

Paper proposal for COV&R Conference 2010

**Mimicry and Mimetic Rivalry: The Case of Amputees in Sierra Leone**

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Prof. Cole's work collecting testimonies from victims of amputation during the civil war in Sierra Leone has led us to ask how the mimetic theory can shed light on this country's experience of violence and how this example can guide a broader application of mimetic theory to post-colonial conflict.

We argue that through mimicry, expressed in part by a subtle process of irony, the amputated stump initially defined as text for inscription of violence and trauma, domination and control, goes through a process of deconstruction and assumes a new meaning: one that gestures towards resistance to the perpetrator's desire to inscribe violence, power and domination through mutilation of the body. In *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha conceptualizes mimicry as "at once resemblance and menace, [that] it is constructed around an ambivalence, so that in order to be effective it must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (86). We re-appropriate Bhabha's colonizer-colonized dialectic to the perpetrator and the amputee, whereby the latter deconstructs master discourse to come up with something new that "transforms what it resembles" and assert agency.

The second stage of our inquiry is to put this view of the sign of amputation taken from a familiar source of post-colonial theory into conversation with the mimetic theory. We suggest that Bhabha's theory can provide an extension of the mimetic theory into a particular form of conscious, non-rivalrous imitation—mimesis with a difference. In turn, we consider how the mimetic theory's more basic analysis of the mechanisms of violence

can help identify the conditions necessary for such mimicry to avoid perpetuating the cycle of scapegoating violence.