

Hybridity or Simulated Identity: Mimicry and Cultural Fascination in the Diasporic Space as Simulacrum in Mehrnoush Mazarei's Short Story "Sangam"

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity has a different position from other concepts in the system of post-colonial concepts due to its wide application and interdisciplinary capacity. Bhabha has a new understanding of theory that requires the marginalized subjectivities to go beyond the limits of the known discourses such as colonialism, nationalism and even philosophy. Simplifying and reducing such understanding to mere appearances distorts and limits the concept of hybridity. Relying on the proposition stated at the beginning, post-colonial studies are not limited to their theoretical context and application. As has been practically proven, the discursive nature of postcolonial studies is diverse and interconnected, creating an inter-space for thinking about the 'other'—a complexity to which Bhabha's concept of hybridity is no exception.

2. Aim

The present study selects this dialogic inter-space of the postcolonial studies for an understanding of hybrid identity within a non-postcolonial subjectivity and a diasporic space that the literary text introduces. Theoretically, this space emerges in the comparative study of the Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry and Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum and examines their overlap in a particular diasporic space. The applied ground for this comparative dialogue is Mehrnoosh Mazarei's short story "Sangam", a diasporic text, the particularity of which helps elucidate the functionalities of these concepts in representation of the identity of an observant narrator. Thus, the research goals are not based on entering into the theoretical issues of diaspora; instead, it focuses on a critical analysis of diasporic mentality and individuality in the special situation the context of the story presents, with a comparative exploration of the two concepts of hybridity and simulacrum.

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3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The process Bhabha refers to as hybridity is in the intersection with the Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum. In the book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha clarifies that hybridity reveals deformation and displacement of all the places of discrimination and domination. Hybridity is the result of the desire to integrate, but at the same time it subverts the imposed culture. One of the key actions related is mimicry, which, according to Bhabha, makes a hybrid identity. According to Lacan, identity is formed in the gaze directed at the other. Inspired by Lacan's dialectics of other, Bhabha believes that mimicry has a subverting quality; it implicates a relative and sly otherness. On the other hand, in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Jean Baudrillard introduces a new semiotic world in which the previously concealed relationships between the reality, signs, and what is considered reality are revealed in different historical, social, political and literary contexts. Baudrillard defines simulacrum, the main concept and semiotic core of the book, as something that replaces reality and its representation. Simulacrum helps us to gain a deeper understanding of the situation and condition of Iranian immigrants' identities as they encounter an immigrant other from a colonized culture within the diasporic space of a world where the precedence of simulacra is indisputable. The diasporic space presented in the narrative challenges our understanding of Bhabha notion of hybridity and invites us to reconsider the realization of hybrid identity and the probability of pretending/simulating the hybrid experience.

4. Discussion

"Sangam" tells the story of the narrator's experience of the relationship between her as an Iranian immigrant woman and an Indian immigrant woman in a minor diasporic space of United States. The story is in the form of memoirs; it is as if the reader is holding a fragment of the narrator's diary. The author's schedule and the spatial and temporal arrangement of the memories revolve around a direct or indirect connection with Shalpa, centering on the image of her life. Also, the form of the narrative is similar to the style of a chronicle. In the contextual function and the author's way of expression in this story, a synthesis has been achieved in which the subject's engagement with memory telling indicates fixation and the chronicle structure indicates a complete focus on the object, which, if they come together in a subjective perspective, heralds a formative fascination. In the specific context of the story, this fascination is the product of the narrator's desire for deeper contact with the other. It refers to a variable yet certain reality: that the diasporic spaces are filled othernesses, or others, which may alternate or hybridize the identity with a conscious/unconscious experience, or through mimicry. In other words, the narrative forms with its fixation and the concentration, based on two form of writings expresses the narrator's gaze and her perspective as the eyes of a gazer/holder. The diasporic space is an intercultural space, where the event of the gaze occurs—not between the dualities of colonizer and colonized, but between the identity of the post-colonial Indian immigrant and the non-

colonial diasporic identity of the narrator. These two identities do not necessarily have a conflicting function. Despite the possibility of power relations and local tensions, they form a kind of duality that instead of opposition they provoke an exchange capacity. The narrator's experience of hybridity occurs in her encounter and then connection with Shalpa, and since this hybridity emerges from the diasporic space and its fluidity of simulacra, unlike Bhabha's theoretical definition, it does not lead to a form of resistance and is not disruptive/subversive. The entirety of this situation occurs in the third order of simulacrum and the fourth stage of the image or sign-order. While nostalgia stimulates the narrator to desire both the past and the other in this diasporic space, it is itself repeatedly and sometimes unconsciously exposed to or integrated with simulacrum. This reaches to a point where even nostalgia itself can be a simulacrum. Simulacra are interwoven with the subjective memory and the outside objective world, from the narrator's past to her interactions in the present and her decisions in the future. They are effective in the narrator's pursuit, fascination and mimicry of Shalpa in different ways: firstly, the narrator's fascination happens through images; Secondly, the narrator's understanding of India's culture is not based on historical political events or lived cultural context, but rather is based on a set of simulated images, which together, include the hyperreality of Indian society, a thing that is not only unable to recognize reality, but it is a revamping compensation for the absence of reality.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The comparative study of Baudrillard's simulacrum and Bhabha's hybridity in the context of "Sangam", not only removes the concept of hybridity from a simplistic sphere of application but also shows that related concepts such as mimicry and third space, despite its positive function, which in Bhabha's opinion causes cultural resistance, can also end up as an identarian *mise en abyme*, a simulacrum from the simulation of other simulacra. Mazarei's short story presents a possibility that indicates the illusory and ambivalent condition of the narrator's hybridity in her diasporic position. The narrator, via desiring to construct an identity based on past, mimicry, fascination and empathy, creates a gap in this third space of diaspora, which both problematizes the practical function of hybridity and emphasizes the importance of simulation in defining a particular identity. This gap reveals different dimensions; one is that the concept of hybridity cannot be extended or applied for all identarian experiences; second, the actions that are defined in the shadow of this concept do not necessarily culminate in hybridity in its positive theoretical definition. And last, the encounters of each subject, being compounded of discourses of culture, ethnicity, race, and gender, has its own particular outcome and is different from another. In "Sangam", we are faced with a form of consciousness that, in addition to having this compounded property it achieves a divergent identity and an imaginary and temporary subjectivity, which results in double confusion and alienation.

Key Words: hybridity, simulation, mimicry, diaspora, "Sangam"

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