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# Mimicry

last edited by Moushumi Biswas 1 year ago

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**Definition of mimicry** or mimesis: Imitation of colonizers as creative acts of resistance performed by "revolutionary actors" who engage in "inquiry and creative transformation" (Villanueva, 85) to achieve subversion of hegemonic forces.

**Key words:** Stereotyping, imitating, "others," subversion, subaltern, colonizers, colonized, postcolonial, language, culture

**Scholars:** Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Victor Villanueva

- Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man." *Race Critical Theories*. Eds. Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg. Malden, Ma :Blackwell Publishing, 2002. 113–22. Print.
- Said, Edward. "Imaginative Geography and Its Representations." *Race Critical Theories*. Eds. Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. 15–37. Print.
- Villanueva Jr., Victor. *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*. Urbana, Il.: NCTE, 1993. Print.

## Important ideas:

- Focusing on India during the British Raj (1747–1947), Bhabha theorizes that it was a group of critically aware individuals who, through mimicry of the colonizers, eventually subverted the colonizer–colonized political structure. Bhabha calls these individuals "hybrids" or metonymic representatives of the colonizer since, as imitators of color, they can only partially represent the colonizer's whole.
- The color "brown" marks the divide between the colonizing sahib and the civilized native.
- "Consent" is a factor that helps preserve the notion of "superiority" of one race over another.
- The solution that Villanueva offers to fix the colonizer–colonized situation goes back to playing the role of Gramsci's "organic intellectuals" who "might function within more traditional intellectual organizations, like the university, yet remain organic if the functions they undertake have them conceptualizing and articulating the social, economic, and political interests of the group or class from which they came" (129).
- As Bhabha would have it, Naipaul's play–actors work to emancipate an entire nation from the clutches of colonizers.
- In Said's larger Oriental context, he is seen playing the role of a mimicking counter–hegemonist who uses the English language and the platform of the American academy for a tirade against Orientalists.

## Important quotes:

- Bhabha on Bipin Chandra Pal: The "anomalous" Bengali who is "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (116).
- Bhabha: "...the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined" (117); it disrupts authority and eventually "deauthorizes them" (120).
- Bhabha: The translator/play–actor draws on the "normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history" and strategically uses its potential for "insurgent counter–appeal" (120).
- Macaulay: Brown sahibs are the "interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" to be "employed in different departments of Labour" (116).
- Villanueva says: "Hegemony's passive revolution does not provide equity, only its semblance" (139).
- The role of the "brown sahib" served Bipin Chandra Pal's purpose of being the "metonymic representative" who could subvert the colonizer's hegemonic power by re–articulating "the whole notion of *identity*" (117).
- Commenting on "the power of the ideology of individualism in our country" (62), Villanueva says that the quest for individual success puts a minority person on the path to racelessness and alienation from roots instead of helping integrate her/him better with her/his community.

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- Villanueva: "They become raceless" (113) through "consensus" as "they become subject to acculturative and assimilationist forces" (62).
- Said: "...rarely were Orientalists interested in anything except proving the validity of these musty "truths" by applying them, without great success to uncomprehending, yet degenerate, natives..." (18).
- Said: "...a kind of free-floating mythology of the Orient, an Orient that derives not only from contemporary attitudes and popular prejudices but also from what Vico called the conceit of nations and of scholars" (18).
- Said in the introduction to *Orientalism*: "...what we must respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability" (6).
- Said: "In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (7).

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