoncé*, or propositionality)” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 326).
- “Cultural translation desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and in that every act, demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation *within* minority positions” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 327). Translation is understood as the transfer from one space to the other



Conclusions

- “Cultural differences must be understood as they constitute identities – contingently, indeterminately – in-between the repetition of the vowel I – that can always be reinscribed and relocated – and the restitution of the subject I. Read like this, in-between the I-as-symbol and the I-as-sign, the articulations of difference – race, history, gender – are never singular or binary” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 335)
- “*What is the desire of this repeated demand to modernize? Why does it insist, so compulsively, on its contemporaneous reality, its spatial dimension, its spectatorial distance?*” (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 350-351).
Necessity to relocate the narratives and perceive disjunctive temporalities / “passages” (reference to Walter Benjamin)



References

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