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The Concept of Acculturation in Edward Said's Writings and its Application to Elizabethan Drama

A Ph.D. Thesis in English Literature

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Chapter One

The Concept of Acculturation in Edward Said's Writings

The term “acculturation” originated in early anthropological writings of the last decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was first used by John Wesley Powell in 1880. Powell states:

The great boon to the savage tribes of this country has been the presence of civilization which under the laws of acculturation has irresistibly improved their culture by substituting new and civilized for old and savage arts, new for old customs – in short, transforming savage into civilized life.... The force of acculturation under the overwhelming presence of millions has wrought great changes. (qtd. in Winthrop 3; qtd. in Herskovits 3)

The historical context within which anthropology evolved as a discipline was reflected on “acculturation” as a concept and a field of study. According to the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, the first substantial contributions to anthropology were made by the Greeks who “developed a model of ethnographic description as the local setting for historical narrative”, but the major significant development occurred in the fifteenth and sixteenth century; the period of Renaissance Humanism and Geographical explorations (Greenberg 1:308).

As Peter Brooker indicates, Humanism placed the human at the centre of the world and considered the individual mind as the determinate source of meaning and action; therefore, man’s earthly career was of interest for its own sake and not merely as a preparation for an eternal hereafter (20). Humanistic philosophy, therefore, gave rise to the study of man, known afterwards as anthropology.

According to The New Encyclopedia Britannica, geographical voyages of the late fifteenth century opened a sea route around southern Africa (1488) and reached the New World (1492) (Colonialism 3:464). This, in turn, widened the geographical scope of the study of man. The populations of the newly discovered continents were objects of study. As indicated in the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, researches were done on

whether these populations descended from Adam and whether they represented the state of human ancestors before the rise of literate civilization (Greenberg1:309). The scope of these researches indicates the wide civilizational gap that existed between the European explorers and the native inhabitants of the newly discovered lands.

Discovering new lands rich in natural resources where the natives' state of civilization was too low to make use of these resources brought about “ the European missions of conquest” (Colonialism 3:464). These “missions of conquest” continued from the fifteenth to the mid twentieth century and developed to form what is known as “colonialism”. The word colonialism, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, comes from the ‘colonia’ which means ‘farm’ or ‘settlement’, and refers to “Romans who settled in other lands but still retained their citizenship” (Loomba 1). The New Encyclopedia Britannica defines colonialism as "the exercise of political and economic sovereignty by a country on a country or a territory outside its own borders. Colonies have often been established by military conquest followed by an occupation and settlement that places the colonized peoples in a subservient position” (Colonialism 3:464). In the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, features of the colonial situation are:

domination of an alien minority, asserting cultural and racial superiority over a materially inferior native majority; contact between a machine- oriented civilization with Christian origins, a powerful economy, and a rapid rhythm of life and a non-Christian civilization that lacks machines and marked by a backward economy and a slow rhythm of life, and the imposition of the first civilization upon the second (Emerson 1:1).

As K .S. Singh explains, colonial administrators needed anthropological studies to collect information about the colonized people in order to guarantee efficient control over them (1225). Thus, anthropology and

colonialism are originally related. They both belong to contexts where a civilizational gap between two societies exists. A society of a low state of civilization is dominated by a civilizational superior society which makes the former an object of study to guarantee more domination and superiority.

According to International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, anthropology in its modern form as a distinct discipline is a product of the nineteenth century (Greenberg 1:308). The scientific success of Darwinism and archeology gave anthropology a great impetus. In On the Origin of Species (1859), Darwin set the theory of biological evolution of man from lower species and from Darwin's theory stemmed the theory of cultural evolutionism set by E. B. Taylor in Primitive Culture (1871) – the first anthropological publication (Greenberg 1:310). According to Taylor, "the phenomena of culture may be classified and arranged, stage by stage, in a probable order of evolution" (1:6). Taylor states, "various grades of civilization may be regarded as stages of development or evolution, each the outcome of previous history, and about to do its proper part in shaping the history of the future" (1:1).

Archeological discoveries of the time also added plausibility to the concept of gradual cultural advance. In 1819, the description of the basic archeological ages of stone and metal, given by Christian Jurgensen Thomsen, contributed to present a picture of "man firmly anchored among other animal species of the past and gradually developed from a cultureless anthropoid" (Greenberg 1:309).

Anthropology then began to exist as a distinct discipline. In order to distinguish itself from other social sciences and from human biology, anthropology mainly focused on "the description and explanation of physical and socio-cultural similarities and differences among human ethnic groups" (Greenberg 1: 305). With the aim of grasping the full range of human diversity, "primitive or preliterate societies were given greater focus

(Greenberg 1: 305). For those societies, a total cultural isolation from civilized literate world was assumed and this isolation was supposed to "guarantee the maximum divergence" from the socio-cultural patterns familiar to Western peoples (Greenberg 1:305). In Primitive Culture E. B. Taylor put "the civilization of the lower tribes as related to the civilization of the higher nations" as a focal point in anthropological studies with the comparative method as the basic method of research (1:1). Thus, anthropology then considered Western culture the norm against which non-Western cultures should be evaluated.

This ambiance which prevailed in anthropological studies had its bearings on the first use of "acculturation". Powell's statements clearly correspond to the relationship between the savage and the civilized, which E. B. Taylor considers the basic anthropological interest and ,hence, assume a great civilizational gap between the two acculturating societies. Powell supposes that the acculturative process should be a one way process where the civilized society acts as a donor and the savage as a receptor. Using the terms "irresistibility" and "force" to describe the process of acculturation, Powell conveys that the acculturated savage society is not allowed to reject acculturation. It is supposed to be a mere object of an inevitably one way process where it can do nothing but gratefully absorb the elements of the foreign culture and withdraw the corresponding elements of its original culture. However, Powell's focus on denying the possibility of resistance implicitly indicates that resistance to the imposed culture can/does exist, but the dominant culture attempts to marginalize it.

After fifteen years from his first use of the term "acculturation, Powell reconfirmed the savage/civilized notion in his explanation of the role of acculturation in the Indian colonial setting:

Progress was made to the extent that the Indians came in contact with the civilized man and learned his ways and industries, but it was acculturation not education, by

which the advance was secured. The triumphs of civilization, the power of prosperity, the wonders of industrial art, all made a deep impression on the Indian and from them he learned much (qtd. in Herskovits 3).

According to the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, in the interwar years, liberal and nationalist attacks on colonialism grew and after the World War II, “the flood tide of anti-colonialism swept away the colonial system with speed and thoroughness” (Emerson1:3). With colonial powers losing their colonies and with colonized peoples becoming independent, the overall pattern of global political, economic, and cultural relationships among peoples changed. This change strongly influenced anthropology. An important shift in anthropological interest began in the third decade of the twentieth century; attention turned to the “internal organization of each culture” in order to discover its “peculiar genius” (Greenberg 1: 305). Industrialized societies were no longer away from being objects of anthropological researches (Greenberg 1:307).

This shift had its bearings on the concept of acculturation. The savage/civilized tone of comparison provoked by Powell did not appear in dictionary meanings and anthropological definitions of the term. In 1928 Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary defined acculturation as “the approximation of one human race or tribe to another in culture or arts by contact” (qtd. in Herskovits 2). In New English Dictionary (1933) acculturation was defined as “the adoption or assimilation of an alien culture” (qtd. in Herskovits 3). In the revised edition of 1934, Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary defined it as “the approximation of one social group of people to another in culture or arts by contact; the transfer of cultural elements from one social group of people to another (qtd. in Herskovits 2). In 1936 New Standard dictionary defined it as “the imparting of culture by one people to another” (qtd. in Herskovits 2).

Instead of Powell's savage/civilized tone, interwar anthropological definitions referred to acculturation as a reciprocal process. In 1933 Alexander Lesser defined it as "the process by which aspects or elements of two cultures mingle or merge.....In acculturation the cultural groups involved are in an essentially reciprocal relationship. Both give and take" (qtd. in Herskovits 6). In 1936 the Social Sciences Research Council defined it as comprehending: "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (qtd. in Herskovits 10). The positive notion of reciprocity pervaded postwar anthropological definitions of the term. In 1948 A. L. Kroeber defined acculturation as "comprising those changes produced in a culture by the influence of another culture which result in an increased similarity of the two. The influence may be reciprocal or overwhelmingly one way" (425). In 1954 the Social Sciences Research Council formulated a concise definition of acculturation as "culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems" (qtd in Padilla 9). In 1974 R. H. C. Teske and B. H. Nelson indicated that acculturation is "potentially bidirectional and reciprocal in terms of influence" (Sam 12).

Thus, these definitions of acculturation, unlike the original sense, associate the term with a culturally positive connotation as two or more peer cultures can mutually benefit from their contact. But this does not mean that the term or the process of acculturation becomes totally free of the negative notion of using force by one of the acculturative societies over the other. The negative connotation of the original sense has persisted.

In Edward Said's concept of acculturation, the negative connotation of the original sense of the term can be grasped. In Culture and Imperialism, Said uses the adjective "acculturated" to describe Joseph Conrad as "never fully acculturated Englishman" because he is a polish immigrant and

,therefore, he preserves "a distance" from the British imperial project (25). Said views that Conrad is not totally absorbed in the British culture and his native culture could survive to an extent . Here the sense of domination and force of the British culture and the sense of Conrad's resistance to keep his native culture alive are involved.

A full scope of Said's concept of acculturation appears in his major books Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism and his article "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors", although acculturation is not his main concern in the three works. His main concern is culture and how it works to shape the relationship between the East and West. Said uses culture to mean two things. First, " it means all the practices, like the art of description, communication, and representation that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, political realms and often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principle aims is pleasure", and second, " it is the concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best has been known and thought" (Culture & Imperialism xii,xiii).

However, neither of Said's senses of culture can be used as a working definition in studying the concept of acculturation. Both the evolution and the development of the term "acculturation" denote that it is a comprehensive process where a great change in nearly all aspects of life occurs as a result of firsthand contact. Using "culture" in a restricted sense such as Said's does not grasp all changes that acculturation causes and confines acculturation to changes that belong to the realm of art. Moreover, this restriction excludes masses from being involved in processes of acculturation. The culturally privileged elites are supposed to be exclusively responsible for cultural change of the whole society; they are supposed to be influenced by the process of acculturation and then they deliver these influences to the masses through their works of art and literature.

The "relative autonomy from the economic, social, political realms" which Said assumes makes his definition inconsistent with his own arguments. Separating artistic and literary products from their socio-political ambiance contradicts what Said proposes in Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism. In both works, Said presents aspects and models of the inevitable reciprocal interrelationships between artistic forms and their socio-political environment. In Orientalism Said confirms, "No one has devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position or from a mere activity from being a member of a society. These continue to bear on what he does professionally" (10). In his introduction to Culture and Imperialism, he argues that humanists fail to trace the interconnections between literature and everyday life which he intends to trace through the book. He states:

Now the trouble with this idea of culture is that it entails not only venerating one's own culture but also thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world. Most professional humanists as a result are unable to make the connection between the prolonged and sordid cruelty of practices such as slavery, colonialist and racial oppression, and imperial subjection on the one hand, and the poetry, fiction, and philosophy of the society that engages in these practices on the other.(xiii,xiv)

In order to study the concept of acculturation, a complex cultural phenomenon, a more comprehensive definition than Said's should be adopted as a working definition. E.B. Taylor's definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society" can do the job (1:1).

In Orientalism, first published in 1978, Said is concerned with the kinds and forms of cultural relationships that have existed and still do between the West and East. Said defines Orientalism in three interdependent senses. The first is an academic one: "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or searches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism" (2). The second one is more general. Said states that Orientalism is:

A style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and "the Occident". Thus, a very large mass of writers among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, mind, destiny, and so on.(2- 3)

The second sense indicates the rationale upon which Orientalism as an academic specialization has been based i.e., the distinction between the West and East. The third sense is also based on the same rationale, but it refers to the historical point when institutionalized Orientalism began and to the political implications of Orientalism. Said argues that

the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point of Orientalism as a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views on it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short 'Orientalism' is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over 'the Orient'. (3)

After defining Orientalism, Said states, "Orientalism is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and ,therefore, always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity 'the Orient' is in

question” (3). He comes to the conclusion that Orientalism is the framework within which the relationship between the West and East has existed and still do. He elaborates, "Orientalism is a mode of discourse supported by institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles... I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of 'a discourse' [...] to identify Orientalism" (2-3). According to Foucault, a discourse is “the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of the legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories” (qtd. in Kennedy 21). Applying Foucault's notion of discourse to Orientalism, Said assumes that Orientalism has established a set of rules that directs the academic study of the East and any other type of intellectual activity concerned with the East. He confirms, "So authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism" (3). Even those whose writings about the Orient were based on actual visits and observations, were – according to Said – directed by what they had read about the Orient (92).

The discourse of Orientalism, as Said indicates in the second definition, is based on the East-West distinction. As he argues, this distinction does not exist by nature; it is totally a man-made historical cultural distinction (5). He calls this distinction “imaginative geography” as he adopts Giovanni Vico's observation that "men make their history, then what they know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities such as locales, regions, and geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made" (5). Said argues that the Western reinforcement of this distinction is a device of reinforcing Western self-awareness through juxtaposition of distinct contrastive entities; the Orient for the West is "one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. ... The Orient has helped

to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (2). He explains how this contrast works within the discourse of Orientalism: "On the one hand there are Westerners and on the other hand there are Orientals; the former are rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, and the latter are none of these things...Orientalism is a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans against all those non-Europeans"(49).

Said maintains that the Self /Other relationship assumed by the Occident/Orient distinction involves what Antonio Gramsci identifies as hegemony: "a form of cultural leadership" where "certain cultural forms predominate over others" (7). Said proposes that this hegemonic discourse is adopted by the West to control the Orient; both physically and culturally. He states:

[The discourse of Orientalism] exists in an even exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with the reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do or understand as we do. (12)

According to Said, the power practiced on the Orient depends on the West's knowledge of the Orient which he describes as "a whole web of related scientific interests" (22). He quotes Cromer's words in Edinburgh Review in 1908 in order to highlight the pivotal role of knowledge in the hegemonic discourse of Orientalism: "Knowledge of Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power and more power requires more knowledge and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (36).