This is America, This is Nigeria:

A Bhabhaian response to interactions of black culture(s)

Abstract:

This essay offers an innovative engagement with Homi Bhabha's postcolonial critique, using it to examine cultural dynamics within the Black International. As case studies, the essay turns to rap, closely comparing the music video of "This is America" by American rapper Childish Gambino and the remixed version "This is Nigeria" by Nigerian rapper Falz. The essay first outlines Homi Bhabha's theories of mimicry and hybridity which show how, through imitation, subordinate groups assert agency in situations of structural, cultural power imbalance. It explains that although the theories were conceived of in a postcolonial context, their utility should extend beyond the coloniser-colonised dynamic to cultural dynamics within previously homogenised groups of the subaltern. The second section sets up the Black International as one such group that has been falsely presented as homogenous. The Black International is heterogenous and evidences structural power imbalances in which black US culture is privileged as reflective of a universal black experience. Having explained both the continued relevance of mimicry and hybridity, as well as the cultural power structures operating in the Black International, the third section explores the moment of imitation established by the two music videos through the lenses of mimicry and hybridity. The theories underline Falz's agency. They present "This is Nigeria" as a new and different iteration of culture which challenges US dominance and claims to universality, asserting the specific Nigerian experience. In this new context, outside the coloniser-colonised binary, the analysis also brings forth new emphases such as a deemphasis of the ambivalence of the powerful group and emphasis of the constant interaction between black US and Nigerian cultures, neither of which are pure or distinct. As the essay concludes, these findings are specific to the moment explored and do not offer a model into which other subaltern interactions can be placed. The aim of this essay is ultimately to reanimate postcolonial critique in a way that others might be encouraged to further study unexplored interactions within subaltern communities.

Contents

In the days following the 5ᵗʰ May 2018, international media was inundated with reactions to rapper Childish Gambino's latest visual project. The music video, entitled *This Is America*, was praised, both as an astute indictment of the United States' (US) chronic mistreatment of its black population, and as a celebration of "black culture" in spite of this (Cornish & Estatieva:2018; Guan:2018). Three weeks later, Nigerian rapper Falz released *This is Nigeria*, a remixed version of the song accompanied by a video also heavily derived from Gambino's aesthetic. Reactions to *This Is Nigeria* were mixed. Most praised its courageous social commentary, while some denounced it as a mediocre duplication of the original (Akan:2018; Oaigbokhaevabolo:2018). The discourses surrounding both videos invite us to interrogate both the implication of "black culture", and that of cultural imitation between members of the Black International.[1]

Presenting his study of black culture, Stuart Hall provocatively asks "*What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?*" (1993). Though not the question to which this essay seeks to respond, this enquiry provokes several points of reflection which underline the necessity of this essay. To address these points, we propose to reformulate Hall's interrogation in two ways:

Firstly, *what is this 'culture' in black popular culture?* A substantial definition outlines culture as a group's 'attitudes, mentalities and values and their expression, embodiment or symbolisation in artefacts, practices and representations' (Burke:2013:5). Since the 1960s, we have seen an analytical shift in various humanities and social sciences to emphasise culture as a dynamic, social process of sense-making (Santoro:2011). Focusing on the cultural legacy of colonialism, postcolonial literature's contribution to our understanding of culture is to present it as a tool, mobilised in the negotiation of power. Edward Saïd's *Orientalism* (1978), a foundational postcolonial text, highlights how culture was, and still is, weaponised by "the West" to enable its domination.

Though not as frequently cited as Saïd, Homi Bhabha's contribution to the postcolonial understanding of culture is equally important. Inspired by Saïd, but also his experiences in post-independence India, Bhabha (1994:x) describes 'the unresolved tensions between cultures and countries' as 'the narrative of my life, and the defining characteristic of my work'. Whilst recognising the role of cultural production in maintaining existing power hierarchies, Bhabha moves beyond this one-way analysis.

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[1] We employ West et al.'s (2009) 'Black International', as a neutral term, to describe the global distribution of people racialised as black.

He develops the theories of hybridity and mimicry to explain how subaltern populations assert their agency. Bhabha's theories offer a methodical explanation of how Western culture's power and claims to authority are challenged in the process of imitation, and thus are paramount to analysis of the relationship between culture and power.

Secondly, we ask ourselves *who is this 'black' in black popular culture?* The legacy of postcolonialism has given scholars the tools to meaningfully analyse power dynamics between subaltern and European populations, between the Global North and South, between white and black peoples. However, such divisions have not encouraged exploration of the heterogeneities within these groups. In this paradigm, the generalisation of black popular culture, as continuous, homogenous and uniform, is uninterrogated. As this essay will illustrate, this lack of exploration; not only of the discontinuities, but also the inequalities of power, operating within the Black International; allows Black US American cultural dominance to persist unexamined. Drawing on theories of hybridity and mimicry, and exploring their applicability to the Black International, we aim to rectify this oversight. For this task of reanimation, we look to *This Is America* and *This Is Nigeria* as a current, popular-culture case of imitation at work.

Our aim is thus threefold: to reanimate discussion of Bhabhaian theories of mimicry and hybridity, explaining their core elements and extending them beyond their traditional postcolonial context (I); to demonstrate that not only has the culture of the Black International been wrongfully prescribed as homogenous, but that this has disproportionately favoured the Black US American experience, thus providing a context for which a postcolonial analysis of cultural power is useful (II); to utilise mimicry and hybridity to explore ways in which this power is negotiated and challenged, through the example of *This Is Nigeria* (III).

I.   Relocating Homi Bhabha: The case for a return to postcolonial theory

1.1 Defining Bhabha's theories

Mimicry and *hybridity* are central to Bhabha's contribution to postcolonial theory. Though written and spoken about extensively, they are most comprehensively conceptualised in his collection of essays, *The Location of Culture* (1994). Both concepts demonstrate Bhabha's understanding of the negotiation of power and Third World agency, illustrating strategies through which the colonial

presence's hegemonic power is contested by the colonised subject through the appropriation of cultural practices or symbols.

Colonial mimicry is driven by 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha:1994:122). In the process of colonisation, the colonial presence attempts to impose its culture (norms, values, habits, symbols) on the colonised subject. This 'narcissistic demand', narcissistic as it assumes the superiority of Self and demands that the Other resembles it, aims to reinforce the supremacy of the colonial presence and the universality of his knowledge (Bhabha:1994:126).

However, ironically, the demand of mimicry exposes the ambivalence and the instability of the colonial presence in various ways. Firstly, though the coloniser demands mimicry, the result is not a re-presentation but a mirroring, a partial representation or 'empty form' (Bhabha:1994:124). Secondly, though the coloniser demands a resemblance, the colonial project is contingent upon the systematic maintenance of a stark oppositional difference between Coloniser and Colonised. Yet, paradoxically, maintenance of any 'disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference' threaten claims at universality (Bhabha:1994:126). Resultantly, through the act of mimicry, the colonised subject becomes an *almost the same, but not quite*, one whose difference and inappropriateness are simultaneously necessary and threatening to the colonial project. The act of mimicry displaces the gaze of the colonial presence, turning it back on itself through a 'gaze of otherness' (Bhabha:1994:126). The colonised subject is thus an active agent who, through his act of repetition, confirms the instability and challenges the power of the colonial presence.

We see similar disruptions of power occurring through strategies of *hybridity*. Bhabha uses the account of Indian catechist Anund Messegh, describing how local Indian populations easily accepted some parts of the Bible and Christian doctrine but refused to adopt other aspects such as the Communion, due to their practice of vegetarianism. Hybridity is elaborated as a strategy through which the active colonised subject engages and negotiates with a cultural symbol imposed by the colonial authority, forcing the symbol to come into contact with the subject's difference. As Bhabha (1994:159) explains, despite the colonial presence's aim to disavow the colonial subject's difference, 'the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different – a mutation, a hybrid'. Though the hybrid retains the semblance of the authoritative symbol, its existence revaluates the symbol's presence and gives opportunity for the symbol to be invested with new meaning.

Hybridity is not a case of two original cultural symbols/practices simply fusing to create an offspring symbol/practice, but rather the assertion of a simultaneous other space, what Bhabha refers to as a *Third Space*, removed from origins and assumed hierarchies which are constructed upon and sustained by existing histories, structures of authority, established representations and meanings (Rutherford:1990). The mere existence of the hybrid form denies the colonial authority's identification as a pure, fixed essence, challenging the authority's claim to a pre-existing, supreme or universal knowledge. The Bible still remains the same visibly but in the new space is emptied of the 'syntagmatic supports - codes, connotations and cultural associations that give it contiginuity and continuity' (Bhabha:1994:170). Both *mimicry* and *hybridity* usefully articulate how discussion of cultural domination can be nuanced to reflect the agency of the colonised subject and to reveal the instability of the colonial power.

1.2 Demonstrating mimicry and hybridity's continued relevance

Mimicry and hybridity provide important conceptual tools that have been fundamental to the development of postcolonial thinking. Nevertheless, the utility of Bhabha's work has been questioned by critics who argue that his theories are impenetrable, vague and inevitably essentialise the subaltern (Ahmad:1997; Dirlik:1994; Parry:1994; Perloff:1999). This section will argue that these criticisms result from the misinterpretation of Bhabha's work and the conventional focus of postcolonial literature on extensions of the coloniser-colonised binary. Such criticisms do not negate the theoretical strength of mimicry and hybridity but rather encourage revision of their application.

Bhabha's conceptualisation of hybridity has been as described as opaque, slippery and difficult to draw clear lines around (Perloff:1999). The discourse around cultural hybridity is extremely broad, predating and postdating postcolonial understanding (Acheraïou:2011). Subsequently, inability to clearly contain Bhabha's hybridity risks it being blurred into a 'maddeningly elastic' definition of the term (Kraidy:2005:3). As Peter Burke (2013) argues, the term cultural hybridity has been employed to describe almost any instance of encounter or fusion between differing cultural traditions from Bhabha's example of the adaptation of Christian doctrine to the popularisation of chips with curry as a meal in the United Kingdom.

The same year that *The Location of Culture* was published, Arif Dirlik (1994) proposed an extensive criticism of the postcolonial standpoint. Dirlik's arguments, though insightful, misunderstand the

emphasis and the complexity of Bhabha's work. It is Dirlik's overall view that, despite its opposition to hegemonic Western narratives, postcolonialism never truly escapes the essentialised, fixed notions of identity that it claims to contest. Following this, mimicry and hybridity's presentation of culture is not dynamic, it removes the individual from his/her historicising, situational context and 'generalizes the local to the global' (Dirlik:1994:341). Despite Bhabha's vehement opposition to rudimentary polarisations, Dirlik would argue that Bhabha both reaffirms the binary coloniser-colonised relationship and presents the Third World as one homogenous group.

Engaging with Bhabha's discussions with greater nuance, we see that though this criticism highlights historical limitations of his theories, it does not prove them redundant. Firstly, although Bhabha's articulation of what hybridity *is*, might be difficult to grasp, we equally learn from what he says hybridity *is not*. It is not 'a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures, or the two scenes of the book, in a dialectical play of 'recognition'', nor is it 'a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism' (Bhabha:1994:162). Hybridity does not describe a harmonious, generalised mixing of cultures. It is a specific analysis of confrontation, of power operating through culture and how this is challenged in the interstitial Third Space.

Secondly, it is true that the consistent subject of postcolonial analysis has been the First World-Third World dynamic. In this sense, Dirlif's criticism holds some weight. However, contrary to his conclusion, this conventional focus does not mean that the theoretical underpinnings of mimicry and hybridity lead to an inevitable essentialisation of the subaltern. Focus on the coloniser-coloniser binary, and its extensions, is a result of postcolonialism's historical positionality as a political project seeking to challenge Western hegemonic knowledge and power. However, today, the fluidity of Bhabha's conceptions allows for the reiteration of mimicry and hybridity in such a way that they can be used outside of this original context (Fay:2017). Hybridity and mimicry do not demand the concretisation of particular binaries but rather the preconditions of a power structure and a case of imitation or re-presentation of cultural symbols or practices. It is in these situations, equally found outside the coloniser-colonised binary, that we engage in meaningful analysis of the "moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (Bhabha:1994:2).

From this, we see how application of mimicry and hybridity to relations and contestations of power between black US Americans and Nigerians is, in fact, a fitting translocation of Bhabha's theoretical

frameworks. In these spaces, we see both inequalities of power and instances of imitation in which the ideals of conformity come into contact with the realities of difference. By focusing on cultural difference within the Black International, we bring postcolonial theory into a necessary acknowledgement of its former blind spot, its lack of critical engagement with power structures *within* global groupings of people of colour. Reading the Black International through the lens of Bhabha ultimately continues the postcolonial project: the analysis of the dynamic negotiation of difference and the rejection of previously normalised discourses of essentialised and homogenous identities.

II. Dislocating US blackness: Inequalities of power within the Black International

2.1 Introducing *the black Atlantic*

In his work *The black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy argues for the consideration of a transatlantic collection of black populations, as a distinct subject for cultural and diaspora studies. "The black Atlantic" symbolises the various linkages between Africans, African-Americans, Afro-Europeans and Afro-Caribbeans and represents a seminal step in the critical conceptualisation of "black culture". Gilroy rejects both ontological and strategic essentialist thinking that had influenced previous social and political movements such as Negritude or Pan-Africanism. Yet, a self-proclaimed 'anti-anti-essentialist', he also criticises an anti-essentialism which denies all connections between black peoples, resulting in rigid ethnic or national particularism (Gilroy:1993:x). By presenting black culture as a socially produced artefact, of continuities as well as important discontinuities, Gilroy hoped to prove the necessity of the black Atlantic's inclusion into conversations of global diasporas.

Nevertheless, as important as *The black Atlantic* was, and still is, its 'enduring puzzle' continues to be its asymmetric focus on black US experiences (Gikandi:2014:12). This is compared to a relative silence on African members of the Black Atlantic (Zeleza:2005). As this essay will show, this asymmetry is, in fact, not that puzzling but rather symptomatic of a consistent conflation of the black US experience and *the* "Black experience", a manifestation of black US Americans' position of relative cultural power.

2.2 Tracing inequalities of power

Disciplines such as cultural studies and diaspora studies, which defend "black culture" as a concept, have generally lacked specific or comprehensive exploration of US hegemony. Even less visible is literature on how this cultural power interacts with black peoples on the African continent. Using the relatively sparse existing literature, this section will present two major explanations for this phenomenon: the motivations and positionality of those writing about black culture; and the wider geopolitics of US cultural power.

Gikandi (2014) posits that writing in the 1990s, Black-British Gilroy was particularly interested in the political project of how ethnic minorities might gain acknowledgement as full citizens. Black America seemed the example par excellence of how this might be realised through the strategic mobilisation of culture. Black US Americans thus provided a political model that non-minority African and Afro-Caribbean communities could not.

Yet, from the mid-20th century, many of those informing how *the* black experience would be conceptualised and understood were, in fact, black US Americans (Nehl:2016). This resulted in both a comparative overrepresentation of the black US experience and the mistaken assumption of its ability to encompass the experiences and practices of all black individuals. Attempting to articulate the idiosyncrasies of black cultural expression, Gilroy looks to US writers such as Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison. Both writers essentialise global black culture through musical metaphors of 'blues, spirituals and jazz', investing local music forms with the ability to capture some sort of universal quality (Gilroy:1993:78). Despite completely varying contexts; for example, of black Africans and Caribbeans who are not socialised as minorities, or certain black Europeans whose migration to Europe precedes the transatlantic slave trade; there is an assumed translatability of the experiences, histories and culture of black US Americans. As Bhabha would argue, Black US power resides in its ability to claim universal authority, presenting the rest of the Black International as 'simulated copies' of itself (Zeleza:2010:5).

Furthermore, black US cultural power is also constructed within a structural geopolitical context. Ironically, interest in the structures maintaining domestic racial oppression in the US has not coincided with an awareness of the 'geopolitical relations of power and hegemony' which allow black US Americans to benefit from the United States' international cultural dominance (Campt:2004:178). Hall (1993:104) explains that one of the three great transformations which allowed for the

development of black popular culture in its US-centric form, is the 'emergence of the United States as a world power and, consequently, as the centre of global cultural production and circulation'. This was facilitated by the development of new technological forms of mass media enabling black US Americans to globally distribute artefacts, notably images and music, through the cultural and economic infrastructure of the United States. Consequently, black US hypervisibility is translated into power through an 'almost endless capacity to proliferate and travel to many different global locations and thus become an available referent [for other groups]' (Campt:2004:208).

2.3 Using Bhabha to nuance the narrative of power

Thus far, we have presented a somewhat one-sided depiction of black US cultural power in order to clearly demonstrate how it has been constructed. However, as Bhabha explains, power's operation is neither unidirectional, simple nor uncontested. This section will explore how a Bhabhaian perspective nuances our understanding of Black American-Black African relations and distinguishes them from coloniser-colonised dynamics.

Jacqueline Nassy Brown (2006) employs the term *resources* to describe the music, iconography, language, ideas and ideologies that constitute black US culture. These resources form a repertoire from which other groups draw in order to credibly express their own localised experiences. As Bhabha's theories propose, the act of drawing upon these resources is ambivalent. On one level it confirms the authority of black US culture to portray a universal black experience. Yet, the very process of articulation, and its interaction with the differences presented by other groups, inevitably produces partial representation which challenges the black US pretension at universality, or a hybrid which invests these resources with new meaning.

Even more so than in Bhabha's original study of the colonial dynamic, relations between groups within the Black International are multiform and require a 'multi-axial understanding of power' (Brah:1996:189). Deborah Thomas (2006) highlights this in her exploration of the idea of "America" in the politics of Jamaican popular culture. She explains that the uptake of cultural resources, although 'implicitly uneven', is reciprocal (Thomas:2006:347). Such an equivocality is evidenced through the Africa's position in the black US cultural imaginary. Africa is often presented in cultural discourse as a 'mythic point of origin' (Campt:2004:176). Cultures of the continent are privileged, presented as somehow epitomic of a pre-modern essence, and simultaneously denied the same dynamism and creative agency afforded to other groups. In this way, we see an attribution of value to the non-

dominant culture that is not present in Bhabha's original cases but a denial of agency which echoes the coloniser-colonised dynamic.

Such nuances preclude a simple superimposition of mimicry and hybridity onto the Black International context. Though the conditions of structural power exist, they do not present themselves in the same way as previously seen. This essay does not seek to defend a false equivalence between the inequalities maintained by colonial domination, and those existing between members of the Black International. Therefore, rather than becoming entangled in potentially dangerous abstraction, we propose to follow Bhabha's methods and look specifically at a precise moment of interaction and articulation of difference. Focusing our analysis on Childish Gambino's *This Is America* and Nigerian rapper Falz' "imitation" of the same video, we will see how mimicry and hybridity, though not identically transplantable, are still useful frameworks for elucidating contestations of power within the Black International.

III. Locating a new Third Space: *This is America* and *This is Nigeria*, analysed through mimicry and hybridity

3.1 Affirming the place of the hip hop music video

International flows of music have provided fertile ground for understanding connectivities between members of the Black International (Gilroy:1993; West et al.:2009). Within this conversation hip hop offers the case study par excellence of the universalisation and dominance of black US culture: The genre is 'the most visible and widely disseminated conduit of U.S. black popular imagery' and simultaneously globalised as a 'legitimate arm of black world culture' (Perry:2009:233; Shonekan:2012:150). This culture is not merely produced by the song and its lyrics, but incorporates visual elements including fashion and, this essay's object of analysis: music videos. Railton and Watson (2011) track the popularisation of music videos from the 1980s and their subsequent incorporation into cultural studies. From the late 1990s, they identify a 'critical atrophy' based on the academic denunciation of popular music videos as commercialised, promotional devices lacking the type of engagement with cultural politics which would require critical analysis (Railton & Watson:2011:5). *This Is America* challenges this perspective. Not only was the video extremely popular; it provoked myriad critical responses both domestically and internationally; and gave rise to various imitations, of which *This Is Nigeria* is just one (Gajanan; Johnson; Cornish & Evstatieva).

3.2 Understanding *This Is Nigeria* through the lens of mimicry

Characterisation of Nigerian contemporary hip hop has often featured criticism of its importation of US vernacular and styles, to the detriment of "authentic" Nigerian culture (Shonekan:2012). Nigerian poet-laureate Niyi Osundare (2005:70) condemns the genre for encouraging Nigerians to 'take leave of one's very self and assume the borrowed clichéd mask of the other'. However, as Bhabha argues and Falz's *This Is Nigeria* illustrates, the act of repetition does not result in a mere copy. A first watch of both Gambino's and Falz's music videos would seem to show two pieces of art, ostensibly the same in form, instrumentation and setting. However, closer analysis of *This Is Nigeria* reveals the *almost the same but not quite* of mimicry. This is visible from the video's opening. The guitar melody which introduces Gambino's video is repeated but with a palm-muted tone reminiscent of highlife guitar progressions.[2] Our first view of Childish Gambino; back turned, torso bare, wearing beige linen trousers and a gold chain; is also mirrored in Falz's opening. The moving shot is almost identical, *but not quite,* as Falz's trousers are made of a multi-coloured wax fabric immediately locatable to the West African context. Within the first few seconds of *This Is Nigeria,* we are made aware that Falz's repetition is interacting with the difference of a current Nigerian context. The result is a partial representation of Gambino's video which challenges US universality.

Yet, the very existence of *This Is Nigeria* is, in itself, an articulation of difference which denies the possibility of conflating Gambino's portrayal of America with an expression of a global black experience. By stating that *This is Nigeria*, Falz reduces *This Is America* to one of many possible *This Is* alternatives, preventing the perpetuation of a US-centred depiction of black suffering. His assertion interprets and responds to Gambino's video, decentring the US gaze and instituting a dynamic *gaze of otherness* which challenges previous, static romanticisations of Africa. Contrary to Osundare's crude depiction of imitation, *This Is Nigeria* affirms Nigerian agency.

Nevertheless, there are limits in trying to understand the dynamics between *This Is America* and *This Is Nigeria* through a framework of mimicry. Describing the operation of mimicry in the coloniser-colonised relationship, Bhabha places emphasis on the colonial project: the systematic maintenance of disempowerment through the imposition of the coloniser's culture on the colonised. Part of the ambivalence of the colonial presence results from the difference between his intentions based on this

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[2] *Highlife* is a musical genre originating in Ghana, often featuring percussive guitar rhythms. It remains an extremely recognisable genre and a quintessential example of West African music (Collins:1989).

project: the simultaneous demand of total conformity and of stark contrast. The imposition of a dominant black US culture (in this case symbolised by the *This Is America* video), though still arguably a violence, cannot be characterised as part of a systematic and deliberate project of disempowerment in the same way. This shifts the theoretical focus of mimicry, emphasising the subordinate's challenge to power through the assertion of agency, rather than through the exposure of the power-holder's inherent contradictions.

3.3 Analysing *This Is Nigeria* through hybridity

Hybridity argues that the act of imitation forces the specific symbols and practices present in Childish Gambino's video, to come into contact with the difference of Nigerian culture, repositioning them in the interstitial Third Space where they can be invested with new meaning. It is the existence of this space, and not necessarily the exposure of the power-holder's ambivalence, which destabilises his authority.

In *This Is Nigeria*, *This Is America*'s symbols are appropriated but given new meaning. As he progresses through various scenes of violence and chaos, Childish Gambino is followed by a group of adolescents in school uniform who joyfully perform popular dance moves, unaware of the shooting and riots that are taking place around them. Music historian Guthrie Ramsay reads this as a commentary on the prevalence of violence against black bodies and society's desensitisation to it (Gajanan:2018). Falz appropriates this image but inserts a group of young women all wearing long veils. His adolescents are given new meaning, as a representation of the Chibok girls, again centralising and affirming the specific Nigerian experience (Akan:2018).[3]

Similarly, in *This Is America*, we are confronted with the scene of a robed gospel choir who, mid-song, are unexpectedly gunned down. The suddenness is emphasised as the music cuts from the joyful gospel interlude back to its 'menacing' refrain (Kearse:2018). The act likely references the Charleston Church Shooting (Gajanan:2018).[4] Synchronously, the shooting comments on a US history of state-sanctioned violence against its black community. In *This Is Nigeria*, the symbol of the Church is again evoked, and robes are still present. However, this time, we see a group of men energetically praying

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[3] This refers to 276 girls who were kidnapped from a secondary school in Borno State, Nigeria by Islamist militants in 2014. Failure of the Nigerian government to expeditiously recover the girls was domestically and internationally criticised.

[4] This refers to a mass shooting at the Emanuel Methodist African Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The shooting took place on 17th June 2015, resulting in the deaths of nine church members.

over a kneeling woman as a passing Falz comments, 'pastor puts his hand on the breast of his member, he's pulling the demon out' (Falana:2018:1.46). Whereas Gambino's Church is symbolised as a custodian of joy and victim to crimes of racialised violence, Falz's Church is removed from these continuities that characterise the US black experience, and instead complicit in the countrywide failings of Nigeria through corruption, deception and prevalent sexual violence. In Falz's Third Space, these symbols, separated from prior histories, assume new meanings which allow alternative Nigerian narratives of black oppression to become tangential rather than subordinate to a dominant US narrative.

3.4 Reiterating Bhabha in light of our case study

As illustrated in Chapter Two, the nuances of relationships in the Black International present certain complexities when progressing mimicry and hybridity beyond their original postcolonial contexts. As we have seen, in the Black International, imitation is a two-way process. In the series of viral dances displayed by Childish Gambino and the adolescent group following him, we see performance of the "Gwara Gwara", a dance which received notoriety in the US in 2018, but which has been referenced as an importation from South Africa (Rearick:2018; Miller:2018). This phenomenon echoes Deborah Thomas' (2006:347) nuanced description of equivocal, but 'implicitly uneven', power structures and flows.

Referencing *This Is America*'s penultimate scene, Falz's video closes with a shot of him standing on a car. Unlike Gambino, who continues to dance, Falz remains still, raising both fists in the air. The two-fisted stance echoes many widely-circulated images of Fela Kuti, music artist, activist and undeniably the most recognised musical export of Nigeria (Fig.1). Falz thus visually draws on Nigeria's history of activism and social commentary through music. However, Fela's fisted pose equally inscribes itself in a transnational, iconographical history of resistance and also solidarity with US-originated Black Power movements. In this way, we see a Third Space which is not completely divorced from the tangential meanings and histories of its cultural symbols but which, in allowing for nuance and movement between these histories, does not privilege one culture over the other. A re-situation of the Third Space, not as abstract or separate, but as inevitably tied to multiple histories ultimately aids the dismantling of hierarchies of power by underlining the idea that neither Nigerian nor black US cultures are, or were, pure or distinct, but rather ever-moving points in constant interaction.

Conclusion

In its interdisciplinary approach, this essay has brought together and problematised multiple areas of academic interest: postcolonial studies and its interrogation of the negotiation of power; diaspora studies' attempts to conceptualise global blackness; cultural studies and critical analysis of music videos as a representation of popular culture. Drawing these disciplines together, we have given them much-needed impetus and new dimension, contributing to a deeper consideration of black culture, as neither homogenous nor essentialised, but a variable and multitudinous landscape in which we see structures of power dynamically operating.

This essay has demonstrated how Bhabhaian theories of mimicry and hybridity continue to be useful in analyses of power and its interaction with culture. Applied to new subject matter, the theories bring forth different emphases, notably a shift of focus away from the contradictions of the power-holder and re-situation and contextualisation of the Third Space. The *moment*, produced in *This Is Nigeria*'s articulation of difference, highlights one instance in which black US power is mediated and challenged through imitation. However, this moment does not present a simple relationship between Nigerians and black US Americans, nor does it offer a model into which we can easily insert other cases. Following our study of a particular instance of interaction between two music videos, the fundamental contribution of this essay is to inspire further exploration: This work paves the way for the continued use of mimicry and hybridity in order to closely analyse specific instances of imitation and the negotiation of power in other subaltern communities, not generalising, but displaying a sensitivity to differing contexts, histories and their effects on the ways in which power is both maintained and contested.

Appendix

Fig 1. *Fela Kuti at The Academy, Brixton, London (November 12, 1983) photographed by David Corio*

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