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## BEWARE OF GREEKS, BEARING GIFTS<sup>1</sup>: LINGUISTIC AND RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AS MODES OF COLONIALISM

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### Abstract

Language is considered as a person's identity, both national and individual, thereby making him/her a part of a whole. Being parts of a whole, everybody feels himself/herself as an ontological entity within a specific community. This, on the basis, makes him/her feel a sense of self-respect and value, which are the principal attributions – though not the only ones – that make people feel as real individuals. Religion, on the other hand, is another sacred area, which should be closed to any debate in terms of its universality or reliability, for such a discussion will probably turn out to be nothing but a verbiage due to diversities in belief systems and religions. In parallel with language, religion, too, is a sign of existence for a person. Apart from that, language and religion share the biggest portion in shaping a nation's culture, which, for sure, is directly related to one's sense of identity and belonging. Nevertheless, these two crucially important facts have been demolished or distorted through colonization processes by the colonial and imperialist powers, which, in turn, have tarnished the very attributions that add to people's individuality. Moreover, while the language and religion problems help the colonizers unstrengthen the colonized more and more, these issues are also abused by the colonizers in order to alienate and assimilate the colonized. This article, hence, aims to demonstrate the colonizers' attitudes against the colonized people's language and religion, correspondingly against their identity and culture, as well as the results of these modes of colonization.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Orientalism, Linguistic Violence, Religious Violence, Assimilation and Alienation.

### 1. Linguistic Violence

Fanon argues that “to speak is to exist absolutely for the other” (2008: 8), thereby highlighting the idea that one's language is a sign of his/her existence, identity, culture, and traditions. If language is devastated by the colonizer, it is easier to wipe off these vital components of the colonized, too. Therefore, one of the most prominent struggles of the colonizers is circumscribed around language. Because most of the colonized nations' languages are oral but not written, these languages are more convenient to be erased from the cultures of the subject communities, and as Katrak also puts it “[the oral languages] were rendered invisible by a Western print-oriented and hence limited perspective” (2011: 97). By doing so, the colonizers overleap the colonized and make them move farther away from what they originally are. Katrak, therefore, proposes that “the ‘dark continent’ [is] supposedly brought into history, and given a culture and civilization by [the] Europeans” (2006: 27 – 8), which, for sure, is supplied by way of many other things, one of which is language. In order to make it more concrete, Samuel Daniel's poem, *Musophilus*, first published in 1599, might be given as an epitome of the Englishmen's notions related to the superiority of their language over the rest of all the other languages:

*And who – in time – knows whither we may went  
The treasure of our tongue? To what strange shores  
This gain of our best glory shall be sent,  
To enrich unknowing nations with our stores?  
What worlds in the yet unformed Occident,  
May come refin'd with the accents that are ours (1855: 149)?*

Daniel deliberately puts forth that English is a glorious and magnificent language which should be taught to the rest of the world. According to Daniel, thus, “expansion [of the English language] is virtually the goal of the whole enterprise” (Greenblatt, 1990: 17), which, unquestionably, shapes the colonial logic in terms of language. Once considered from the perspective of the powerful, this case might sound logical; nonetheless, once the circumstances of the alienated bodies are taken into consideration, it is possible to claim that the attributions mentioned before, which make them feel as real individuals, are erased in a very crucial and

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<sup>1</sup> An English proverb, pointing out the tricks and dangers of enemies who show friendly manners. The proverb is derived from Virgil's *Aeneid*, written between 29 and 19 BC. Emphasizing the unreliability of their foes, Laocoön, the priest, inculcates the Trojans not to accept the Horse as a gift from the defeated Greek army once he says “Sons of Teucer, whatever this horse is, be careful. / I am afraid of Danaöns [Greeks], not least when they offer donations” (Virgil, trans. 2007: II, 48 – 9, 29). Disregarding the priest, however, the Trojans are caught unawares by the Greek soldiers, hidden in the Horse. The word, Greeks, in the title of this article, however, is not used with racial intentions; it serves only as an English proverb.

unacceptable way. “Colonization impose[s] a severe linguistic violence in disrupting integral links between language and culture. The denigration, at times, erasures of native languages, [have] severe cultural and psychological impacts on people’s self-respect, identities, and values” (Katrak, 2006: 27). What Katrak argues, too, might be exemplified through Greenblatt’s references to Indians on their encounter with Columbus; they are kidnapped by Columbus just because he believes that the Indians do not have a language that is comprehensible (1990: 17). The results of these kidnapping series are of course not surprising, for the identities of the kidnapped Indians are stolen and re-described by the English colonizers. The chronicler Robert Fabian’s observations of the kidnapped Indians is reported to King Henry VII as follows:

*This yeere also were brought vnto the king three men taken in the Newfound Island that before I spake of, in William Purchas time being Maior: These were clothed in beasts skins, and did eate raw flesh, and spake such speach that no man could vnderstand them, and in their demeanour like to brute beastes, whom the King kept a time after. Of the which vpon two yeeres after, I saw two appparelled after the maner of Englishmen in Westminster pallace, which that time I could not discerne from Englishmen, til I was learned what they were, but as for speach, I heard none of them vtter one word (Hakluyt, 1889: 32).*

Being forced to leave their former identities, the Indians are shaped in a suitable way to seem like Englishmen. Their origins will never be remembered, their identities will never be known due to the newly described and adapted manners of Englishness they possess. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that none of the two utter any words of English, which connotes the notion that if they speak English, they will be labelled as ‘the other’ since they cannot speak it as their mother tongue; moreover, if they are heard speaking their own mother tongue, they will be castrated from the rest of the society owing to their lack of competence in speaking the colonizers’ language. In other words, it is critical to underline the fact that the Indians are *seemingly* Englishmen, for the language they speak – or the language they do not speak at all – is one of the most powerful tools, giving them their identities. In addition, returning to what Fanon argues, these people will not exist as Indians for their community; on the contrary, their existence is for the Englishmen now since their interlocutors are the colonizers. Although Columbus and Spivak belong to very different periods in history, the latter proves that the linguistic violence over the colonized people has not changed at all since the former, for the colonizers “consider the third world as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation” (2003: 269). This surely depicts the colonial logic, for the mentioned literary heritages *will be* worthy when they will be translated and curricularized in the English language.

The colonizers’ language is another issue to be discussed since they believe that their language is understandable worldwide and that any incomprehensible language is an evidence of a nation’s barbarity and monstrosity. Hulme, for instance, argues the coming up of the word ‘cannibal’ in his article; the word is defined as “originally one of the forms of the ethnic name *Carib* or *Caribes*, a fierce nation of the West Indies, who are recorded to have been anthropophagi, and from whom the name was subsequently extended as a descriptive term” (2003: 365). It is apparent that the word derives its meaning from Columbus’ experiences in India; however, the fact that the Indians’ language is not understandable does not make them savages or man-eaters. Here comes up the ideology of the colonizer; trusting the power they have, they attribute meanings to weaker people and make the whole world believe in the definition they have created. This, as a result, makes the colonized people feel more and more suppressed, leaving them no chance other than letting the colonizers’ processes of re-shaping the colonized according to the intended ideologies. All these ideological endeavours are strengthened vis-à-vis various binary oppositions. Abdul JanMohamed names this process as the Manichean allegory and defines it as follows:

*The dominant model of power – and interest – relations in all colonial societies is the manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native. This axis in turn provides the central feature of the colonialist literary representation: the manichean allegory – a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object (1985: 63).*

Creating and applying these sorts of binary oppositions, furthermore, is directly related to the holder of power, for whoever has the power at hand is capable of creating, re-creating, defining, re-defining, formulating, and re-formulating knowledge in parallel with the ideological necessities. Therefore, “[s]uch oppositions [...] are crucial not only for creating images of the outsider but equally essential for constructing the insider, the (usually white European male) ‘self’” (Loomba, 2001: 104). Considering the establishments and impositions of various binary oppositions, thus, a clear look at the definition, which is derived from Columbus’ observations of and experiences with the Indians, proves that it is nothing but a big deception,

for the observer or the agent of the sentence is not vivid enough to be grasped. Therefore, the definition's being in passive voice without a clear observer demonstrates how blindly the colonizers are focused on justifying their intention of colonization, which is bringing modern life and civilization to these so-called barbarous people. However, as Oliver Senior demonstrates it in her realistic poem, *Colonial Girls' School*, "the language of Shakespeare / Told us nothing about ourselves / there was nothing about us at all" (2000: 168). What Senior underlines is the fact that the language of Shakespeare, actually any language other than Senior's own, lacks every tiny unit of her own culture and identity. By being exposed to the curriculum and the language in the colonial girls' school, they are loaded a new culture, a new identity and a sense of alienation to both their own cultures and to the newly acquired one. On the one hand, the students at the colonial girls' school have rather difficult moments while trying to understand what Shakespeare and his people mean; on the other hand, what is written by the outsider does not manipulate even a slight amount of relevance to these girls' own culture, people, social life, or history. Therefore, apparently, "[c]olonial power has consolidated with the chalk and blackboard, more crucial ideological tools than military might" (Katrak, 2001: 92), thereby giving new identities to all those who are exposed to the colonizers' language.

Civilizing the quasi-bestial creatures, therefore, turns out to be nothing but a very big plan of assimilation and alienation, which is a very old principle of colonization, dating back to the Renaissance period, for during the Renaissance period the people are taught that "eloquence [is] strong enough [...] to gather scattered humanity into one place, or to lead it out of its brutish existence in the wilderness up to our present condition of civilization as men and as citizens" (Cicero, 2008: 93). Some African languages, for instance, are highly inclusive of onomatopoeic utterances, which, not surprisingly, let people communicate pretty well without any confusion; however, this, as a requirement of the Renaissance colonial logic, is something out of eloquence and these utterances are more likely to belong to what animals produce. This is also why Columbus aims to kidnap the Indians; they use a language but it is not understandable, so, according to him, there is nothing wrong in kidnapping these people, forcing them to abandon their native land and making them learn a totally foreign language for the sake of the colonial logic. What makes it ironic, however, is the fact that when the Africans, for instance, are happy, they yell like '*pururu*'. Yet, what they produce makes them savages and barbarous in the eyes of the Europeans; nevertheless, when the Europeans are happy, they yell like '*hurray*' and this does not make them uncivilized or uncultivated; on the contrary, because they can say '*hurray*' rather than yelling like '*pururu*', they become symbols and embodiments of modern, civilized, and cultivated men.

Returning to what Fabian observes about the two Indians, it is possible to claim that the Indians will neither be original Indians nor real Englishmen, for while they have no interlocutors in their mother tongues as well as not being able to speak in Indian language, they will never be able to speak like a native Englishmen, which, of course, will make them seem and sound as *the other* within the whole community. This is what linguistic violence is; being a human within a group of *super-humans*, who will always remind you of the fact that you are not one of them. Being neither in hell nor in heaven; these people will always sway in purgatory. Chinua Achebe's own life may also be exemplified here. His condition of being a foreigner within his own culture from the gaze of the Occident is justified through the theory of "man of two worlds" (Achebe, 2003: 58); being Nigerian, he is raised in Europe intellectually; however, he uses the European education to fight against the Occident. Therefore, Achebe becomes the uncivilized person in Europe whereas he is the de-familiarized entity within his own culture, for he cannot meet on the same ground neither with his own people nor with the Europeans just like the Indians that Fabian observes. As the theory suggests, "no matter how much the native was exposed to European influences he could never truly absorb them" (Achebe, 2003: 58). Hence, the educated native is doomed to be an outsider within the borders of both of the worlds, for "the power and privilege gained by knowing English may marginalize one from one's un-English educated family. Such linguistic outsidership is accompanied [...] with a fatal 'forgetting' of one's mother tongue" (Katrak, 2011: 98).

## 2. Religious Violence

Religion is another tool of the colonizers in order to wipe off the colonized people's very identity so that they can alienate them. Through alienation, the colonists easily benefit from the colonized people. Harrison argues it as follows:

*the 'religions' of the 'Orient', of the Pacific and the Americas, of ancient Greece and Rome were pressed into the service of the religious interests of the West. They became heresies which were formally equivalent to some undesirable version of Christianity, be it papism, Calvinism, Arminianism, or any other of the myriads of Protestant sects (1990: 9).*

What Harrison points out is the idea that Christianity is the best of all and there is no other religion, capable of keeping up with it. In other words, "[t]here is a single faith, a single text, a single reality" (Greenblatt, 1990: 28), if someone is outside of this singularity, s/he is totally imposter, barbarous, monstrous and

devilish within the frames of the colonial religious logic. This is why, as Greenblatt depicts it, “everywhere we hear of [the Indians’] worship of idols which, in the eyes of the Europeans, strikingly resemble the images of devils in Christian art” (1990: 22). Because the Indians’ way of worshipping or the idols and images they worship have no common share in what the Christians practice, these so-called barbarous people are entitled as devilish or heresies from an original religion. Considering Christianity as the one and only truthful and universal religion makes the colonizers so blind that they cannot even realize how different people might be indeed. Stereotyping, thus, becomes the key word the colonial logic is indebted to. The process, then, is again related to the groups, having and lacking authority. Recalling the ways and practices the natives performed during their sessions of worshipping as well as the idols they worshipped and the Christian colonizers’ interpretations of *the other religion*, thus, it is possible to claim that the colonial powers politicized Christianity at its zenith so as to make it “the prism through which knowledge about the world was refracted” (Miles & Brown, 2003: 25).

Geertz claims that culture is not a tool for power; on the contrary, it is something contextual, therefore it should be considered within the contextual frame and everyone should be aware of the fact that there should not be a universal – or better to say – a dominant discourse in the world. He believes that culture is not “something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described” (1973: 15). Hence, evaluating every community within their own context – that is to say, culture – it will be better and easier to understand the community, for every action that does not belong to our own context will seem ridiculous or obscure while the same actions could be meaningful if we regard them in their own meaning system.

In parallel with Geertz’s arguments, Bhabha, too, speculates that cultural diversity and cultural difference are not the same; on the contrary, they are totally different and only one of them, which is cultural difference, has been very effective in the revision of the history of critical theory. He defines cultural difference as “the process of the *enunciation* of culture as ‘knowledgeable’, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification” (1995: 206), whereas cultural diversity “is the recognition of pre-given cultural ‘contents’ and customs, held in a time-frame of relativism; it gives rise to anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity” (1995: 206). Therefore, Bhabha states that culture is an epistemological entity according to cultural diversity while cultural difference comes up once this epistemological entity is enunciated as knowledgeable, authoritative, primitive, modern, cultivated, and so on. Cultural diversity, Bhabha goes on, is a way that the imperialist colonizer powers adopt in order to divide the collective groups so as to control them more and more easily. To achieve this, the imperialist powers make use of cultural diversity, which encompasses the pre-given concepts and values about a culture, thereby giving way to “multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity” (Bhabha, 1995: 206).

Additionally, the unknown is always scary and terrorizing for the colonizers. Islam and Muslim peoples, for instance, are the entities that the Occident are pretty afraid of. What is more, these are not familiar to the European people, therefore the unknown things become more and more fearful to the Occident, thereby making the Orient more and more primitive, barbarian, ignorant, and illogical. Hence, “the European representation of the Muslim, Ottoman, or Arab was always a way of controlling the redoubtable Orient” (Said, 2003: 60). By using the wrong or distortional representations of these unfamiliar entities, Europe tries to break the resistance of the Orient, thereby minimizing it to a trivial ontological being. Nevertheless, Mahanta and Maut argue it as follows:

*[t]he modern European cultures were also primitive in their past. They have developed in course of time only with different degrees. But it must be remembered that the ‘modernity’ associated with ‘Christianity’ is mostly for material progress. Any nation, culture or religion may get advantages for such material progress. But the imposition of developed race’s religion over other less developed races is definitely unjust (2014: 258).*

This, for sure, is related to Lévi-Strauss’ theory of the science of the concrete, which is the notion that “order is achieved by discriminating and taking note of everything, placing everything of which the mind is aware in a secure, refindable place, therefore giving things some role to play in the economy of objects and identities that make up an environment” (Said, 2003: 53). This is why the more the Occident classifies and divides, the easier it is to control the nations they find barbarous and unknown. Hence, the distinctions such as Ottoman, Muslim, Turk, Arab, Jew, and so on, make it more effortless to identify Europe as the superior and cultivated power, compared to the Orient. Because of this unfamiliarity of Islam, Christian people hold conferences to convert Muslims into Christianity, Mohammad the prophet is labelled as an imposter for copying the Christian prophet Jesus Christ, thereby making the perfect religion as an imitation of the copy of the true religion. Mohammed is portrayed and depicted as one of the worst sinners of humanity in Dante’s

*Inferno*. “[S]ince Mohammed was viewed as the disseminator of a false Revelation, he became as well the epitome of lechery, debauchery, sodomy, and a whole battery of assorted treacheries, all of which derived “logically” from his doctrinal impostures” (Said, 2003: 62). To clarify, it is possible to assert that the Occident makes up a stage, on which it performs the roles of the Orient in such a way that the spectators have nothing to do but to believe in the performance on the stage, thereby making Oriental religions a learned field of study and making people prejudiced against all the components of the Oriental religions. By doing so, the Occident creates an enclosed system and imprisons the Orient within the frames of that system. After all, Bakhtin, too, considers that “the Orient is unable to become anything more than a ‘fiction’, constituted by similar consecutive ideas in history. This, as a result, blocks the development of the perceptible ‘real’ Oriental image as well as consolidating its state as an intertextual ‘fiction’” (2013: 112).

There are also multiple numbers of political projects, which are planned to encapsulate the Muslim people in Egypt in order to colonize the country and make it a vessel for the Occident’s benefits by way of abusing religion. Said asserts that “Egypt was the focal point of the relationships between Africa and Asia, between Europe and the East, between memory and actuality” (2003: 84). Thus, it has a crucial geopolitical significance for the Occident. With their power of knowledge, Napoleon and his followers make the Suez Canal, deceiving Muslims by acting in the Oriental way but with a sneaky Occidental purpose, which removes the barriers between the colonizer and the colonized. The textual and the schematic attitude of Napoleon, in addition, is portrayed by Said as follows: “The Orient [...] existed as a set of values attached, not to its modern realities, but to a series of valorized contacts it had had with a distant European past” (2003: 85). This is why the one who possessed Egypt would be listed among the best and most powerful people of the Egyptian history, proving that he and his nation are also as strong and successful as those historical characters, thereby justifying history. “[T]he Islamic Orient would henceforth appear as a category denoting the Orientalists’ power and not the Islamic people as humans nor their history as history” (Said, 2003: 87), which is very suitable to the materialistic development of Christianity as Mahanta and Maut depict above. For sure, the struggles and plans are not restricted to Islam; all the religions which differ from Christianity are strong enemies of the Christians on the way to acquire power and control.

### 3. Conclusion

Language and religion have shared the largest portion in constituting cultures as well as giving people and communities their identities; nevertheless, the owners of power and authority have abused them in the most convenient way to reach their unending colonial goals. As one of the oldest ways of discrimination, language and religion have been adapted to be the mainstream tools of violence in order to define, re-define, alienate and assimilate the weaker communities. The Egyptians, according to Herodotus, “call all who do not speak their language barbarians” (quoted in Baldry, 2009: 21), which is exactly what the Indians were exposed to. Following Herodotus’ records, the Greek, too, applied the same method to the rest of the humanity. “While *barbarous* came to be the normal word for a foreigner, *Hellēnes* [...] was [...] the common label of all who used Greek, and ‘Hellenes and barbarians’ was a regular way of referring to the whole mankind” (Baldry, 2009: 21). Considering this, it would not be unjust to claim that since the beginning of humanity, the Egyptian and Greek method, which has been used for the classification and definition of people, has been the very core point of the European colonial logic since they provided “some abiding templates for subsequent European images of ‘barbarians’ and outsiders” (Loomba, 2001: 105). In parallel with these marginalising vehicles, the colonizers have believed that it is very easy to expose these weaker communities to the erasures of culture and identity by way of assimilation, thereby making the colonized people more and more alienated to their original selves and to their newly acquired identities. By naming them as primitive, uncultivated, barbarous, incomprehensible, and bestial, the European colonizers have found various excuses for themselves to cultivate, to modernize and to civilize the communities they have selected. Moreover, “[t]hrough specific policies of population transfers, gerrymandering of borders, and forced production, [...] European colonialists promoted the destruction of native legal and cultural systems, and ultimately, the negation of non-European civilizations” (JanMohamed, 1985: 61). By abusing all these ways, the colonizers have adopted stereotyping as their key word on their route to their victory. In addition, since regarding culture as a contextualized phenomenon is a huge blockage on their path, they have omitted it. Apart from the contextualized nature of culture, they have ignored cultural diversity, too, and they have espoused cultural difference as one of the most convenient and useful vehicles for fulfilling their dream of an overmastering religion and a preeminent language, which, in the end, would provide them with a dominant discourse in order to support their vicious circle of religious and linguistic violence over the colonized. Though there are still some scholars who consider that colonizers are good at cultivating people who are in need of the assistance of the powerful, it is very obvious that the other side of the medallion is not as vivid and flamboyant as the colonizers depict.

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