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A Rock and A Hard Place

Is it possible to define yourself in one word? In both early post-colonial literature and in newspapers today, we see quick, one word definitions used to portray anyone unlike us, whether it's by race, ethnicity, gender, or nation. "Othering" occurs often and is a type of limiting categorization that hinders opportunities to connect with each other. It also limits our understanding of how cultures collide and create overlap to the point where boundaries cease to exist and categories are imaginary. What happens to the people who do not fit neatly into categories? How do we interpret our own identities? Authors Paul Scott and Gloria Anzaldua explore what it means to be caught in a limbo between race, nation, and culture by presenting people who face hardships because of their hybridity.

Post-colonial literature showcases the "othering" that occurs as a consequence of the erasure of cultures and the establishment of standards created by imperialism. In order to understand perspectives other than our own, we must blur the lines between "us" and "them" and examine ourselves in an alternative frame of reference.

One character who complicates the distinctions between the colonizers and the colonized is Hari Kumar. In Paul Scott's novel *The Jewel in The Crown,* Hari Kumar is caught between two nations. He is the perfect Englishman in an Indian man's body. He grows up in England, knows perfect English, and falls in love with a white woman. Kumar has internal conflicts because he represents a hybrid of two nations, England and India. Although Kumar is superior to many of

the white men in education level and charm, he is treated by the British as an outsider, non-recognizable, and is judged first and foremost by his skin color.

Not only is Kumar rejected by the English, but he is also resented by Indians. Kumar looks down upon India, as if he were a colonizer. He believes in the notion that "[Englishness] is a magical combination of knowledge, manner, and race" (Scott 226). His tendency to distance himself from his Indian culture is created by his desire to mimic the qualities he believes are superior, and suppress those he believes are inferior. Kumar's internalized oppression can be described by Frantz Fanon's statement that, "the colonialist bourgeoisie has deeply implanted in the minds of the colonized intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal… the essential qualities of the West. A native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas, and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Greco-Latin pedestal" (Fanon 46). Although Kumar was not born an Englishman, he believes that the Western agenda is superior as he was taught so at Chillingborough and grew up in England surrounded by a culture vastly different from his family's. It is only when Kumar's best friend from England Colin Lindsey passes by him in India without recognizing him all, that he realizes that he has become invisible to the British people in India.

One character in *The Jewel in The Crown* who despises Kumar for complicating the boundaries of "us" vs "them" is Ronald Merrick. Merrick becomes obsessed with Kumar, and his anger grows as Kumar becomes infatuated with Daphne. The more that Merrick sees the ways Kumar acts like an Englishman, the more he becomes obsessed with him: "Merrick was a man unable to love. He was only able to punish. It was Kumar who Merrick wanted, not Miss Manners" (Scott 160). When Merrick brings Kumar in for questioning about an earlier case, he is surprised that Kumar speaks back to him in perfect English. When Kumar is able to clear things

up by calling the judge and deputy commissioner, Merrick gets angry. He does not know how to process Kumar's dual identity. Kumar's "display of hybridity – [his] peculiar "replication" – terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery" (Bhabha 176). Merrick feels threatened by Kumar because he believes that the goal of the colonizer's civilizing mission is to create a "recognizable Other" (Bhabha).

In his essay "Of Mimicry and Man," Homi Bhabha states, "the success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 127). As a colonizer, Merrick is personally threatened by Kumar because he goes beyond mimicry and almost succeeds in becoming an Englishman, and would be one if not for his skin color. Merrick's hatred for Kumar stems from his opposition of racial and class mixing. He believes that people of Indian origin like Kumar are not supposed to become like the English, but instead are supposed to fail when trying in order to uphold and reassure the superiority and ego of the colonizer. Kumar is outcast and punished because of the hatred Merrick feels towards his hybridity. Kumar says nothing when he is imprisoned and suffers for it. Perhaps he does so as a way to punish himself for being Indian and for believing anyone would see him as anything else.

The supremacism presented by Merrick's character is not new, and today it is not gone. There are still people who make the news for committing hate crimes, being white supremacists, being openly anti-semitic, etc. and the world suffers for it. For Kumar, he was destined to fail because he was surrounded by closed-minded people like Merrick who believe in purity and reject hybridity. Scott's novel invites us to consider the variations and differences within characters like Hari Kumar who blur the lines between colonizer and colonized. Kumar believes he is the colonizer, but upon returning to India realizes he fits into neither group and is rejected

by both. Kumar represents people who are a hybrid of race and nations. One author who can speak on the subject of hybridity and authenticity in a newer light is Gloria Anzaldua.

Anzaldua changes the way we see hybridity. As a Chicana woman who lives on and has experienced life at the U.S. Southwest / Mexican border, she reverses discourse on the "impurity" of hybridity. Anzaldua argues that her dual consciousness, though not without its struggles, is a position of strength and desirability:

> This mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross pollination, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making – a new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands (Anzaldua 99).

She defines mestiza as a place to house those rejected by their cultures for being "impure" or "acceptable," where they can know that they are not alone in their struggles. She creates a space, although painfully situated in the "middle of a 1,950 mile-long open wound," where people living in borderlands can belong (13).

One of Anzaldua's struggles that she mentions in her book are her intersectionalities of being a Chicano, queer woman. As we similarly observed with Kumar's difficulty fitting in with both the Indians and the English in Scott's novel, Anzaldua also feels stuck in a limbo space as her cultures collide. "Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. Thus people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes (Anzaldua 55). Both Anzaldua and her book are hybrids in terms of a number of identities. She denies readers the comfort of any "purity" by writing about the hardships she has faced in accepting her identity. In doing so, this book becomes eye-opening

to the struggles of people who do not fit neatly into one culture or the other, those "caught between worlds".

Anzaldua reframes her perspective and presents a mindset of people who are lost between cultures, nations, worlds, and she defines the borderlands as a place we have all been to: "The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (Anzaldua 8). She is careful to include intersectionality, something all of us can relate to. Instead of gatekeeping a community and "othering" those who do not feel the same way, she extends her hand and invites readers to see how they relate to her path. Anzaldua knows what it feels like to not belong in one culture or the other. She bares her vulnerability on her sleeve in her novel and invites readers to see themselves and how their intersectionalities pertain to the injustices small or large, that she faces as a mestiza.

> This shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld (the realm of the soul). As we plunge vertically, the break, with its accompanying new seeing, makes us pay attention to the soul, and we are thus carried into awareness—an experiencing of soul (Self) (Anzaldua 58).

The new perspective that Anzaldua asks readers to look at is an important step in correcting racist and xenophobic behaviors. Anzaldua takes readers out of their prejudice and showcases the similarities they have with people in other cultures, races, genders, and nations. Anzaldua's book is not free of bias as she does get angry at both of her cultures, but through her removal from both cultures, she gains the power to see them and judge them from an outside perspective.

Anzaldua does not let herself become invisible. Instead, she creates a comfortable space in her writing where Mestiza people do not have to translate and unravel themselves for the comfort of others. She makes readers uncomfortable because it is important to be uncomfortable sometimes. To see one's self through new perspectives is difficult but necessary. Anzaldua uses poetry and symbolism to sort through her conflictions and ultimately reclaim her unique hybrid culture, femininity, sexuality, and overall identity. Accepting the fact that one culture is not superior, one race is not superior, one nation is not superior, allows you to see yourself and your identity from a different perspective.

To understand the harmful effects of using terms like "purity" and "authenticity" in relation to race and nationality, we must first understand what a nation is. In his study, Benedict Anderson proposes that there is no scientific definition of a nation, and it is instead an "imagined political community" (6). He states that all nations are imagined as "limited, sovereign, communities" (7). Anderson suggests that nationalism is nothing more than a made up relationship with people we have never before met, and people we do not share the same ideals and morals with. Instead, a nation is a projection of our own ideologies onto a group of people we will never fully understand. We trust others of our own nationality, protect our neighbors, even go to war for people who live in our imagined communities. "An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-odd fellow Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity" (26). It is through these imagined communities that we tend to distance ourselves from people unlike the ideals we decide to represent ourselves by.

People tend to define nations by their stereotypes, never questioning how different people are within the borders of a country. In Scott's India there are bridges that separate distinct class

boundaries, crowded city streets with people who are overlooked every day, and civil wars being discussed (Anderson 284). Anzaldua argues that terms like “legitimacy” are made to harm hybridity and diversity, and disputes the validity of these ideas by stating: “the only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power (Anzaldua 14). In the question of who belongs in one place, the answer depends on who holds the most power. Anzaldua mentions that a portion of the United States was Mexico once, yet Mexican-Americans living in Texas and New Mexico are treated as foreigners. If we can not clearly define a nation, how can we define purity? Different cultures, border lines, races, and nations begin to bleed into each other to the point where a person’s identity is not just one “pure” classification. We are represented as a mix, and can not be defined as one culture.

One way we can approach a greater understanding of cultures without relying on the “authenticity” of an author to portray it, is by choosing to read from authors like Scott who hide themselves in their characters. Scott allows ideas to just be without passing judgment. *The Jewel in The Crown* is written without a narrator so as to not add bias from the author and from the author’s hidden points of view that may be controversial. An alternative to no narrator and opinion is a mindset open to possibilities outside of one’s own ideas. By starting a conversation about looking within, at the problems created in our own cultures and nations, we can begin a healing process.

Terms like “authentic”, “nation”, and “others” have been distorted to serve as a means to lessen people whose perspectives are outside of our own.“The more one is able to leave one’s cultural home, the more easily one is able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision” (Said 259). There there is much

more to accomplish in order to combat complex issues like xenophobia and racism, but we can start small.

In order to examine our relationship with our own nation we must step back and see ourselves from a different perspective. When it comes to authenticity, and "who can speak," we cannot say that only one type of person can speak. In this case, a lot of people are discouraged from joining the conversation. Instead, we need to be open to hear from many diverse groups of people, and willing to have a conversation. People can teach each other how to respect their cultures while upholding their own. "The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war" (Anzaldua 111).

By examining the impacts that hybridity had on characters like Kumar and individuals like Anzaldua, we can begin to understand how our own individuality is shaped by those around us, and why this can be problematic. Kumar is English in all ways except skin color. Regardless, he is stuck between two identities, between a rock and a hard place. Anzaldua experiences a similar kind of loneliness, but she makes the most of it. She invites us to understand her by refusing to translate for anyone, and she welcomes us all in her representation of intersectionality. The community that Anzaldua provides for all of us hybrids of nation, race, consciousness, and individuality is one that is created for good. Whether communities are created or imagined, they can be important aspects in our lives, but should not be used to justify

violence. We can imagine community, but not limit ourselves into believing some people belong and some people do not.

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