Cultural Hybridity and Modern Binaries: Overcoming the Opposition Between Identity and Otherness?

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Introduction

German sociologist Ulrich Beck argues that we have entered "late modernity", or in other words, "reflexive modernity". It is not the aim of the paper to discuss Beck's considerations but to set a general context for the following reflection. In his dramatic account of risk society, Beck argues what reflexive, radicalised modernity puts to the foreground: a paradigmatic change in which "we" have no other choice than to reflect on and even think beyond dualisms. It is a paradigmatic change as these dualisms or binaries are "modern mental habits" (Beck 1992, 2007). One particular habit of thought of the "modern imaginary", is the binary opposition between the *Self* and the *Other*. Beck argues that "we" (the *Self*) can no longer imagine "ourselves" in such a binary opposition: the *Other* is among "us", and even more, "we" are the *Other*. (Beck 2007) This relates of course to what can be described as the postcolonial condition of the contemporary world – a condition that is not new, but which is, or so it seems, more and more experienced in everyday life. (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:238) There are many academic approaches which study and express this condition. We can mention one of the most common metaphors for describing what is considered its main attributes, changeability and uncertainty. The metaphor is "fluidity" or "liquidity". "Fluid identities" or "boundaries", "liquid modernity" or even "liquid life" are but a few of the metaphorical expressions extensively used in the past decade. (See e.g. Bauman 2000, 2005, 2006; Longhurst 2001)

It is from this very general setting that I wish to address the debate on cultural hybridity. Hybridity, as it is understood in postcolonial theory, is perceived as having the potential to go beyond the sort of modern binaries from which, as Beck suggests, contemporary social imaginaries have to find a way out. According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse, hybridity is precisely that: "Hybridity is to culture what deconstruction is to discourse: transcending binary categories." (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:238).Yet, as it is pointed out in many works discussing cultural hybridity, the term and the vast array of concepts it encapsulates has raised already long-running discussions and debates.

The term refers notably to discourses and ideologies of racism. Robert C. Young traces the origins of the term back to the early seventeenth century. Derived from Latin, it was seldom found until the nineteenth century but in biological or botanical descriptions. "Its first recorded use in the nineteenth century to denote the crossing of people of different races is given in the OED as 1861." But Young points out that it had also been previously used in the context of race mixture (and especially in relation to human fertility). He also relates the definition found in the OED to other previously used terms, like "mixed" or "intermediate races". The significant point in Young's account of the increasing use of the terms "hybrid" and "hybridity" (and their eventual inscription) in the nineteenth century, is that it "marks the rise of the belief that there could be such a thing as a human hybrid." (Young 1995:6) The belief, in other words, that there are objective different human races (or "species").

Another significant point is hinted with the idea of fertility in the context of nineteenth century racial hybridity. It is a narrative that runs throughout the colonial experience and maybe

even beyond. It was believed that the “hybridisation” of different human races would eventually cause the downfall of the different “pure” species. A downfall caused by supposed sexual lust and infinite fecundity of hybrids or to the contrary by their perceived biological inferiority, which made them barren. (Brun 2007) One particular aspect that emerges from this very brief overview of the colonialist ideas around hybridity, is how the mixing of races was considered in a negative way. The negative aspect of human mixing can be found throughout human history, and it is best defined through the perception of its transgressive potential. (Brun 2007)

It is also this transgressive, revolutionary aspect that runs through the opposing narrative on hybridity (biological, racial, cultural or simply as a process). Terms like *bricolage* (or simply *colage*), *métissage*, *creolisation* and indeed *hybridity* used in cultural studies (and related fields) do not necessarily have the negative take on the concept(s). To the contrary, it is in fact the particularity of the hybrid space to be able to transgress, or better, to transcend, to *go beyond*. The hybrid position is no longer seen by some as a “badge of failure or denigration, but as a part of the contestational weave of cultures.” (Mudrooroo 1990:24)

One of the major contemporary theorists recently associated with cultural hybridity is Homi Bhabha. In most of his works, Bhabha considers the interrelations and interdependence between the colonisers and the colonised. Through the colonial experience, the social categories exerted on the colonised (the ideas of superior and inferior human races and cultures for instance) imprints an imaginary, which collides with their own, “displacing” or “disjuncting” it. This “encounter” eventually creates new “hybrid” expressions (of culture, of belonging), which in turn challenge the beliefs and experience of the colonisers. Bhabha argues that these colonial – and postcolonial – cultural systems and statements are constructed in a “liminal space”: the “Third Space of Enunciation” (Bhabha 1995:209). The aim of his argument is the deconstruction the colonisers' (and more generally Western and modern) essentialist claims of an inherent purity of culture.

Although ground breaking, Bhabha's theory is not without contradictions and has regularly been the subject of criticism. A particularly strong criticism is expressed in the work of anthropologist Jonathan Friedman. One of the main points of Friedman's critique is the elitist approach of, among others, Bhabha's work. He eventually defines postcolonial theory of hybridity as the ideology of a new elite: a “postmodern” cosmopolitanism. (1997:75) In this paper, I would like to address the question whether “cultural hybridity” can indeed transcend modern binaries and whether is not something more (or else) than simply a theoretical construction for the self-identification of the postmodern elite Friedman points a finger at.

The paper will overview Bhabha's definition of cultural hybridity and Friedman's critique. In spite of what will appear to be rather simplistic arguments, some elements of Friedman's critique can bring up elements for a further reflection. The paper will then explore some tropes that this episode in the debate over “cultural hybridity” leads to. As Friedman sets his critique of hybridity in opposition to what he considers “true” cosmopolitanism to be, we will show how his understanding can be considered as flawed and how hybridity can in turn be considered as being less but meaning more than cosmopolitanism. The paper does not have the pretension to provide a comprehensive study of hybridity theories or of the debates around it, and as such is only the starting point of a wider reflection on contemporary social modes of exclusion and inclusion.

1. Varieties of *Hybridity* and the *Discourse of Critique*

As much as hybridity theory aims for the deconstruction of essentialist categories, it has been criticised on grounds that it can only make sense “on the assumption of purity” (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:221; see also Young 1995). Nederveen Pieterse who has more extensively analysed the debate over hybridity, distinguishes two different varieties. One of those, “new hybridity”, is a process that can be observed (Mandarin pop, e.g.). The other variety, “existing or old hybridity”, is a discourse and a perspective, which creates a “hybridity consciousness”. Additionally, they connect in the experience of the “new” phenomona (“new hybridity”) and through the self-conscious perspective

taken on performing and experiencing the processes ("exisiting or old hybridity").

> "Hybridization as a process is old as history, but the pace of mixing accelerates and its scope widens in the wake of major structural changes, such as new technologies that enable new phases of intercultural contact. [...] If practices of mixing are as old as the hills, the *thematization* mixing as a discourse and perspective is fairly new." (ibid. 222)

This twofold project, of describing hybrid narratives and "thematising" the experience and the self-conscious perspective, is at the core of Bhabha's works on cultural hybridity. In his theorisation, it precisely refers to "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation." (Ashcroft et al. 2003:118) These new forms, Bhabha argues, come together as a counter-discourse to the discursive dominance of the hegemonic structures and institutions of colonisation. The main narratives it opposes are what Bhabha considers to be essentialist national narratives of culture and belonging. The significance of these counter-narratives is their "negotiation" of space where hegemonic discourses homogenise culture and society. This negotiation as a constant endeavour "that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation." (Bhabha 1994:2)

The coerciveness of hegemonic narratives can nevertheless be overcome. The "Third Place of Enunciation" in which cultural hybridity comes into constant formation is a place of movement, of "fluidity", which opposes the traditional fixity of national narratives. Referring to artist Renee Green's metaphor of the art gallery as a stairwell Bhabha develops the metaphor for describing the cultural negotiation which takes place in this space of "différance"[1]:

> " The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. " (1994:5)

Cultural hybrid expressions ,which have emerged from colonisation, are marginal cultural narratives. The space they need to be expressed cannot be imagined in the binary categories traditionally associated with essentialist discourses:

> " [...] the very idea of a pure, 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood." (1994:7)

At the same time, Bhabha sees the discourse of these narratives (as well as his) as *the* discourse of critique that can break down these essentialist barriers and make sense of the historical complexity (opposed to the *historicity* of the hegemonic narratives of the nation). As such, he proposes a further, political perspective for hybridity to take on:

> "The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics." (Bhabha 1994: 37)

From this very brief overview of Bhabha's contribution to the postcolonial theory of hybridity, two dilemmas already emerge. The first is related to the already mentioned problematic "assumptions of purity". The ambivalence of Bhabha's account on the inclusive and exclusive

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[1]For Derrida, "différance" is how "concepts are inscribed in a chain or a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of difference". In Jacques Derrida (1982) (trans. Alan Bass), Margins of Philosophy, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p.11 (see also pp.3-27).

properties of hybridity is confusing. On the one hand, liminal space is supposed to prevent "identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities", suggesting that the polarities are in fact the boundaries of liminal space (and not spaces themselves), and as such, are included within the former. On the other hand, it is an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications", between fixed "imaginaries", which supposes (just like the concept of "Third Space") that they are indeed spaces. This lack of clarity, although not necessarily contradictory, needs to be clarified. We shall focus on it further below.

The second dilemma, which is one of the point of criticism mentioned before, concerns the sources Bhabha uses to describe and conceptualise narrative processes of cultural hybridisation. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), he draws on a very large array of literary, artistic and theoretical texts. The interweaving of all these texts create a complex and hermetic whole which can indeed give the impression to voice an elite condition (albeit marginal) rather than the commonality and daily experiences of displacement. The lack of clarity, as mentioned above, helps to produce this impression. But Bhabha describe his endeavour in different terms, and reverses the argument:

> "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." (1994:19)

It is sometimes seen as ironic coming from one of the leading postcolonial theorists that has throughout his career been subject to charges of elitism and the like (Graves 1998). Friedman is no exception to the rule. We shall take the charge of elitism as the starting point of his critique.

2. Essentialist Hybridity and Essentialist Critique

Jonathan Friedman seems to hold a deeply rooted grudge against postcolonial theory of cultural hybridity as well as towards its theorists. In relation to Bhabha's approach, we shall review Friedman's (1997) main arguments. As Nederveen Pieterse's analysis shows, Friedman's arguments against hybridity can be considered "[...] as representative of a wider view." (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:224)

Contrary to Bauman's metaphor of "liquidity", Friedman gives a dramatic and alarming account of the world literally falling into pieces, moving away from the neat modernist classifications. Asserting that "the general fragmentation process of the world system" is under way, he considers the concurrent "theorisation of creolisation, métissage, mestisaje, and hybridity" (Gilroy 1993:2, quoted in Friedman 1997:75) to be:

> "[...] the intellectual cosmopolitan reaction to that process, one that contains a highly ambivalent posture with regard to to the ethnification process itself and the desire for something broader, more global, truly cosmopolitan and above it all. This is the hyphenated reality of the postmodern cosmopolitan, a reality that is defined not by the modern, the abstract, but by the plurality of knowledges, of cultures and of their continuous fusion." (Friedman 1997:75)

If the theorisation of hybridity is the "self-identification" of postmodern cosmopolitans, Friedman argues that "it has little to do with everyday problems of identity in the streets, even as it is part of the same world." (1997:74) This is the recurrent elitist argument against theorists like Bhabha or Paul Gilroy. Friedman rhetorically asks:

> "[...] For whom, one might ask, is such cultural transmigration a reality? In the works of the post-colonial border-crossers, it is always the poet, the artist, the intellectual, who sustains this displacement and objectifies it in the printed word. But who reads the poetry [...]?"(1997:79)

One would like to ask whether Friedman does not have a narrow view on the question. But, we shall not linger discussing it more here (for a more thorough analysis see Nederveen Pieterse 2001). What explains it is his own ideological perspective, the criticism of which has been left out from previous reviews of the debate. Through elements than run throughout his critique, Friedman

also presents himself as a proponent of cosmopolitanism, but not of the same "age", or of the same "sort". It is significant in the sense it establishes a framework from which Friedman expresses the more "direct" criticisms.

The new condition of the world, the one Bauman describes as "liquid", is defined in Friedman's "neomedievalism" assertions as a sort of chaotic dark age (which "is one of the accounts for current political conditions", Nederveen Pieterse 2001:238) In this light, Friedman considers that the "model" for postmodern cosmopolitanism "is not the macro-nation but the medieval Church, the great encompasser. Ecumenical pluralism is the complementary counterpart of fragmented ethnic identities." (Friedman 1997:75)

What transpires here is an opposition between modernity, or the modernist project Friedman associates with it, and what he describes as the postmodern condition of the world ("ethnification") and postmodern cosmopolitanism. Friedman suggests that this condition has taken the world over, "forsaking modernity" (1997:72). This "abandonment of the ideal of a strong social project and assimilation to that project" for the sake of multiculturalism, "is the expression of a broad shift in the 'identity space' of declining Western modernity." It is in these dark ages that a new cosmopolitanism is thriving. Friedman considers the cosmopolitan project that dominates this new age to be very different from the one that used to dominated in the modern world. It is a "[c]osmopolitanism without modernism" and yet "not without modernity as such, but without the rationalist, abstract and developmentalist project of modernism." (1997:76) By describing what is lacking, Friedman gives a gist of what the "old" cosmopolitanism was. Indeed:

> "The cosmopolitan of old was a modernist who identified above and beyond ethnicity and particular cultures. He was a progressive intellectual, a believer in rationality who understood cultural specificities as expressions of universal attributes. The new cosmopolitans are ecumenical collectors of culture. They represent nothing more than a gathering of differences, often in their own self-identifications." (1997:83)

The harsh criticism of the last sentence may divert attention from what the remainder of the quote suggests: Friedman appears to take the position of a nostalgic herald of the cosmopolitanism "of old". By taking side with a suggested idealist modernist approach, his critique appears to formulate a struggle for hegemony against "hybridization [which] is a political and normative discourse." (1999:242) The binary opposition constructed by Friedman is in fact representative of the essentialist categories opposed by postcolonial theory. This provoking set of mind is also contained in the title of one of his articles: "Global Crisis, the Struggle for Cultural Identity and Intellectual Porkbarelling: Cosmopolitans versus Locals, Ethnics and Nationals in an Era of De-hegemonisation" (1997).

The following point of his critique lies in what he calls a simple "descriptive statement" (1997:82), namely that hybridity bases its possibility of identification on essentialist notions of identity and culture. In turn, it is hybridity theory that is considered essentialist. Commenting on what he calls the "programme Bhabha envisaged", he considers it establishes:

> "[...] a world in which the homogenising tendency of all identification are eliminated not via modernist anti-cultural identity, but by a postmodernist total fusion of all cultures into a new heterogeneous homogeneity of the 'third space', which, if it is a space, must have boundaries of its own, and thus be based on oppositions to its own others. [...] It is precisely in the metaphor of border-crossing that the notion of homogeneous identity is carried and reinforced, since it is a prerequisite of such transgression." (1997:79)

In relation to the lack of clarity and ambiguities found in Bhabha, and regardless of the elitist argument, it is hard not to give credit to Friedman's criticism. It shows how the possible interpreting of liminal space as exclusive of essentialist notions (like those of homogeneous identities), can be considered to consequently reinforce their perceived fixity. A fixity opposed to the movement, to the "différance" contained in the liminal space.

And yet, “différance” hints to a different interpretation. Friedman is again right to point a finger at the fact that “all cultures have always been the product of import and a mix of elements” adding with a sense of superiority that this “was a commonplace for early cultural anthropology”. As a consequence, post-colonial theorists suffer from “a confusion of perspectives” (1997:80). But this is a point where Friedman's argument is flawed. Reversely, his suggestive defence of modernist cosmopolitanism shows that his take on the work of post-colonial theorists, including Bhabha's, is also based a misconception. It is in terms of representations and imaginaries that liminal space and hybridity *as well as* essentialist, homogeneous notions of culture and identity can make sense. In consequence, his criticism of “postmodern cosmopolitanism” as an elite discourse may well be justified. But his own discourse, albeit self-identified to be “above and beyond ethnicity” is also, as we will see, hegemonic and particularistic.

3. From One Cosmopolitanism to Another

The brief summary in the first part of this paper of Bhabha's theory of hybridity suggested how its interpretation is not necessarily clear. The lack of clarity in theorising the complexity and the “varieties” of hybridity is particularly evident the lack of coherence between the various aspects of the theory. This opens space for simplified interpretations on which a certain type of criticism can thrive. As it is reviewed in the second part, Friedman bases his critique on such interpretation. His aim appears in fact to be the deconstruction of the theory. He points at what he sees to be the limitations of the theory, its essentialist foundations, and that hybridisation is an anthropoligical evidence. This somehow closes the scholarly discussion. He concludes though that the theory is in fact a political endeavour representative of the postmodern condition of the world: the discourse of a new cosmopolitan elite looking for an overarching identity. In other words, looking to establish its discursive hegemony.

Notwithstanding Bhabha's ambiguities, the political project (the “hybrid perspective”) is indeed clearly stated. Similarly, other theorists do in fact argue in favour of what is pervieved as a political resistance of cultural representations or a “radical imaginary” hybridity can produce. So it seems that Friedman is right, and that there is a self-conscious element of the theorisation of hybridity. But one could argue that this, as well as hybridisation, is self-evident. Discursive formations are precisely about knowledge and power (although again, Friedman seems to discard the Foucauldian approach, 1997:72).

More precisely, the reason why pointing at the political aspect is a criticism in Friedman's eyes lies in the position he takes. His rather idealistic and naïve belief in the modernist cosmopolitan project, shows that despite his acute critical look on hybridity, his is not self-critical. He equates his position to a wider anthropological approach, taking Claude Lévi-Strauss as the main reference for the “critique of the chimera of a new multicultural world” (1997:81).

But had he taken Lévi-Strauss' word for granted, he would maybe have formulated a more critical standpoint. He uncritically shows how Lévi-Strauss' support for a possible “larger co-operation” of “the world's cultures” has shifted towards the impossibility to transcend “ethnocentrism”:

> “[...] racism is not the same as ethnocentrism, and [...] the latter is an inescapable tendency that has little to do with learning to think correctly. No intellectual process can eliminate this phenomenon, simply because it has nothing to do with falsity of fallacy.” (1997:77)

This leads to the conclusion that “strong cultural identities are the source of cultural creativity, and that there is nothing wrong with this as long as it does not lead to racism.” Still referring to Lévi-Strauss, Friedman writes: “[h]e goes even further, suggesting that if cultures exchanged all their elements with one another on a continuous basis, there would no longer be any differences, and thus no mutual attraction.” (ibid.)

The exclusion of relations of power and dominance in the abstract cultural exchanges he

mentions show the oversimplification of his perspective. This is a crucial point as the political endeavour of postcolonialist theory can precisely be summed up in the deconstruction of power relations that have lead to hybridisation – and often not the least of them: the coloniser/colonised relation. This in short means that they are historical relations and that their localised context can hardly produce a systematic theory, even though certain patterns can reappear in different contexts. This why Bhabha for instance highlights a necessary interrelation between theory and practice (1994:19).

But it might be here useful to turn to critical theories not generally associated with postcolonialism. In relation to ethnocentrism and racism, Friedman (through Lévi-Strauss) claims that they are not the same. Friedman dismisses their complex correlation maybe too quickly. Although ethnocentrism is indeed not racism as such, it can in fact lead to it. Philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis offers a more profound understanding of the relationship between racism and other forms of particularism and exclusion. In his article "Reflections on Racism" (1990), Castoriadis theorises racism as the "most acute tip" of exclusionary phenomena (40). Here these phenomena can be summarised as those that reject the *Other*, more or less violently, more or less figuratively. He further suggests how the tendency of rejecting the *Other*, like ethnocentrism, is perceived as "natural" given the constitution of identity throuh binary oppositions. But Castoriadis is also concerned with social representations, with imaginary formations and their institutionalisation. He thus draws a very subtle but significant distinction. He argues that the perceived "natural" tendency is in fact the "extreme probability" for social institutions and imaginaries to take (41), but that a different formation, a "radical imaginary" is possible, although historically highly improbable. Of course, this consideration does not close the discussion, it only shows the continuum and complexity of social modes of exclusion.

Focusing then back on Friedman, we have seen how he suggests a rationale for modernist cosmopolitanism:

> "The cosmopolitan of old was a modernist who identified above and beyond ethnicity and particular cultures. He was a progressive intellectual, a believer in rationality who understood cultural specificities as expressions of universal attributes." (1997:83)

It is representative of the type of Western ethnocentrist discourses that carries essentialist notions. It also raises the issue of loyalty as it is to be found in the political or "ethical cosmopolitanism" defended by Jürgen Habermas to move beyond particularistic solidarities (1998). Apart from the nostalgic note on the "faith" in rationality, the corollary attribute of the modern cosmopolitan is the knowledge about "universal attributes", or more simply, his universal identity.

It is again here useful to turn to another scholar, sociologist Craig Calhoun, who has produced a critical work on belonging and "modern" cosmopolitanism. Calhoun shows how cosmopolitanism renders "culture an object of external consumption rather than internal meaning", which relates to Friedman's and Habermas's "abstract" loyalty. And he concludes:

> "No one lives outside particularistic solidarities. Some cosmopolitan theorists may believe they do, but this is an illusion made possible by positions of relative privilege and the dominant place of some cultural orientations in the world at large. The illusion is not a simple mistake, but a misrecognition tied to what Pierre Bourdieu called the "illusio" of all social games, the commitment to their structure that shapes the engagement of every player and makes possible effective play. In other words, cosmopolitans do not simply fail to see the cultural particularity and social supports of their cosmopolitanism, but cannot fully and accurately recognize these without introducing a tension between themselves and their social world. And here I would include myself and probably all of us. Whether we theorize cosmopolitanism or not, we are embedded in social fields and practical projects in which we have little choice but to make use of some of the notions basic to cosmopolitanism and thereby reproduce it." (2007:25-26)

4. From “Third Space” to “Second Nation”

One could wonder what we are left with. If on one hand hybridity theories are simply elite discursive formations of a certain sort of cosmopolitanism fighting over a hegemony with other cosmopolitanisms, and on the other, none of them is able to transcend essentialist categories, are we left with bitter cynicism?

However, Calhoun does not refrain from formulating a political perspective in continuum to his critique:

> “Cosmopolitanism by itself may not be enough; a soft cosmopolitanism that doesn’t challenge capitalism or Western hegemony may be an ideological diversion; but some form of cosmopolitanism is needed.” (2002)

He suggests that:

> “ [...] we should want to transform it, not least because as usually constructed, especially in its most individualistic forms, it systematically inhibits attention to the range of solidarities on which people depend, and to the special role of such solidarities in the struggles of the less privileged and those displaced or challenged by capitalist globalization.” (2007:26)

Postcolonial theory and related studies appear as one domain where the idea to provide a space for the expression and the formulation of marginal stories of solidarities is fundamental. But as Friedman critique of Bhabha's show, and in the same vein of Calhoun's insight, it has to carefully reflected and studied.

A certain number of studies show how what may be interpreted as new imaginings, as the promotion of hybrid identities, can in turn become exclusionary practices. In the case of such a narrative reaching the comfort of discursive hegemony, however new it is, it appears to falls back into the traditional set piece of the *Self* and the *Other*. Viranjini Munasinghe shows for instance in his case study on Indo-Trinidadians in Trinidad, how the Trinidadian national narrative celebrates hybridity and impurity, and as such seems to form a counter-narrative to Western national discourse. However “[l]ike all nationalist narratives [...] it remains a narrative that excludes, in this case those people who were thought to embody purity because they never mixed in the first place.” (2002:685)

Like Friedman's “postmodern cosmopolitanism”, this suggests that hybridity as a theme, formally and consciously addressed, can become an essentialist category in itself. Social imaginaries are maybe necessarily exclusive at some point. But it becomes rather contradictory and even tragic when this exclusion is justified on grounds of an essential hybridity.

I would like to further the second interpretation of hybridity as an inclusive process rather than as an type of identities or cultures. Calhoun suggests that we should not dismiss the value of particularisms. It is, like Bhabha suggests, on the margins of the nation that hybrid perspectives can promote inclusive imaginary significations (1990:291-319). As we also read in *The Location of Culture*, it is “in moments of historical transformation” that “cultural hybridities [...] emerge” (994:2). In other words, it is *during* critical *moments* of struggles for recognition, and not necessarily for hegemony, that new imaginings of can emerge. On the same thread, recognition can mean inclusion, but of course, does not necessarily mean their institutionalisation. These issues would demand a wider reflection on the establishing of structural and institutional social and political formations which goes beyond the scope of the present paper.

In light the *situational* aspect and its importance in the emergence of hybridity, it would be useful to look a bit closer at such a situation not so far from “us”. In 2005, France saw a wave of so-called “suburban riots” during which, teenagers living in housing estates took the streets. Images of French cities burning and falling into chaos were thoroughly aired throughout media networks. Politicians and alike also took advantage of the situation, and risk-driven and nationalist discourses were easily justified. What interests me here though are not the “crisis of the banlieues”, but the period that followed it.

The spectacle and experience of the crisis fostered an already latent uneasiness towards French new minorities and immigrants (particulary as representative of the peoples who inhabit the housing estates). In 2007, the "failure of the French integration system" was part of president Nicolas Sarkozy's nationalist rhetoric during his campaign. On the other hand, a certain number of press articles, radio shows, television documentaries, and books on the "banlieues" and their "infamous" inhabitants have emerged (Horobin 2007).

But this crisis has also produced a mobilisation to counter this dominant narrative. Many rap or hip hop artists for instance who have for the past two decades been the heralds of the inhabitants of the "banlieues", have recently reaffirmed this status. I would like to mention just one, Kery James, whose latest video clip, "Banlieusards" (the term derives from "banlieues" and refers to its inhabitants) was extensively screened on French television networks and the internet earlier this year. At least since 1996, he is regarded as a spokesman for the "banlieues" along with other members of his rap formation of the 1990's *Ideal J*. They became famous with their first album *Original MC's sur une mission* with notably a song entitled "Ghetto français" ("French Ghetto"). They obviously refer to the "banlieues" (although born in Guadeloupe, James was raised in a housing estate in the south-east of Paris, in Orly).

In the video clip of "Banlieusards", we can see a picture frame being passed on from James to many famous and professionally successful people who come from the "banlieues". The frame is passed on throughout the video clip, taking snapshots of each of the participants. Under each frame appears a caption with the name and profession of the person in the frame. In the end of the clip, we can see all the participants singing the final verse with James.

The lyrics do not focus on cultural or ethnic themes (there is a brief mention about the varied skin colour of the "banlieusards" and about colonisation). But the main theme that runs throughout the song is about the marginal social and economic situation of the peoples of the "banlieues". The people, "we", are opposed here to the state, "them" - and not to the mainstream community: "[...]nous dans les ghettos, eux à L'ENA/ Nous derrière les barreaux, eux au sénat/ Ils défendent leurs intérêts, éludent nos problèmes"[2]. Here James does not address "them", but the "banlieusards". In a nutshell, his message holds in the rhetorical question: "Mais [...] qu'a-t-on fait pour nous même ?"[3] The motto "on n'est pas condamné à l'échec"[4] is repeated throughout the song and also appears on the T-shirt James wears in the video clip.

What is important is that the theme of ethnicity and cultural particularism is turned upside down. James explicitly expresses the idea of an inclusive French society:

> " Le 2, ce sera pour ceux qui rêvent d'une France unifiée/ Parce qu'à ce jour y'a deux France, qui peut le nier ?Et moi je serai de la 2eme France, celle de l'insécurité/ Des terroristes potentiels, des assistes/C'est c'qu'ils attendent de nous, mais j'ai d'autres projets qu'ils retiennent ça." [5]

Leaving aside the rest of the lyrics which would demand a much more extensive analysis, I would like to extract some of the significations from the elements already presented. James, who would certainly fit the "elitist" box in Friedman's critique, makes a very significant distinction between the *people* and the *state*, arguing for a unity of the people *without* the state, without a revolutionary project of hegemonic institutionalisation. This sort of *shift* in the significations from the master narrative of the nation-state and nationalism (e.g. "one people, one state"), is exactly

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[2]The ENA stands for the National School of Administration, famously the one institution of higher education in which the majority of French politicians are educated. "We, in the ghettos, they, in the ENA/ We, behind bars, they, in the Senate/ They defend their interests, elude our problems."

[3]"But what have we done for ourselves?"

[4]"We are not doomed to failure"

[5]"The 2 will be for those who dream of a unified France/ Because today there are two France(s), who can deny it?/ And I will be of the second France, that of insecurity/ Of potential terrorists, of social security/ This is what they expect from us, but I have other projects, let them hold to that."

what one would expect to find in the expression that emerges from a critical moment. Thematically though, there is no hybrid theme. What we find for instance are themes related to pluralism (the images form the video clip also bring this out) and to a lesser degree of a working class consciousness. It not a call for anarchy, but a message driven by a very Marxist assumption that the ruling class wants them to play a certain role (the scapegoats?) and is driven by its own interest.

What is interesting in terms of hybrid imaginary representations, is that the process is inclusive of what would traditionally (or in the dominant discourse) be considered the *Self* and the *Other*. Both, the "banlieusards" and the rest of French society are part of the project of unity James expresses.

Conclusion: Rap and *Différance*

The potential for hip-hop movements to "transcend the divisions that are ever more openly fostered by the French state" was already identified in 1997 by Steve Canon (1997:163, quoted in Horobin 2007). The interweaving of cultural, political and social significations that can be emerge from these productions present what should remain at the centre of hybridity theory: the transcending of exclusionary imaginaries. All other elements in a study are historically and geographically localised. It should then be clarified that it is about providing a space for marginal historis (for analysis and expression) rather than leaving it for a deification of "new" forms – even though they might as well be new.

Hybridity is an theoretical tool that is helpful in describing and analysing marginal phenomena, non-hegemonic productions of meaning, not necessarily in terms of identity or culture, but in terms of social and singular imaginary significations. As such, they are indeed rarely unrelated to political significations, and it is not wrong to oppose these to fixed, traditional expressions of culture and identity. What Friedman points out in a simplistic and biased way, is the importance of class relations in the context of cultural expressions and significations. This may lack in Bhabha's account, inasmuch as one does not consider national and traditional hegemonic cultures related to one particular class.

If we take Friedman anthropological statement for granted, namely that all cultures are the result of a process of hybridisation, logically, the spaces of the "one" and of the "other" are the original "third space of enunciation" for those that identify with one. This raises of course problems about the historical development of cultures. It suggests that cultures mix, and eventually reach a certain maturity which finally equals a form of purity, the third space becomes the first one. Similarly, when an identified "hybrid" culture is reified and institutionalised (fixed), however novel it may appear, it eventually becomes a represented closed space of enunciation. It consequently loses its radical power. This is why, as Bhabha writes it in *the Location of Culture*, it is significant to stress the historical "locality" and not the linear historicity of these phenomena. The historicity can bring validation to expressions perceived as long-running historically (perceived tradition, meaning legitimation) whereas "new" forms will be discarded as simply invented, momentary creations of marginal, up-rooted, unstable or ill-identified people.

Hybridity is then not only a question of race, of métissage, but also of gender, class and maybe above all of imaginary significations that are constantly subjected to "différance". Bhabha is maybe wrong in defining the "place of hybridity" as something "new". Theorising hybridity as " neither the one nor the other" is maybe theoretically very attractive, a revolutionary *tabula rasa*, but it does not have the performative potential he claims it has (1994:37).

For "différance" to be performed, I would rather suggest a localised and yet unlimited potential of inclusion. If spaces close, the struggle becomes indeed a struggle for hegemony and not for recognition. Binary categories can not be transcended if they are discarded. Literally, Calhoun says we should seek to "transform" them as none is above particularistic and hence essentialist modes of thinking. "Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed" goes Greek philosopher Anaxagoras' famous sentence. However, in the world of human relations and

expressions, some things get certainly lost. But if "différance" is the mode through which social meanings change, then indeed, no signification is created out of nothing, and all can and will be somehow transformed.

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