



# Critical Review of Postcolonial Theory of Homi Bhabha’s Hybridity: A Study of “*The Location of Culture*”

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<p><b>Abstract:</b> Homi K. Bhabha's <i>The Location of Culture</i>, published in 1994, is one of the foundational texts of the branch of literary theory known as postcolonialism. Although postcolonialism has many facets, the central question lies in the interpretation and understanding of the encounters between the Western colonial powers and the nations of the world to which they belong, and colonization is not only an economic, military or political process but also a process that profoundly affects cultures and identities around the world. This is an area in which interpretation takes centre stage, and its strength depends in large part on its ability to address the complex legacy of colonial encounters with careful and constant attention to the significance of the marks they left on colonial cultures. What Bhabha do writings show, like so much other postcolonial thought, is that the art of clarification and definition underpinning good interpretation is rarely the same as simplification. Indeed, making good interpretations often involves pointing out and dividing the different types of complexity going on within a single process or term. For Bhabha, the main object is identity, as embodied in the idea of colonial powers. According to his interpretation, what at first glance appears to be the cohesive set of ideas behind colonialism quickly breaks down into a complex mass of shifting views – creating something much closer to postcolonial thought than it might seem at first glance.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Post-colonial discourse, Homi K. Bhabha, equivalence, scientific text, terminology system.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Review Paper</b></p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b> <i>Abdullahi Dahiru Umar</i> Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Gusau, Zaria Road, Sabon Gida Village, Gusau, Nigeria</p> <p><b>Article History:</b>   <b>Submit:</b> 21.01.2024     <b>Accepted:</b> 23.02.2024     <b>Published:</b> 26.02.2024  </p>
<p><b>How to Cite this Paper:</b> Abdullahi Dahiru Umar &amp; Nuhu Lawan (2024). Critical Review of Postcolonial Theory of Homi Bhabha’s Hybridity: A Study of “<i>The Location of Culture</i>”. <i>Middle East Res J Linguist Lit</i>, 4(1): 15-19.</p>	<p><b>Copyright © 2024 The Author(s):</b> This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution <b>4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)</b> which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p>

## INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial theory which emerged as an academically "Left" substitute for "Area Studies" (primarily sponsored by the US State Department) and "Oriental Studies" (supported by the "Foreign Affairs" ministries of European governments) soon became one of the most "popular" modes of inquiry. Postcolonial theory combined in various measures the theoretical "rigour" of poststructuralism and the "activist" energies of the equally new field of "Cultural Studies." Since the late 1970s, the field has formed its canon (Said's Orientalism, Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Spivak's *The Postcolonial Critic*, Young's *White Mythologies*.) and is now an established discipline on the contemporary interdisciplinary academic scene.

It is in this space that Homi K. Bhabha's first book *The Location of Culture* is itself "located" in terms

of a supposedly "innovative" "move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories". As a result, in line with the "post-history," "post-gender," "post-production," "post-necessity," and "post-exploitation;" in short, "post-al" "spirit of revision and reconstruction" that is currently articulating the condition of social and cultural theory, his various writings are offered as a contribution toward the project of "reforming" the existing via the destabilization of established discursive (representational) boundaries.

The book is a collection of twelve of Bhabha's essays written over the past decade, a selection comprising mostly of Bhabha's old and famous writings on anti-colonial subjective formation. Among these is his analysis of racial "patterns" in light of Freud's cult theory, his theory of "imitation", the treatment of colonists as "a subject of nearly the same difference but

not quite" as a method of shuffling. colonial rights, his reading of several texts on the British colonial government to point out the rift in colonial surveillance strategies, as well as Signs Taken for Wonders, the text introducing the concept" his trademark" of "hybridization" describes the diversification of colonial discourse.

### **Brief Biography of Homi Bhabha**

Born in India in November 1949 but a literary critic and theorist living in the United States, Bhabha is one of the three most prominent postcolonial theorists of modern times, along with Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. A native of Parsee (an Indian minority that originated in Persia in the 8th century), Bhabha was born and raised in Mumbai. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Mumbai and then went to Oxford to complete his PhD in VS. Naipaul. He then taught at the University of Sussex for a decade before moving to the United States, where he held a series of prestigious positions that led to his decision to join Harvard in 2001. Bhabha was far from a career. He is an outstanding author to date, he has published only one monograph (although several more are in preparation), *The Location of Culture* (1994), which brings together several previously published essays. Although the output is relatively meagre, Bhabha's work has had a surprisingly wide impact.

No matter how challenging his writing, his combination of post-structural theory, postmodern sensibilities, and postcolonial themes resonated strongly with critical concerns in the United States current time. Bhabha's basic argument, tested through interrogation of a wide variety of literary and artistic texts, is that culture can no longer (if at all) be formed in monolithic terms, but rather must be thought of in hybrid terms. Culturally, through the movement of people, ideas, capital, and goods created by the forces and processes of globalization, we are never entirely or in the same place. Our sense of self and place is the product of a combination of factors that are never entirely local or 'indigenous'. To take just one example, more than two-thirds of all toys and clothing retailed in the United States today are made in China, yet these toys and clothing are not identifiable by their shape or appearance design. For Bhabha, this hybridization is two-way: this means that power is always limited to the ability to identify and control representatives. Thus, Bhabha criticizes Said's orientalist thesis for portraying the effect of power as unique and immutable, while not taking into account the postmodernist subject's imitability and can therefore transform what is expected of him.

It is difficult to define the profession of H.K. Bhabha. It is cited by historians, philosophers, linguists, and culturologists. It is undeniable that he was a pioneer in the direction of postcolonial research, the author of a large number of neologisms (hybrid, imitation, contradictory, popular, etc.). In his works, H. K. Bhabha

deals with various topics: nationalism, postcolonial literature, the city problem in the age of globalization, writing practice, translation studies, postmodernism, hermeneutics and phenomenology in the exploration of history, culture and philosophy of third-world countries. However, the keyword describing his research activities is still "postcolonialism".

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study, postcolonial theory and intertextual analysis were applied. Postcolonialism has today become a popular and important theory in literary studies. It plays an important role in the growing culturalism in contemporary political, social and historical analysis (Young, 2016, p.7). Culture is the key factor in defining this literary theory as well as the essential point that distinguishes postcolonialism from its ancestors: imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Postcolonialism, as a critical theory, was born in the late 1970s in the United States; then it spread to Europe and became a worldwide cultural trend. Postcolonialism claims the right of all peoples on this earth to enjoy the same material and cultural well-being (Young, 2003, p.2). According to postcolonialists, it was easy to separate politically and economically from the settlers, but it was too difficult to uproot material or intangible control over culture. The application of postcolonialism in the study of literature shows the importance of cultural phenomena to literature.

### **Critical Assessment of *The Location of Culture* by Homi Bhabha**

According to Juniper Ellis, Homi Bhabha's Cultural Position is the most important essay in considering his contribution to contemporary literary theory. A self-proclaimed postcolonial critic often compared to Edward Said or Gayatri Spivak, Bhabha is perhaps best known for the theory of cultural hybridization he developed in *Signs Taken for Warders* and several other essays. Bhabha argues that hybridization is the result of various forms of colonization, resulting in cultural collisions and exchanges. This hybrid trace contradicts both the attempt to fixate on and control indigenous cultures and the illusion of cultural isolation or purity.

Hybridity, one of the most widely used and controversial terms in postcolonial theory, often refers to the creation of new forms of interculturality in the contact zone created by the process of colonization. Colonization when used in horticulture, the term refers to the hybridization of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third "hybrid" species. Hybridization takes many forms: language, culture, politics, race, etc.

### **The Linguistic in *The Location of Culture***

Linguistic examples include the pidgin and creole languages, and these reflect the basic terminology used by linguist and cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who used it to suggest the disruptive and transformative power of linguistic situations and by extension, multi-voiced stories. The idea of polyphony of voices in society is also implied in Bakhtin's idea of carnival, which arose in the Middle Ages when "a boundless world of humorous forms and expressions for the established with the orthodox tone and seriousness of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture.

The term "hybrid" has recently been associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonial/colonial relationships emphasizes their interdependence and construction of subjectivity. Bhabha argues that all cultural utterances and systems are built within a space that he calls the "Third Space of enunciation". Cultural identity is always present in this space of contradiction and ambivalence, which, for Bhabha, makes the hierarchical claim of "purity" of cultures untenable. For him, recognizing this conflicting space of cultural identity can help us move beyond the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of realizing a powerful hybrid in which differences cultural differences can be developed.

The productive capacity of this Third Dimension must be of colonial or postcolonial origin. Having the will to go down to this foreign territory can pave the way for the conceptualization of an international culture based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the memorization and expression of hybridity and complexity of culture (Bhabha, 1994, P. 38).

It is the space "in-between" that carries the cultural weight and meaning, and that is what makes the concept of hybridization so important. Hybridity is often used in postcolonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural "exchange". The use of the term has been widely criticized, as it often implies the denial and neglect of imbalances and inequality in the power relationships to which it refers. By emphasizing the transformative cultural, linguistic and political effects on both colonizers and colonists, this approach is seen as recreating assimilation policies by masking or "bleaching" cultural differences.

The idea of hybridization also underlies other attempts to emphasize the interdependence of cultures during colonization and postcolonialism in expressions of synchronicity, synergy, and transnationalism culture. The criticism of the terminology mentioned above stems from the perception that theories emphasizing reciprocity necessarily minimize antagonism and increase persistent postcolonial interdependence. However, nothing in the idea of such hybridity suggests that reciprocity negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process or that it

implies the idea of equal exchange. However, this is how some advocates of decolonization and anticolonialism interpret its current usage in colonial discourse theory.

It has also been the subject of criticism as part of a general dissatisfaction with colonial discourse theory from critics such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Benita Parry and Aijaz Ahmad. These critiques emphasize the textual and idealistic basis of such an analysis and point to its neglect of particular local differences. The assertion of a common postcolonial condition such as hybridity has been seen as part of a trend of discourse analysis aimed at dehistoricizing and delocalizing cultures from the context of time, space, and location theories and their language, and towards an abstract vision, a globalized conception of the text that obscures the concrete features of concrete cultural situations.

### **Colonialism and Structuralism in Bhabha's *The Location of Culture***

Emphasizing that the study of the discourse structure of colonialism does not seek to replace or exclude other forms such as historical, geographical, economic, military or political, Robert Young suggests that the contribution of colonial discourse analysis, in which concepts such as hybridity are framed, provide a meaningful framework for this further work by emphasizing that all views of realism people have in common and must deal with a common means of discourse which is also the means of colonialism: therefore, the analysis of colonial discourse can view many texts on colonialism as more than mere documents or "evidence" (Children, 1995, P. 163).

Thus, Bhabha's project accepts the challenges of poststructuralism to stable or fixed identities, attempting to "remove" postmodernism from the postcolonial perspective and allow attention to how roles, gender, community and nationality converge. One of his main contributions to theories of cultural production and identity is that he scrutinizes these different points of intersection and avoids just listing them or favouring an analytic aspect of them more than other aspects.

Throughout the book, Bhabha offers a series of nontraditional readings from the Enlightenment to the present day. It is often based on psychoanalytic approaches, with particular attention to Frantz Fanon, focusing on the material of British missionaries and colonial administrators in India, as well as writers such as Salman Rushdie, Nadine Gordimer, Toni Morrison, Joseph Conrad and E.M. Forster.

Although Bhabha's story is sometimes ambiguous, these terms best convey a new framework for describing cultures and their products. Bhabha emphasizes that what he describes as the "middle" of culture, i.e. the spaces that alternate within and between

individuals and cultures, do not maintain a single position but colour in a continuous process.

Bhabha explains the atrocities that were intentionally committed and acknowledged in the colonies as "anti-modern" that go against the traditional arguments of increasing civilization and developing modernity. In particular, "Postcolonial and Postmodern" and "By Breed Alone" confront teleological versions of history with an acknowledgement of colonial involvement and modern complicity.

Bhabha's work suggests that the process of creating the modern and the past is continuous and partial and that political action can be effective in general. The joy of the job as well as its difficulty took advantage of him in refusing to simplify cultures or espouse easy hypotheses.

## DISCUSSION

In "The Commitment to Theory," an essay collected in *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha foregrounds the unfortunate and perhaps false opposition of theory and politics that some critics have framed to question the elitism and Eurocentrism of prevailing postcolonial debates:

There is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged. It is said that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of an imperialist or neo-colonial West.

What's ironic is that Bhabha himself--perhaps more than any other leading postcolonial theorist has throughout his career been susceptible to charges of elitism, Eurocentrism, bourgeois academic privilege, and indebtedness to the principles of European poststructuralism that many of his harshest critics portray as his unknowing replication of "neo-imperial" or "neo-colonial" modes of discursive dominance over the colonized Third World. Using a complicated repertoire of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Postmodern notions of mimicry and performance, and Derridian deconstruction, Bhabha has encouraged a rigorous rethinking of nationalism, representation, and resistance that above all stresses the "ambivalence" or "hybridity" that characterizes the site of colonial contestation--a "liminal" space in which cultural differences articulate and, as Bhabha argues, actually produce imagined "constructions" of cultural and national identity.

Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) is primarily an intervention in the "nature" understanding of nationality in an attempt to identify and naturalize Third World "nations" through traditions assumed to be identical, innate, and historically continuous to define and ensure the fallacy of their dependent status. In other words, nations are "narrative" constructs arising from the

"mixed" interaction of opposing cultural elements. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha broadens his interpretation of the category of 'nominal' or 'intermediate' occupying a space 'between' competing cultural traditions, historical periods and methods. critique. Again using the complex criteria of semiotics and psychoanalysis, Bhabha examines the "contradiction of colonial domination" and suggests that it creates resistance to the "imitation" performance of the "English book". Discussing artists such as Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer, Bhabha searches for the 'place of culture' in marginal, 'obsessive', and 'hostile' spaces between dominant social forms.

In Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), a vast and archaic mode of discourse took on fundamentally moving and fixed positions about an imaginary centre in Europe. The "East" becomes an object that the European subject can know just as he cannot know himself. This argument effectively established a new field in textual and cultural studies, postcolonial theory.

Said's work was critiqued and supplemented by Homi Bhabha in a series of influential essays, most of which were collected in *The Location of Culture* (1994). This volume offers an important and necessary warning against Said's book: It has always been suggested that colonial power and discourse are entirely in the possession of the colonists. Bhabha proposes that the attempt at westernization must always fail because the colonial subject is built on a series of conflicting positions; they make it a place of both fixity and illusion (Difference 204) in a process that can only be unequal, divisive, and incomplete. Bhabha discusses several mechanisms that threatened colonial rule, including cultism, deception, and paranoia. By showing that the subject of colonialism is always reactive, never simply in situ, he relies on certain arguments of psychoanalytic content. However, Bhabha went beyond this first reaction to Said to develop his theoretical view based on the concept of "hybridization" and heavily on the ideas of Jacques Derrida.

According to Andrew (2011), he sees Homi Bhabha as the one, who gathers thinkers together, takes their fragments and tries to put them together, but he does very poorly. His typical binder is a Lacanian booby (damn, spellchecking accepted that) (but not "Lacanian"), so I'm probably not the best translator. He has unreadable boundaries, but then he has moments of absolute clarity and charm when he sings along to Salman Rushdie or Roland Barthes, and you realize he has a lot of talent. Toni Morrison and Edwards Said are great spokespeople for him. It speaks to the positivity of a nominal, frontier and post-colonial life, but without the appeal or spirit of Gilles Deleuze Frantz Fanon or Bell Hooks.

Scott Smith (2011), considers *The Cultural Position of Homis Bhabha* a book that is certainly



important. Bhabha is part of the "Trinity" of postcolonial theorists, along with Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. He's known to be quite difficult to read (he's a huge Lacan fan) but once you get used to his style and general mindset, he becomes more approachable. Spivak is even harder to reach than Bhabha. However, his main thesis concerns the position of the colonized subject, somewhere between the stereotypes of barbarism and naivety that the colonists imposed on him. To him, the ability to imitate, like much of psychoanalytic theory, was important. He also bases much of his argument on the writings of Franz Fanon, although Bhabha is much less pessimistic about the potential of a marginalized audience than Fanon ever was. I like that and I think Bhabha is a pretty smart guy...

Philip (2014) has something to add, It's hard to deny that Homi Bhabha changed the entire discourse surrounding postcolonial studies, but he's also one of those figures like Foucault, Judith Butler, Marx, or Freud--whose central ideas have become so important and so widely discussed that they are now almost taken as a baseline for discussion in literary and cultural criticism. For my money, Bhabha's two best essays in this collection are "Of Mimicry and Man" and "Signs Taken for Wonders," which develop his theories of cultural hybridity and liminality. What Bhabha argues is that colonial contacts fundamentally restructure/recompose the cultures of both the empirical power and the colonized area through a process of cultural hybridity. This may take the form of a blending of cultures through repetitions, altered contexts, or borrowed behaviours (an idea especially developed in "Of Mimicry and Man"), or through the articulation of cultural values that never needed to be articulated as such before (like the role of the English book, in "Signs Taken for Wonders"). The encounter with an alternative culture is fundamentally transformative, not only in introducing new cultural practices, artefacts, and ideas but also in altering one's relationship to his or her own culture by showing it in all its strangeness.

Chon M. (2012) considers it an excellent book about the future challenges faced by the birth of postcolonialism and postmodernism. His observations of the third dimension• certainly struck him as a multicultural and multiracial individual. It treats human development as always media and restricts binary categorization as past and present or one culture or the other. His argument, which completes the "rhizomes" of Deleuze and Guattari, is convincing. A good book but not a quick read.

Bhabha's philosophy is deeply rooted in the concept of hybridization, which refers to the mixing and fusion of different cultural, social and historical influences. It also explores the politics of cultural

differences and the complexity of presentation in a post-colonial world. He argued that the colonial encounter and its aftermath created a complexity of power relationships, patterns, and hierarchies.

## CONCLUSION

Bhabha's philosophy has been criticized from various angles. Some argue that his theories can be abstract and difficult to access, making it difficult to translate them into concrete political action. Others question the potential of hybridization to romanticize or ignore power imbalances. Bhabha has provided scholars and activists with the tools to challenge dominant narratives, disrupt oppressive power structures, and promote an inclusive and pluralistic understanding of cultures and identities.

Despite the criticisms faced by Bhabha's theory, his contributions to postcolonial theory and cultural studies continue to shape scholarly discourse and inform conversations. stories of identity, power, and representation. His theory provides valuable insight into the complexity of cultural dynamics and the potential for transformative change in a postcolonial world. In Bhabha's Place of Culture it is necessary to consider the fact that, to a greater or lesser extent, one must maintain an academic presentation, i.e. material accuracy, and objectivity and exclude personal involvement in writing style. The desire to attract readers is not the main goal of the author, not to simplify and adjust the writing style.

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