



Department of Modern Languages
and Business Communication



THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES
The Faculty of International Business and Economics
The Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication of ASE
5th International Conference: Synergies in Communication
Bucharest, Romania, 10 - 11 November 2016

UNDERSTANDING MARGINAL IDENTITY THROUGH THE LENS OF MULTICULTURALISM. A THEORETICAL APPROACH

Monica GOT¹

Abstract

Amidst the current confusion of attitudes and standpoints, an academic pursuit to define and clarify the nature of the circumstances which cause entire ethnic/religious groups to be situated on opposite sides of Samuel P. Huntington's controversial "clash of civilizations," as well as the very concepts that are used to identify them, is needed. Clearly such an attempt is neither new, nor trouble-free, yet the present paper aims to explain the dynamics of the relationship that 'marginal' cultures have with today's multicultural world, by resorting to several seminal works that have forever altered the way individual and group identity is regarded.

Keywords: *marginal identity, multiculturalism, clash of civilizations, colonial discourse, mimicry.*

1. The Evolution of Mentalities. A Historical Assessment

Throughout the ages, it has been difference rather than resemblance, disparities rather than cohesion and the mania of pointing the finger and casting the first stone—rather than the halo of unity—that have driven humanity forward and established the winners of the day, winners whose blinding glory cast the shadow of oblivion over the ones defeated in the long battle of mankind's history. And, as far as contemporary man's conclusions go, history is—before anything and beyond any reasonable doubt—exclusively written by the winner.

This paper's main objective is trying to pinpoint where exactly postmodern thought and the evolution of mentalities are situated at present, as far as the theoretical preoccupation with 'marginal' cultures is concerned. Postcolonialism has, for quite a considerable amount of time now, stopped being the latest piece of news in terms of critical theory; hence, an exclusively fresh, innovative and off-basis approach to this area of interest is no longer possible. The ramifications of the mere notions of Postcolonialism, Orientalism and the like are far beyond the grasp of anyone exclusively concerned with one-sided explanations and clear-cut, mathematical definitions. The previously-mentioned concepts and their literary representatives are as complex and intricate as the cultural melting pot they originate in.

In his essay "Religion in Politics," while discussing the concept of *jihad* inside and outside the Muslim tradition, Eqbal Ahmad concludes that the fundamentalists' oversimplification of the Islamic doctrine—which is thus turned into no more than a "penal code"—is indeed "very reassuring to the

¹ Monica Got, The Bucharest University of Academic Studies, monica.got@rei.ase.ro

men and women who are stranded in the middle of the ford, between the deep waters of tradition and modernity.”

This is a very fortunate choice of words and especially one definable of the convoluted historical moment that mankind is currently in, given the turmoil and inner contradictions fostered by just any inhabitant of contemporary society, regardless of their racial, geographical and religion background. These “deep waters” mentioned by Eqbal Ahmad are the perfect metaphor of the situation of today’s world, comprising not only the nations struggling to take the huge step towards transition, but also (and perhaps in an even more symbolic manner) those which have already been tagged as ‘emancipated’, ‘democratic’ and ‘free’—yet the same ones that, when the time came, repeatedly failed to shed prejudices and ready-made opinions of whatever is distinct, unfamiliar and faraway.

Huntington’s point of view, although not more than a fairly decent analysis of the state of contemporary political circumstances, has caused significant reactions and stirred the academic and political environment as a revolutionary piece. The study’s main message is basically that, politically speaking, the world is bound to enter a new stage, in which mankind will be faced with dramatic conflicts, first and foremost at a cultural level. Since civilization is the highest form of cultural alliance formed by human beings, it is the problematic matters defining these civilizations (such as the differences in language, history, religion and tradition) that will make up the very source of ongoing conflict. Since, according to Huntington, this age of cultural divergence has already begun, the author suggests a coalition of the related and a policy of overt cultural imperialism, so that Western values are disseminated as much as possible. The text concludes that the Occident must promote a position of acceptance when it comes to foreign civilizations, yet consider a more aggressive approach, should circumstances call for it. Nevertheless, Huntington’s overall reflections point to a solution involving tolerance between cultures and, more generally, the Other.

In the very beginning of his essay, Huntington states the following:

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

This assertion and the whole thesis which derives from it is what causes Edward Said, in his article “The Clash of Ignorance,” to virulently contradict the points of view of both Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilizations?” and Bernard Lewis’ “The Roots of Muslim Rage.” Said’s stand is extremely clear; he denounces the extremist positions of both Huntington and Lewis, in the sense that the Orient and the Occident are turned by the two authors into cartoonish representations, a categorization lacking subtlety and demeaning the very significance of the East/West dichotomy:

In both articles, the personification of enormous entities called “the West” and “Islam” is recklessly affirmed, as if hugely complicated matters such as identity and culture existed in a cartoon-like world where Popeye and Bluto bash each other mercilessly, with one always more virtuous pugilist getting the upper hand over his adversary.

According to Said, what is chiefly embarrassing about the vision of the Other in either cultural community is the complex of superiority it invariably implies. The parallel never seems to allow differences in the directions evaluated, nor compensatory values of any kind. Comparisons are always strict and unbending, to the point where whatever is alien cannot but be labelled as inferior, and always looked down on with a condescending smile at best. The ‘us’ versus ‘them’ issue lies at the core of the self-proclaimed civilized and unbiased West, as well as it is the basis of Oriental views. Conflict and opposition are always, most of the time unconsciously even, the paradigm to which cultural identity is subject to; sadly enough, the coexistence of values and reciprocal assimilation of such is seldom taken into account or praised. Usually—since it is unacceptable in the lines of the ‘either/or’ manner of thinking which characterizes even the most liberal minds—the idea that typically there is a part of ‘us’ in ‘them’ and vice versa quickly dissolves in denial. As Said puts it:

This is the problem with unedifying labels such as Islam and the West: they mislead and confuse the mind, which is trying to make sense of a disorderly reality that won't be pigeon-holed. I remember interrupting a man who, after a lecture I had given at a West Bank university in 1994, rose from the audience and started to attack my ideas as "Western," as opposed to the strict Islamic ones he espoused. "Why are you wearing a suit and tie?" was the first retort that came to mind. "They're Western, too."

This is a typical illustration of the intertwinement of cultures so subtle and deeply rooted in the collective unconscious that it completely and absolutely eludes any kind of rationalization. It is perhaps the point of disruption that Said is trying to warn us about, the moment when the ultimate clash takes place—and it is not a clash of cultures in the sense that Huntington, for that matter, defines it; in fact, this particular clash is quite the contrary. It is a clash whose origin resides within the modern individual's own mind: an uninterrupted yet perfectly involuntary and unconscious process of thought.

The case of Said's student is but a clear and undistorted picture of modern cultural beliefs, whether they are explicit or not, whether the ones who adopt them are even aware of their stand or not. The brief but significant occurrence during one of Said's university courses is an uncomplicated parabola of the entire modern world, be it Eastern or Western—culturally speaking. One is hereby faced with one's innermost hypocrisies and weaknesses; since, no matter how hard one tries to rationalize and hence come to terms with one's own limitations as to understanding the Other, one oh-so-often finds oneself in the shoes of the Oriental student who, wearing a suit and a tie—utterly ignorant of the elements of the other culture which he has fully integrated into his own—poses as an intransigent judge of the vile process of 'Westernization'.

It is a common problem which characterizes a dramatic majority of individuals nowadays, regardless of their degree of education and insight into intercultural issues. What is indeed interesting is that we tend to think in patterns and are prisoners of categorizations, long after we have begun denouncing them, in a manner most overt and brave—yet only at the level of appearances. I am compelled to observe, however, that this hypocrisy is almost never acknowledged and taken upon oneself, but rather a sign of human incapacity to assimilate and internalize beliefs that, rationally, are endorsed and extensively preached. This happens because, so many times, we fail to recognize any sort of influence of the Other, be it positive or less so, upon our own culture, since we more often than so prefer to turn a blind eye and live in denial, trapped in a black-and-white vision of the world around.

Therefore, we may assume that this intolerance to difference and rejection of representations, rather than concrete realities, is merely a manifestation of intellectual limitation and self-deceit. It is easy to cast the stone as long as the 'opposing' culture is merely an alien set of values, an empty concept, a prejudice with a given name. What is difficult, though, is to be courageous enough and start to differentiate the very moment day-to-day details—such as the suit and the tie in Said's example—which remind one that culture is a living organism, subject to transition, become manifest.

Indeed, the fact that cultural values fluctuate and are part of an ongoing process of involuntary lending and unconscious borrowing has become more and more obvious in (post)modern times. Therefore, it must be stated that introducing, adapting and taking over the values of another culture are all part of a process that has a lot to do with acculturation, although this term has undergone a considerable number of changes in recent history.

Certain concepts, designed to describe precisely this sort of phenomenon, have gained great popularity among modern cultural theorists: the concepts of 'melting pot', cultural pluralism, multiculturalism. The theory of multiculturalism advocates in favor of coexistence rather than assimilation, stating that nowadays it is no longer the case of the greater power's overt attempt to conquer and dissolve the weaker one; on the contrary, the world we live in has attained the sort of balance in which Differences are integrated without being deformed and subdued. This idea of the natural coexistence of values is known under several names, such as "salad bowl" in the United States or "cultural mosaic" in Canada.

A very interesting view on these matters can be found in the two inaugural releases from Norton's *Issues of Our Time* series, namely the works of Amartya Sen and Kwame Anthony Appiah, respectively. Theirs are not only philosophical and scholarly opinions on the issue of multiculturalism,

but direct accounts of personal life experiences. Although in slightly different ways, both authors argue against the cultural separatism policy, adopted by several academic circles. In a study of the two works, Michael Blake summarizes the stands taken by Sen and Appiah, respectively, as follows:

*According to the cultural separatism thesis, cultures or nations are morally central groups in the world; membership in such groups is both ethically significant and explanatorily powerful; and the borders of cultural and national groups must be preserved against outside influence. This thesis is rejected by both Appiah and Sen, in subtly different ways. [...] Sen's argument focuses primarily on the ascription of identity. [...] We tend to think we can know a great deal about a person's beliefs in politics and morality, for example, if we know their cultural background. [...] Appiah shares this concern for complexity in identification, but combines it with a more extensive account of how our moral duties might change when we encounter difference. [...] We must ultimately seek acceptance and familiarity even with those whose beliefs we reject. ("Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny." Journal article by Michael Blake; *Ethics & International Affairs*, Vol. 21, 2007)*

Indeed—as English language writers of Indian and African descent, respectively—, Sen and Appiah find themselves in the position of firsthand witnesses as far as the problem of multiculturalism is concerned, thus becoming exponents of a major train of thought not only as researchers, but as chief representatives as well.

When referring to authors of Oriental descent who have studied the so-called “colonization of the mind” phenomenon from the inside, one is compelled to recurrently return to the work of Edward Said. According to Said (*Orientalism*), it has always been man’s obsession to divide the world into different regions, in such a way that these differences could be either real or imaginary. It took years and even centuries to establish an absolute demarcation line between what we generically refer to as ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident,’ respectively. The contacts established involved not only trading and politics, but other aspects as well. Thus, in recent history Europe has started developing a continuously growing knowledge of the Orient—however, more attention is always paid to the colonial phenomenon than factual reality, with an ever-unresolved obsession with the Other and all that the Other represents. This mythical view of the Orient has been mainly a product of literature and the arts.

It is common knowledge that Europe has always enjoyed the dominant position, which is an objective historical reality and cannot be turned into a euphemism. I solidly agree with Said in that, however diplomatic the position of dominant Europe has tried to be, striving to compensate the general state of affairs by emphasizing the so-called grandeur of Oriental civilizations, the relationship between the two poles continues to be one of power—defined within the limits of the superior/subaltern dichotomy.

Therefore, the cliché has always stood at the core of the Occidental’s perception of the Oriental, as follows: the Oriental is devoid of reason, debauched, childish and ‘alien’, whereas the European is—in direct opposition—reasonable, virtuous, mature and ‘normal’. In *Orientalism*, Said goes on to explain that the coherence and intelligibility of the Oriental’s world, as far as it existed, was never the direct result of the Oriental’s efforts and a mirror of his efforts, but once again the circuitous influence of the Occidental, whose own view of the former’s existence offers that existence rules and a consistent, articulate essence.

The knowledge of the Orient, having originated in a political and cultural power struggle, creates the very Orient, the Oriental and his entire world. Thus, the Oriental, being subject to interpretation, observation and representation of all sorts, is no longer a complex type, but is reduced to the status of an object, an inanimate exhibit in a museum where the dominant power writes the tags. Cultural power is indeed a very intricate topic to be analyzed, and Orientalism itself does nothing else but deal with exercising this cultural power.

2. Self and Other: On the Intricate Nature of Self-Perception

In the very beginning of the first chapter of her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba draws, in a very brief yet extremely suggestive manner, what I deem a perfect definition of the colonial endeavor: “Colonialism was not an identical process in different parts of the world but

everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history.” (Loomba 8)

The reason why I believe this assertion to be genuinely significant is a simple one: it manages to have the entire perspective altered, turning the one-way road of interpretation that most scholars and students are involuntarily tempted to take into the unbiased and more ethically coherent two-way one. For a long time, the dichotomy has been trouble-free, a riddle without any catch, with the colonizers constantly playing the part of the enlightened and the colonized unknowingly accepting the role of brutes. What has constantly been ignored is the true nature of the colonizer-colonized relationship, which is characteristic of any relationship for that matter, namely ambivalence. It is quite obvious that the actions of the West regarding the Orient have not just influenced the latter, but have rather set the two poles in an equation that has left neither impervious to the cultural shock, a shock whose repercussions have changed the face of today’s world.

Another aspect of great importance that Loomba brings to her readers’ attention is that of the distinction which must be made between the two core concepts under discussion: imperialism and colonialism, leading to a better understanding of what the notion of *Postcolonialism* involves:

Thus, imperialism, colonialism and the differences between them are defined differently depending on their historical mutations. [...] To begin with, the prefix ‘post’ complicates matters because it implies an ‘aftermath’ in two senses—temporal, as in coming after, and ideological, as in supplanting. (Said 11-12)

What Loomba basically asserts is the idea that Postcolonialism is hardly a grid, a mirror of truth able to faultlessly depict the social and political metamorphosis that a country or region has undergone. On the contrary, these very social and political circumstances are the ones which can point out the kind of ruling which that country or region was subjected to and put a name to it, together with a whole set of connotations. In this fashion, Loomba continues her plea by defining other terms often used in this area of research, such as ‘hybridity’, ‘minority’ or ‘third world’—all pointing out to just how complex and problematic the matter really is.

Given that—amid such a multitude of theoretical notions which all aim at describing the fabric of what we call ‘cultural identity’—without exception there is an unidentified element lying at the core of each analyzed case in particular, one might conclude the issues of colonial influence and postcolonial existence of a nation, respectively, are directly related to the concept of “collective unconscious”:

I have chosen the term “collective” because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us. (Carl Gustav Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 3-4)

Indeed, the term coined by Jung refers to a kind of repository of myths and symbols, accessible to the entire human race, which—by recording the complete history of human reactions to the outside world—make up an active substratum that is the primary source of all reality. Jung originally stated that the collective unconscious consisted of primordial, ancestral images, later concluding that their true nature is that of archetypes, manifesting in consciousness by means of images and patterns of behavior.

Undoubtedly, Jung’s theory of the “collective unconscious” can be used to define the very essence of collective identity, which is fundamental for the understanding the exact nature of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and of the mechanisms according to which it actually works. It is impossible to fully comprehend that which is encompassed by the notion of ‘cultural identity’ itself without first drawing a map of its origins and characteristic elements. Although the etymology of the term ‘identity’ clearly links its meaning to the idea of similarity, while in philosophy, also being used in the form ‘sameness’, identity is “whatever makes an entity definable and recognizable, in terms of possessing a set of qualities or characteristics that distinguish it from entities of a different type,” it seems that throughout history it has been separate identities and the clash between them that

has so often lead to conflict instead of coexistence, to confrontations instead of alliances. Many times, the assertion and preservation of one group's identity has been more imperative than the exchange of ideas and customs or the adoption of alien ones. That is why, in the course of the centuries, the conquering/conquered dichotomy has been encountered far more frequently than phenomena such as the cult of diversity, multiculturalism or tolerance.

The duality characteristic of postcolonial theory proper invites one to return to the fields of psychology and spirituality. Hence, just as the human psyche is a mystery yet to be revealed and only partly explainable in scientific terms, claimed to be the main subject matter of various research domains—as contradictory in aspirations and methods as they are numerous—the far more intricate network of interaction which defines the colonization process is even less quantifiable.

In short, the colonizer/colonized relationship and the entire web of phenomena it results in is no less complicated and ramified than the human being proper (what Jung referred to as the 'anima/animus'). Following the same pattern, one can assume that, as a critical theory directly related to and in close interference with the broader area of cultural identity, Postcolonialism itself is multifaceted and open to ongoing interpretation, and therefore susceptible to no abruptly clear-cut, obtuse or biased conclusion of any sort.

Having established that identity—both as far as its textual meaning and the multiple, various-angled interpretations it was given are concerned—is a conflicting and at times quite ambiguous concept, it is perhaps time to add several more elements to the endeavor of grasping the essence of the colonial experience. One of these elements is mentioned by Frantz Fanon in his highly influential writing *Black Skin, White Masks*, in the book's fourth chapter, meaningfully named "The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized":

The problem of colonization [...] comprises not only the intersection of historical and objective conditions but also man's attitude towards these conditions. [...] Once and for all we affirm that a society is racist or is not. As long as this evidence has not been grasped, a great many problems have been overlooked. [...] Colonial racism is no different from other racisms. (Fanon 65-66, 69)

In a very straightforward manner, Fanon makes it clear to his readers that colonization and all the 'post' reactions and attitudes which it elicited has a lot to do with an omnipresent negative-response kind of scrutiny and, furthermore, with racism—in a fashion more or less blatant, but equally detrimental to the overall picture which, at least in theory, was supposed to breathe objectivity and fair detachment.

What is indeed surprising is that the lack of objectivity—involuntary and devoid of any trace of ill will, but existing nonetheless—is typical not only of the 'other party', it is not just a trait of the oppressors, of the colonizers, of the 'winners' who went on to become the sole writers of history, but is also a visible mark of the colonized themselves. An interesting phenomenon takes place, a sort of mirroring which causes the conquered to no longer see themselves and the world through their own eyes, but through the very eyes of the 'enemy'. Not long passes before the oppression moves on to another level, more subtle and all the more dangerous, considering the implications—as there is no domination more coercive and intransigent than that exercised by one onto themselves.

Once again resorting to Fanon's work, I dare support this idea by the author's own tone: far from being cold and written in the reticent academic fashion, *Black Skin, White Masks* makes use of a style which allows the reader to perceive Fanon's true identity, as being the voice of first-hand experience and not a mere result of rational endeavor. Taking the analysis to such a highly personal level, unmediated and devoid of generalization, Fanon bluntly brings into discussion the terms of the 'inferior/superior' opposition, so overtly and consistently hinted at by the colonizers:

Inferiorization is the native correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say: It is the racist who creates the inferiorized. [...] I start suffering from not being a white man insofar as the white man discriminates against me; turns me into a colonized subject; robs me of any value or originality; tells me I am a parasite in the world [...]. So I will try quite simply to make myself white; in other words, I will force the white man to acknowledge my humanity. (Fanon 73, 78)

Fanon revisits symbolic connotations long-established in the collective unconscious, for instance that of the European as “honorable stranger” (79) and what he considers to be the black man’s inoculated inferiority complex, a complex whose recurrence he often noticed, as a psychoanalyst, in his patients’ dreams—thus confirming the theory according to which the process of colonization can be acknowledged as a trauma, and the repercussions it has on the psyche of the colonized individual equals a neurosis.

By extrapolation, one could conclude that—from both a psychological and social point of view—the status of the colonized is that of a victim. Thus, there are many instances when the description of the colonized broadens, to include criteria independent of race or ethnicity, usually referring to gender, social status and basically any other aspect which might be assessed in terms of the ‘inferior/superior’ opposition. This reality involves a shift in how the image of the colonized is perceived, adding several new facets to the general definition of such: the colonized is no longer seen strictly as the savage, the irrational being, the potential slave, but just anyone who has in one way or another been oppressed, demeaned, patronized—basically anyone whose beliefs and individuality were willingly ignored by the higher authority, only to be replaced in the end with the ‘enlightened’, the ‘superior’, the ‘beneficial’ alien ones.

It is intriguing how all the seemingly separate issues eventually find a common denominator, merging the somewhat mystically-based, irrational thesis of the white Westerner’s superiority with the highly rational, lucrative and productivity-oriented class principles. Ania Loomba too argues in favor of this transfer and explains it: “The ideology of racial superiority translated easily into class terms. [...] Certain sections of people were thus racially identified as the natural working classes.” (109) A number of highly controversial points of view belonging to certain thinkers, such as those of the 19th century philosopher Ernest Renan, cemented the system of prejudices against all that was considered to be non-European and, essentially, ‘non-white’:

Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity and almost no sense of honor; [...] a race of tillers of the soil, the Negro; treat him with kindness and humanity, and all will be as it should; a race of masters and soldiers, the European race. Reduce this noble race to working in the ergastulum like Negroes and Chinese, and they rebel. [...] But the life at which our workers rebel would make a Chinese or a fellaah happy, as they are not military creatures in the least. Let each one do what he is made for, and all will be well. (Quoted in Caesaire, 1972:16)

This statement is extremely representative of the manner in which those who advocated for racism made their point. The case is by no means that of a hate-discourse—of the kind so popular nowadays when dealing with ‘otherness’—and it has little in common with the policy expected to come from the well-embedded image of the imperialist tyrant. On the contrary, the type of attitude is all the more offensive and frustrating from a politically-correct perspective as it is clearly genuine and sweetly-patronizing. Bluntly said, what a 21st-century assessor would define as particularly repulsive and overtly racist was nothing but a crude reiteration of said rational fact and generous, philanthropic behavior towards those inferior by design.

Hence, the victimization of the colonized is a two-way process: being recurrently described as such by the self-proclaimed ‘superior’ and ‘enlightened’ race, the colonized begins mirroring the belief on the inside, in the end internalizing their own status of inferiority, which quickly turns into frustration and guilt for a reality they have no control over. As the ‘difference’ theme is without exception a delicate one, regardless of the circumstances, the feeling of inferiority grows on one faster than any other delusion, causing a typical case of split identity to occur. At this point, returning to the field of psychoanalysis becomes almost inevitable, since the irony is again great: the colonized is brought on the verge of schizophrenia, which reminds one of the tremendously persistent associations—in literature and beyond—made between the Oriental’s irrational nature and pathological insanity:

Both in novels and in non-fictional narratives, the crossing of boundaries appears as a dangerous business, especially for those who are attracted to or sympathize with the alien space or people. ‘Going native’ is potentially unhinging. The colonized land seduces European men into madness. (Loomba 117)

Various critics suggest that the almost physiological rejection of the colonized that the colonizer repeatedly experiences is in fact a trauma caused by fear, which is itself irrational—however, when the European is subject to it, the rationalization fails to take place and the situation is accepted somewhat de facto. Therefore, what the white man really fears is not the Oriental as an individual in their own right—since this individualization never actually ensues in the case of the one who had previously been acknowledged as ‘inferior’ anyway—, but always a fear of the masses. Undeniably, the image of the ‘Other’ as self has long been assimilated to the more horrific and threatening representation of the crowd, “both swarming Orientals and working-class hordes, and also shaped by sexual guilt.” (Loomba 118) The non-white is at all times devoid of a face, which becomes exclusively the luxury of the colonizer. In their turn, the colonized are stripped of their human attributes which are strongly linked to the concept of individuality, and their sole identity remains that of the horde, of the pack. The image in itself is very strong and a perfect illustration of the distorted vision the European has of all those which constitute Otherness. By being depersonalized, the Oriental is brought significantly closer to the savage nature assigned to them from the very beginning, along the lines of the ‘superiority/inferiority’ paradigm mentioned before:

The individual European faces the alien hordes, and if he identifies too much with them, he transgresses the boundary between ‘self’ and ‘other’ and regresses into primitive behavior, into madness. These associations between European male adulthood, civilization and rationality on the one hand, and non-Europeans, children, primitivism and madness on the other are also present in Freudian and subsequent accounts of the human psyche. (Loomba 118)

In short, otherness is seen as a disease—anyone who comes near the manifestation of irrationality is bound to contract it themselves. Moreover, the colonized are described as figures of primeval impulse, to the extent that they are compared to children or the neurotic European at best. They are linked to the ideas of polytheism and matriarchy, as opposed to the monotheism and patriarchy which are the mark of ‘civilized’ societies—what Freud considered to be the main criteria for assessing the degree of human development. Freud emphasized the theory according to which individual progress at a psychological level is directly connected to that of society on the whole. Hence, Orientals could be labelled as primitive inasmuch as they were childish in their desires and other manifestations of the psyche, and completely ignorant of reason. Actions were seen as the substitute for thought in the case of the colonized, and pleasure remained their only attribute—since reflection and mental processes of any kind were an activity for the ‘advanced’ and ‘mature’.

The ramifications of colonial medical discourse involved various elements, all of which focused on the issue of difference: black versus white, oppositions between ethnic factions, archaic versus recent. The resistance to change—understood as the civilizing process of colonization—was deemed irrational, hence automatically belonging to the area of pathology. Clinging on to one’s customs and cultural heritage instead of adopting the new, ‘enlightened’ way of life was seen as a kind of obstinacy of a vicious nature. Here the colonizer’s fear mentioned before is again brought to attention, as an interesting parallel could be drawn between the tendency to ‘massify’ the Oriental’s distinctiveness and the image of the group of demons—also devoid of an identity—evoked in the New Testament. By definition, whatever is unquantifiable is impossible to understand in logical terms, and along those lines it also becomes frightening. Consequently, the bearers of this abhorring disease—often equated to insanity—whose fundamental symptom is difference, otherness, were forced to accommodate an identity other than their own, which in turn granted them the condition of pariahs in the eyes of the whole world:

Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self. (Fanon 109)

At this point another concept is bound to take the stage, namely Homi Bhabha's interpretation of 'mimicry'. In his book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha resorts to the ideas of Edward Said to better explain the road taken by the colonial discourse as far as the identity shift is concerned. He concludes that the tendency to dominate is a synchronic one, calling for distinctiveness and resistance to change, while historical progress is diachronic in nature, which causes the equilibrium between the two to be disrupted. In this context, Bhabha describes mimicry as an 'ironic' solution to such a clash:

[...] colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. [...] mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. (Bhabha 122)

Undeniably, Bhabha's point of view raises new and even more intricate questions concerning the perception of identity, constituting itself into yet another argument in favor of the thesis which the present paper supports: that according to which the process of colonization is not a single-edged weapon, so to speak, but rather one capable of producing a boomerang effect. Many a time, the attempt to enforce a certain view of themselves on one and the response this triggers may cause the very author of the theory or definition to perceive reality in a distorted way—and so is the case of the colonizer who is stubborn enough to constantly try and implement categorization and mind control. The effect this ongoing endeavor has had all the way through colonial history was intense for both parties, since aiming at 'normalizing' the 'inferior' inevitably reset the patterns of what 'normality' was actually supposed to mean. Discovering that the Other exists, the Self can no longer ignore the subjectivity of its own existence. The presence of the Other cannot possibly be acknowledged solely as an outside manifestation, as an irrelevant appendix, anymore. It suddenly becomes a factual reality, something that the Self is unable to hide from, since the discovery of such rearranges the parameters of its own identity.

This theory could once again be endorsed by making an analogy between the colonial phenomenon and Jung's ideas on the rules which govern the human psyche. Fear—which I have previously offered as the most viable explanation for the colonizer's tendency to 'demonize' the colonized—is yet again the basic principle of the Self/Other tension. Once the Self learns about the existence of the Other, the illusion of individuality is shattered for the former as well, which causes them to develop that same form of schizophrenia which eventually leads to denial. At a more symbolic level, it is as if the Self becomes 'inhabited' by the Other, leading to a displacement of identity.

3. The Oppressor Versus the Oppressed: Mechanisms of a Complex Apparatus

"For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency" (Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 95)

What Bhabha claims is that a full understanding of the mechanisms of colonialism cannot take place by 'normalizing' its rules, subjecting them to an outside judgement, but by trying to analyze its own "regime of truth" (96), the intrinsic laws which set the whole phenomenon in motion. I agree with Bhabha in that 'otherness' is in itself a contradictory, highly paradoxical notion, at the same time standing for adulation and diminution, a coexistence of opposites which is actually quite consistent with the very definition of identity.

However, the thesis according to which colonization is, in terms of perception, an equally invasive process for the colonized as well as the colonizer—is somewhat contradicted by Frantz Fanon in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*: "Ontology [...] does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. [...] The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man." (61)

Another theory which might support Bhabha's standpoint is that which argues in favor of the white man's narcissism—namely the non-existence of the Other in the eyes of the Self. For sure, to accept that the image of the Other is nothing but a construct, a projection generated by the colonizer's own perspective, is to realize that, in keeping with this paradigm, the Other as perceived by the Self is merely an illusion. The white man's vanity, the unquestionable role of the 'enlightened' which

colonizers so often embrace almost as if it were a key element of their physiology, is ultimately the answer to all the ailments of the colonized. Specifically, it is the reason why the latter are never individuals in the proper sense, but always incomplete beings, shadow personalities, images without a soul—in short, mirrors.

This transformation, however, has direct consequences on the colonizer as well. Having assumed the role of ‘savior’ as to the rudimentary, soulless colonized, the Westerner ends up by having their own conception of the self altered, perfectly designed so as to fit the ready-made prototype even the colonizer starts to believe in. The portrait of such as the ideal man, the demigod engaged in a selfless mission of salvation—trying to raise the Oriental from animalism to reason—is so vivid and well outlined that it acquires a life of its own, taking full control up to the point where it penetrates the deepest layers of thought, perhaps even reaching that which Jung calls the “collective unconscious.” As proof of the existence of such an extended and fixed perception, one can resort to Albert Memmi’s introductory paragraph to the first chapter of his work *The Colonizer and the Colonized*—suggestively titled “Does the colonial exist?”—, and written in a somewhat ironical tone:

We sometimes enjoy picturing the colonizer as a tall man, bronzed by the sun, wearing Wellington boots, proudly leaning on a shovel—as he rivets his gaze far away on the horizon of his land. When not engaged in battles against nature, we think of him laboring selflessly for mankind, attending the sick, and spreading culture to the nonliterate. In other words, his pose is one of a noble adventurer, a righteous pioneer. (47)

In view of such a description, perhaps it would not be excessive to say that the colonizer is in a way swallowed, annihilated by the outside perception of themselves. The surface thickens and slowly replaces the core, robbing the colonizer of whatever objectivity and genuine self-awareness they had left—to a certain extent turning one into their own victim, or better said turning every single representative of a category into a victim of group pride.

This is why returning to the question of ‘who affects whom’, in terms of the overall sensitivity to the given situation or simply each other, becomes inevitable. Both the colonizer and the colonized are characters on a stage, and both are treated likewise by history and memory—so far as the marks this whole experience leaves on them, neither remains unaffected. In Memmi’s own words, they are equally “protagonists of the colonial drama” and the entire colonial process is the “relationship that binds them.” (145)

An interesting point of Memmi’s thesis is that colonization is a hypocritical endeavor in itself, only mimicking assimilation but never actually intending to achieve it, since the very power relationship involved by the act of colonization is utterly incompatible with the former. This leads, once again, to a situation—so to speak—reeking of ambivalence, which causes the colonized to accept an existence governed by “painful and constant ambiguity” (15). As, for the most part, the colonized is eliminated from history and forced to assume a whole new identity, the colonizer’s self-elevating version of the truth remains the only reference point for the former. In this manner the colonized becomes, as Memmi puts it, “divorced from reality” (106), completely unable to “assume a role in history” (94), stripped of an authentic perception of the past and therefore alien as to present-day society.

Memmi explains that, along these lines, the colonizer is essentially a usurper, one who denies the colonized the right to any kind of citizenship and, as a result, causes them to lack feelings of national belonging—devoid of any trace of authority and even the remotest sense of identity, the colonized awakens only to find out that the only part left available on account of the alleged master’s policy is that of the eternally inadequate and negligible being, of the soulless slave. When portraying the colonizer, Memmi makes no concessions: “He endeavors to falsify history, he rewrites laws, he would extinguish memories. Anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy.” (52)

However, perhaps the most interesting part of Memmi’s demonstration is the focus on the backfire effect that the brainwashing process in which the colonizer is engaged has on themselves. Surprisingly enough, yet coming as a much prophesized consequence as far as this paper is concerned, the colonial experience leaves its devastating markers on the initiators of the whole process as well, who in their turn collapse under the enormous weight of their actions. Indeed, one cannot but be reminded of that

version of the 'ideal' colonizer quoted before, which Memmi uses to begin his book by. As a reinforcement of that very description, Memmi makes it clear in his landmark work *The Colonizer and the Colonized* that it is

the manner in which the colonialist wants to see himself [that] plays a considerable role in the emergence of his final portrait (55). The excess of his vanity, the too magnificent portrait he paints of himself, betray him more than serve him (58). [...] the colonialist realizes that without the colonized, the colony would no longer have any meaning. This intolerable contradiction fills him with a rage, a loathing, always ready to be loosed on the colonized. (66)

What Memmi actually does is clarify the fact that, by legitimizing his position within the colonial process, the colonizer has the revelation of a horrific truth, namely that his very identity as redeemer and noble master, as well as the unquestionable superiority of his culture, is merely a construct. Hence, by relentlessly trying to elicit an imitational response from the colonized, by constantly searching for mimetic reactions on the part of the 'inferior,' the colonialist ultimately admits to doubting not only his authority, but his own identity—an act which, once again, leads to a neurotic disorder, but whose victim this time, ironically enough, is precisely the oppressor.

What is truly fascinating is that, within the colonial scenario, the law of compensation fails to function. Quite the opposite: the more outrageous and vivid the oppressive episodes against the colonized, the more painfully aware of his repugnant position the colonizer. Because of this mental awakening, the colonizer's hatred of the oppressed—by now acutely acknowledged as the usurped—intensifies. In short, the colonizer can no longer stand the sight of the colonized (namely fight the intrinsic knowledge of the latter's reality), because their mere existence forces the former to exercise the role of usurper, and accept a stained identity which curses one to live with an excruciatingly constant awareness of one's guilt—hence the ambivalence.

The other facet of this ambivalence is the one less obvious and more insidious in terms of its effect on the colonized mind, namely that which Memmi accentuates in the very beginning of his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: the image of the colonizer as enlightened philanthropist and redeemer. And it is along the lines of this traditional view of the colonizer that the colonized are but paper men, shadows whose sole purpose is veneration and, as a direct result, imitation. As writer Kamau Brathwaite so eloquently puts it,

It was one of the tragedies of slavery and of the conditions under which creolization had to take place, that it should have produced this kind of mimicry; should have produced such "mimic-men." But in the circumstances this was the only kind of white imitation that would have been accepted, given the terms in which the slaves were seen. (From Creolization in Jamaica, in The Post-Colonial Studies Reader 153)

To better explain the concept, Homi Bhabha asserts that mimicry is all about repetition rather than representation, and so it is on this act of repetition that all originality is wasted. Thus, that which was normally considered central is condemned to marginalization, and all that remains is not the core but its mere shape, an illusory reality, an artificial shadow. Analyzing colonial discourse, Bhabha concludes that mimicry among the colonized is a direct result of the Janus-faced manner in which these were handled by the colonizers themselves, an act which in its turn materialized in the form of an implosion rather than a consolidation—or, to use Bhabha's own notions, more often than not it results in a "menace" instead of a genuine "resemblance":

In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy. As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage [...] Its threat [...] comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory 'identity effects' in the play of a power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no 'itself'. And that form of resemblance is the most terrifying thing to behold. (The Location of Culture 128-129)

The colonized is thus forced to wear a mask which can never resemble his own face to the extent where it could truly allow him to be socially and culturally accepted and integrated. A prisoner of two

worlds, torn between two individualities of which neither is complete and neither fits so as to pass as real, the colonized mirrors not his master's alleged virtues, but the hideousness of all his insecurities, inadequacies and perpetual—although never fully acknowledged—guilt and remorse. That is why the image of the colonizer, in the way in which it is mirrored by his subjects, is at all times a distorted one, and without exception displaying the markers of ambivalence—never self-sufficient, but always doubled and above all lacking autonomy, which is the key element that stands at the basis of any genuine sense of identity.

References and bibliography

- Ahmad, Eqbal. "Religion in Politics," in *Dawn*: 31 January, 1999.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. [et al.]. 2004. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, CA: Spinster/Aunt Lute.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2005. *The Ethics of Identity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Assman, Jan. 2006. *Religion and Cultural Memory*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 2004. *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Caruth, Cathy. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Clifford, James. 1997. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Durand, Gilbert. 1999. *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*. Trans. Margaret Sankey and Judith Hatten, Brisbane: Boombana Publishing.
- Fanon, Franz. 2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Press; [Berkeley, Calif.]: Distributed by Publishers Group West.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Ed. Lewis A. Coser. Trans. Lewis A. Coser, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Huntington, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?," in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49.
- Hutcheon, Linda, and Mario J. Valdés. 2002. *Rethinking Literary History*, Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Jung, Carl G. 1981. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Loomba, Ania. 1998. *Colonialism-Postcolonialism*, London; New York: Routledge.
- Memmi, Albert. 1965. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les lieux de mémoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.
- Olick, Jeffrey, K. "Introduction: Memory and the Nation: Continuities, Conflicts and Transformation", in *Social Science History*, vol. 2, no. 4, *Special Issue: Memory and the Nation*, Winter 1998, pp. 377-387.
- Said, Edward W. 2003. *Orientalism*, London: Penguin.
- . "The Clash of Ignorance," in *The Nation*, October 4, 2001, the October 22, 2001 issue, <https://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance/>.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988: 271-313.
- Walder, Dennis. 1998. *Postcolonial Literatures in English: History, Language. Theory*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

The author

Monica Got is an assistant lecturer with the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, where she teaches Business Communication in English. In 2014-2015, she was a junior Fulbright scholar to the U.S. with the Chicano/a Studies Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is currently working towards the completion of her doctorate in Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Bucharest, with a dissertation titled "Crossing Borders, Merging Homelands. Traumatic Identities in Contemporary Chicana Fiction." Her experience abroad includes a Master's program in Paris at the Université Paris Est-Créteil and a school year teaching English in Catalonia, with a European Commission-funded project. Ms. Got delivered talks at several international conferences and published various articles on such issues as hybrid identity, cultural trauma, transnationalism, acculturation, border theory, and collective memory.