

“OTHERING” IN THE MUGHAL COURT: THE “FIRANG” PHYSICIAN AND THE WHITE MUGHAL EMPEROR

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Abstract

I propose to sketch the “evil” portrait of Aurangzeb portrayed by Niccolao Manucci, the early modern Italian writer and traveler who served as a physician in the Mughal court. I argue that both theatrical and antitheatrical elements are present in each individual irrespective of religion, race or citizenship. In the first section of the paper, I intend to examine Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor, as a radical antitheatrical Islamic figure and put him in conversation with Manucci, the antitheatrical Christian. I will analyze how antitheatricality is not a peculiar tradition to the West or Christianity and how it is an active “othering” which takes place even in a local/oriental space. In the second section, I hope to inspect the subconscious slippages of Manucci into theatricality despite his fundamental antitheatrical stance. I will sketch how he fakes his credibility as an efficient physician in the Mughal court thereby constructing the false assumption that European physicians surpass native doctors. Aurangzeb too is compelled to become a performer as a ruler who has to safeguard his position through diplomacy. Manucci’s censure of Aurangzeb’s pretence is an irony that speaks to his own failure in resisting theatricality. Finally, I examine how skin color is another factor that both Aurangzeb and Manucci share, which differentiates them from the rest of the natives/Mughals. The unusually fair Aurangzeb was nicknamed the “white serpent”, by his own father who theatricalized his “foreignness” at birth. Similarly, Manucci too always remains a “firang” because of his skin color, despite his adaption to Indian attire, food and language. Both, Aurangzeb and Manucci, can be viewed as “firangs”, who occupy the “middle space” that demarcates the native from the foreigner/alien. Neither of them can ever become a “desi” because of their peculiar alterity.

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My theoretical framework will involve the works of antitheatricalists such as Gossen and Prynne to underscore the aversion for theatricality that both Aurangzeb and Manucci share. Grosrichard, Said, and Singh will be helpful in understanding how the Oriental imaginings were important to secure European identity. Chakrabarty's work will help in analyzing the subconscious change in Manucci and will speak to his new, acquired identity in India.

Some of the questions that I intend to explore along the paper are: How does active "othering"/ antitheatricality secure personal identity? What defines foreignness in India? Can we perceive the early modern "desi"?

Before I elaborate my arguments further, I would like to outline the generalizations and limitations of this paper, underscoring the fact that these points are debatable and can become great arguments for prospective papers. I cannot emphasize enough the generalization of the term "Indian" especially in the early modern context, when there was still no "India". So when I talk about "Indian culture", it is only to highlight the difference of European culture with the culture(s) of India, and not to homogenize all early modern oriental traditions into a common practice. I would also like to underscore the difficulty I have had in locating the early modern "desi"/ subject in the Mughal Empire, who remains a mysterious figure in Manucci's narrative. Was the early modern oriental citizen a Mohammedan, a Hindu or a convert- still remains a puzzling question.

Before entering into Aurangzeb's services, Manucci served Dara Shikho, his brother, who was very popular because of his generosity and his liberal attitude towards life and religion. Manucci admired Dara, who, though a Muslim from birth, was a secular man. Manucci records how Dara used to enjoy religious discussions and was more of a scholar than an administrator:

Dara was very fond of Europeans. Added to this, as everyone knew, he held to no religion. When with Mahomedans, he praised the tenets of Muhammad; when with Jews, the Jewish religion; in the same way, when with Hindus, he praised Hinduism. This is why Aurangzeb styled him Cafar (Kafir) that is to say, 'The Infidel.' At the same time he had great delight in talking to the Jesuit fathers on religion, and making them dispute with his learned

Mahomedans, or with a Hebrew called Cernad (Sarmad), an atheist much liked by the prince. (Manucci 223)

After serving under such a “liberal” minded patron, Manucci was unenthusiastic to enter into the services of the fundamentalist Aurangzeb. He also deeply felt the economic pinch after the demise of Dara, as Aurangzeb was extremely calculative and careful in money matters. Manucci constantly underscores the duplicity of Aurangzeb in his narrative and how he theatricalized/faked austerity:

Although this prince (Aurangzeb) was held to be bold and valiant, he was capable of great dissimulation and hypocrisy; pretending to be an ascetic, he slept while in the field on a mat of straw that he had himself woven. He stitched caps with his own hands and sent them out for sale, saying that he lived upon what he made by them. He ate food that cost little, such as radishes, lentils, barley, and such-like vegetables and cereals; he gave alms publicly, and also let it be known that he underwent severe penances and fasting; he allowed himself to be found in prayer or reading the Quran ; went out frequently with his chaplet in his hand ; and on all occasions called on the name of God as if he made no account of the things of this world.... for a long time he pretended to be a faquir (faqlr), a holy mendicant, by which he renounced the world, gave up all claim to the crown, and was content to pass his life in prayers and mortifications (Manucci 185, 214)

Hansen foregrounds how for Manucci, Aurangzeb’s religious attitude was a mask for his power drive. He also notes how Aurangzeb’s personality is more than mere hypocrisy. “There is a certain fascination in Aurangzeb’s insatiable need for religious justification”, he observes. God, “the ultimate father” must be constantly invoked in order to efface the religious self and to manifest a sublime “compulsion to power”. (Hansen 268) The metaphysical father then sanctions rebellion and justifies the will of the tyrant. Divine will is superimposed over the human spirit and war is validated through religious rhetoric. “I was sent into the world by Providence to live and labour, not for myself, but for others” believed Aurangzeb according to Bernier’s records (Bernier 130). “Not my will, O Lord, but thy will”, is the slogan of Aurangzeb to substantiate his despotism, a familiar motto used by Christianity to secure its sanctity. An example of Christianity’s despotic urge can be traced in the journal of Bernier, who calls on Divine Providence to destroy Islam and save the oriental people from the sins and violence of the “baneful” creed:

Mahomedanism is a pernicious code, established by force of arms, and still imposed upon mankind by the same brutal violence. To counteract its baneful progress, Christians must display the zeal, and use the means I have suggested, however clear it may be that this abominable imposture can be effectually destroyed only by the special and merciful interposition of Divine Providence. (Bernier 291)

Oriental hypocrisy is a reflection of Europe’s subliminal duplicity which is masked by the language of nationhood.

Manucci outsources duplicity and hypocrisy to the Orient and depicts oriental figures as impostures in order to secure Europe’s virtuosity. Bernier, a French doctor and a contemporary of Manucci, seconds Manucci’s opinion on Aurangzeb’s hypocrisy:

He (Aurangzeb) was reserved, subtle, and a complete master of the art of dissimulation. When in his father's court, he feigned a devotion which he never felt, and affected contempt for worldly grandeur while clandestinely endeavouring to pave the way to future elevation. (Bernier 10)

While locating the Orient in the Western imaginaries, Said argues how the Orient is one of the most recurring images of the other in European culture. (Said, 1) He examines Orientalism as a western practice for dominating, restructuring and validating the Orient. He underscores how the Orient emerged as a space of desires, repressions, investments, and projections in the European imaginary and how being a European means, however inadvertently, to belong to a power which has its interests in the Orient, ever since the time of Homer. (Said, 11) He further notes how the Oriental space is “outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact” (Said, 21). The dramatic representation of the Orient by European writers obscures the fact that the audience is watching “a highly artificial enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient”. Said makes explicit how the European stands out as rational, virtuous, mature, and normal in relation to the Oriental irrationality and abnormality. This “othering” which is based arbitrarily on geographical distinction is derived through a “lack” which is mapped on to the imaginative space of the orient. Said elaborates:

It is enough for us to set up boundaries in our minds; “they” become “they” accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from “ours”. To a certain extent modern societies seem thus to derive a sense of their identities negatively. (Said, 54)

Said analyzes how the Orient became an imaginary stage for the Europeans, where the whole East was confined and represented through a few figures and an imagined repertoire of myths and ideas. (Said, 63) He elaborates how the Orient was not an extension of the European world, but “a theatrical stage affixed to Europe”.

Active “othering” is prevalent in the work of Bernier, who extols the splendors and governance of France while denigrating the Orient and its government. Bernier’s pride in French nobility is clear in his letters to Colbert, his superior in France, whom he informs how the nobles in the Mughal court are not “true” aristocrats and heirs of ancestral property. He elaborates how the Mughal Lords or Omrahs were appointed as officials by the king and acquired wealth during their service. However, on their death all their property would be confiscated by the King, who was the sole proprietor of all assets. Bernier criticizes the Mughal government, which forbade the acquisition of private property and underscores how the East has much to learn from the Western system of governance (Bernier 212):

... Take away the right of private property in land, and you introduce, as a sure and necessary consequence, tyranny, slavery, injustice, beggary and barbarism: the ground will cease to be cultivated and become a dreary wilderness; in a word, the road will be opened to the ruin of Kings and the destruction of Nations... How happy and thankful should we feel, My Lord, that in our quarter of the globe, the Kings are not the sole proprietors of the soil! (Bernier 238, 232)

By establishing European superiority in matters of governance, Bernier projects oriental figures as inefficient rulers and tyrants consumed by a thirst for possessions. He also

underscores the performance of nobility in the Orient thereby securing stateliness as a unique characteristic of Europe. He criticizes oriental art, culture and religious practices throughout his account, comparing and contrasting eastern barbarity with European sophistication/modernity. Grosrichard elaborates how Bernier constantly strives to understand the Orient by comparing it to France. This comparison is necessary for the European to interpret his present, he argues. The European's "endoscopic fantasy" of Oriental anarchy becomes the only perspective through which the West can assess itself. (Grosrichard 23) Grosrichard further elaborates that monarchy is not necessarily despotism or an evil form of government; he argues that in the "mechanism of power" command and obedience are connected by the "love-fear pairing". (Grosrichard 36). No reports of a revolution have been recorded in Aurangzeb's reign, thereby validating the efficiency his governance.

Manucci, like Bernier, views the Orient from an Oriental perspective. He needs to define the Oriental figures in terms of a "lack" in order to secure his European identity. Therefore, he attacks Aurangzeb's imposture and scoffs at his piety. However, by abstaining from worldly pleasures and leading a life of austerity, Aurangzeb qualifies to be the "godly" paragon that Gossen holds in high esteem. By prescribing "nothing but that which was necessary" for himself, Aurangzeb shares the attitude of the antitheatrical Christian ascetics (Gossen 106). Aurangzeb banned the production of alcohol and liquor in his empire as he believed in self-restraint and condemned all forms of pleasure. He ordered his chief "kotwal"(chief of police) to chastise all Muslims and Hindus who sold or drank alcohol by cutting off one hand and one foot. Aurangzeb also issued an order asking all Muslims to trim their beards to the length of "four finger-breadths". He appointed an official to measure the beards of Mahomedans on the streets and to trim and clip them when necessary. Like the anti theatrical Prynne, he seemed to have an aversion for long hair and mustache; he believed that the mustache would become a hindrance when the lips called upon the name of Allah and subsequently saw the need to trim it; long beards and mustaches also masked the person's identity and lead to imposture, which Aurangzeb condemned. (Manucci 7). "Heroic, generous, true-bred English men and Christians" repudiate the nation and Christianity by growing their hair argues Prynne. They break the law of nature and God by "powdering, frowning, adorning and decking" their hair. (Prynne 2) Prynne argues that neither Christ nor the Christian saints ever indulged in lovelock fancies and that therefore the growing and adorning of hair is a sinful, unlawful and unwarrantable act. Christians are made in the image of Christ and they should live up to their ideal. He observes that such fiendish fancies originate from the infidels and pagans who are "vaine, effeminate, proud, fantastique, prodigal, immodest, and unchristian in their attires, fashions, haire, apparel, gesture, behaviors, and vanities". (Prynne 6) By focusing on external appearances, man's attention from god waivers, and incurs His wrath in the form of plagues and storms. It is therefore the duty of all good Christians to forsake external beautifications and be dedicated towards the beautification of the soul, which is eternal and true. Prynne cites Asian and middle eastern examples of kings and tyrants sporting long hair and argues that their hair served the devil to draw them into hell, where these ruffians no doubt deserve to be. Aurangzeb shares Prynne's antitheatrical views and strongly opposes outward fancies that waiver one's attention from God.

Manucci records how Aurangzeb terminated music and dance in the Mughal court as well. If music was heard in any house, the kotwal was ordered to arrest the musicians and break the instruments. Dancing came to an end soon after Aurangzeb commanded that all female dancers in the Mughal court be married immediately if they were found dancing.

The abstinence from alcohol, music and dance marks a strong antitheatrical penchant in the Mughal emperor, who believed that art should represent God alone, and not stoop to provide aesthetic/ sensual pleasures. The antitheatrical tradition preached that “everything that hindereth the outward performance of Christianity” must be avoided in order to preserve “the inward holiness of the mind”. (Gossen 91) By setting an example, Aurangzeb endeavored to enforce austerity on his subjects by abolishing all theatrical forms of representation, thereby striving to eradicate duplicity/impotence and disguise and invest piety and holiness in the kingdom.

Aurangzeb’s ruthlessness and despotism is a constructed fantasy of the West according to Dolar who argues that “the fantasy, useless as a tool to explain its object, can shed light upon its producers and adherents. It projects on to the screen of this distant Other our own impasses and practices in dealing with power, and stages them”. (Dolar xiv). This active “othering” and disparagement point to Europe’s own shortcomings and its inefficiency in keeping a check on its own pleasures.

Inspired by Bernier account, Dryden’s tragedy Aurang-zebe portrays an antitheatrical picture of the Mughal Emperor, investing him with European values of virtue, honor and loyalty. Dryden’s hero is an “upright” Mughal prince trapped in the hypocritical realm of the Mughal court and who seeks freedom from “deceit, canker and malice” to lead the life of an ascetic. (Dryden 202) Dryden sums the virtues of the “Europeanized” Aurangzeb:

But Aureng-Zebe, by no strong passion swayed, Except his love, more temperate is, and weighed: This Atlas must our sinking state uphold; In council cool, but in performance bold: He sums their virtues in himself alone, And adds the greatest, of a loyal son. (Dryden, 194)

Dryden has depicted Aurangzeb as the ever forgiving and doting son of Shah Jahan, who considers filial love more valuable than empires and crowns. He endows his hero with all the “virtues” that a European would envy: “What have I said or done, / That I no longer must be called your son? / ’Tis in that name, heaven knows, I glory more, / Than that of prince, or that of conqueror. (Dryden 200)

In this tragedy, the hypocritical nature of Shah Jahan is highlighted by Dryden. Shah Jahan is portrayed as a theatrical oriental figure who rejoices in duplicity and sham. He admires Aurangzeb’s virtue, although he believes that “virtue” is a futile and a foolish pursuit:

Oh, Aureng-Zebe! thy virtues shine too bright, They flash too fierce: I, like the bird of night, Shut my dull eyes, and sicken at the sight. (Dryden 200)

Sick of the antitheatrical conduct of his wife Nour Mahal, Shah Jahan rebukes her chastity and virtue which she wields as a veil to mark her dignity and superiority. He underscores the pleasures that vices yield and scorns the theatricality of virtues’ clamors:

... Such virtue is the plague of human life; A virtuous woman, but a cursed wife. In vain of pompous chastity you're proud; Virtue's adultery of the tongue, when loud.

I, with less pain, a prostitute could bear, Than the shrill sound of—"Virtue! virtue!" hear. In unchaste wives There's yet a kind of recompensing ease; Vice keeps them humble, gives them care to please; But against clamorous virtue, what defence? It stops our mouths, and gives your noise pretence.

Shah Jahan is portrayed as the theatrical hero in the tragedy countering his antitheatrical son who is schooled in the European tradition. Dianet, Aurangzeb's loyal friend and courtier, also cautions his master from the phony nature of honor, which enfeebles the human will into torpor: "Honour, which only does the name advance, / Is the mere raving madness of romance. / Pleased with a word, you may sit tamely down; / And see your younger brother force the crown." (Dryden 221) But Aurangzeb pays no heed to Dianet and never leaves the path of honor thereby striving to inscribe in vain a European identity on to the oriental space of theatricality. Dryden's Aurangzeb is an advocate of Gossen's Christian philosophy which claims that "God hath made us to his likeness, which likeness consisteth not in lineament and proportion of the body, but in holiness and singleness of life". (Gossen 88)

Singh notes how virtue and vice, civilization and barbarism, Christianity and heathenism, and tradition and modernism are binaries constructed by the British for acquiring "a privileged epistemological position". (Singh 2) She argues that the Orient was a "discovered" land, enabling Europeans to inscribe their "linguistic, cultural... and territorial claims" on it. The "trope of discovery" later spawned several shifting meanings and mobilized a vocabulary that secured European identity by way of "othering" the Orient. (Singh 1) Dryden's Aurangzeb is inscribed with a European identity and his rhetoric reflects the modernity that Europe prides in.

Mannucci did not approve of Aurangzeb, despite his antitheatrical stance. He always perceived the latter as an impostor. Neither did he approve of the Europeans in the Mughal court, as he believed that they had become charlatans too, pretending to be true Christians while indulging in Oriental pleasures:

But such was the Christians' insolence and absence of shame that they did not desist. They were of many nations, mostly thieves and criminals; and without slandering anyone, I can say with truth that the Christians who served in the artillery of the Moguls retained of Christianity nothing but the mere name, were worse than the Mahomedans and Hindus, were devoid of the fear of God, had ten or twelve wives, were constantly drunk, had no occupation but gambling, and were eager to cheat whomsoever they could. For these reasons the Farangis (Franks) have not in the Mogul country the estimation they formerly had ;many from greed of a small pay abandon their faith and turn Mahomedans, as if it imported little for the salvation of one's soul whether one is a Christian or a Mahomedan.

Manucci records how Europeans theatricalized Christianity in the Mughal court by indulging in lascivious acts or by becoming renegades. By becoming expatriates they exempted themselves from the virtuosity and masculinity that define the European nation's supremacy. Manucci believed that true Christianity thrived within the European boundaries alone. He

condemned the Indian Christian's practice of touching tombs and idols with their bodies in order to obtain benefits and blessings. He regarded the Christians in India more as heathens than as worshippers of "the true Faith or... of the holy Mother Church". (Manucci 16) By converting to Christianity, Indians modified the Faith and its practices to suit their temperaments. Unable to ever become a true European Christian, the Indians perform differently the alien religion subsequently subverting Christianity as well as the dominant local religion (Islam/Hinduism). Subsequently, Manucci distinguishes himself as a true Christian as opposed to these converts and regards the latter as adulterated.

Despite Aurangzeb's antitheatrical doctrine he was compelled to enact theatrical performances in order to sustain his kingship; diplomacy and espionage are inevitable theatrical elements for a ruler. Manucci notes with aversion how Aurangzeb's maxim was "to make use of oaths only to deceive." (Manucci 25) He states how:

...With this cloak of renunciation he (Aurangzeb) deceived many, and secured intimacy with the poor mendicants, many, of whom were devoted to him, and the greater number of them were used as spies, to give him news of the many things that occurred. (Manucci 159)... He was so subtle as to deceive the quickest-witted people, among whom are these fakirs. (Manucci 229)

Manucci's distrust in Aurangzeb doubles when the latter forged a letter in Shah Jahan's name, asking Dara to attack Agra and kill Aurangzeb, to take over the throne. Aurangzeb ensured that this letter was read in court, so that the public gained sympathy for him and condemned Shah Jahan's slyness. He narrates the theatrical performance of the Emperor on hearing the contents of the letter:

On hearing its contents, Aurangzeb feigned consternation, and his face blanched ; he began striking the ground with his feet and beating his pillows with his open hand ; he made display of the greatest terror, as at some most displeasing news, and betrayed all the signs of having learnt of some great treachery. He held his head down in thought, and then directed the letter to be read aloud, and after that told them to give it to anyone who wanted to read it for himself. By these actions everybody was greatly terrified. (Manucci 296)

It is interesting to note that Manucci who is so averse to theatricality and duplicity in general, inadvertently becomes himself a performer and an impostor. Manucci feigns to be a physician in order to earn his living in the Mughal court. The Mughals trusted his diagnosis as they considered European physicians to be more efficient than the local Persian doctors. Subsequently, Manucci faked medical knowledge and treated people as a quack:

It happened that a relation of the envoy fell ill, and imagining that I was a physician, as they suppose all Europeans to be, they called me to their house. I knew a few secrets, but I did not give myself out as a physician, nor was I bold enough to teach myself medicine at the expense of others' lives. But seeing that these savages had sent for me to their house, I was anxious to see how they lived. (Manucci 39)

Manucci recounts how he convincingly he played the part of a physician to deceive the patient. By faking medical knowledge he secures his reputation as a learned physician which ensures regular income:

To induce him to believe that I was a great physician, I asked the patient's age, and then for a time I assumed a pensive attitude, as if I were seeking for the cause of the illness. Next, as is the fashion with doctors, I said some words making out the attack to be very grave. This was done in order not to lose my reputation and credit if he came to die. (Manucci 41)

The antitheatrical Manucci who is averse to imposture is seen feigning and performing quackery in Hindoostan. His theatricality reflects the hypocrisy of Europe, which outsources deceit and absurdity to the Orient. Manucci instructed all his servants to inform everyone who asked about him that he was a “firang” doctor:

Thus it began to be noised in Lahor that a Frank doctor had arrived, a man of fine manners, eloquent speech, and great experience. I rejoiced at such a reputation, but my heart beat fast, for then I had had no experience. It pleased God, our Sovereign Lord, to open the door to me with a case furnished me by his Divine Providence.

Manucci theatricalizes Christianity through his belief that Divine Providence will assist him in securing a reputation by duplicity. He justifies his actions with theological rhetoric and by making God his accomplice. He recounts with relief how he saved an old dying woman during his practice in Lahore, when he knew not what “ingredients” to apply or what “implements” he could have recourse for to perform an operation. He gave her an enema assuming that she suffered from constipation and the treatment worked. Since then, Manucci acquired the reputation of a physician who had the powers to revive the dead/dying. (Manucci 178) Quackery gained him much reputation and increased his finances, enabling him to lead a lavish life. Hansen makes note of the concoction he gave the woman and shudders at Manucci’s remedies. Manucci prepared brews from “mallows, wild endive, herbs, bran, black sugar, salt and olive oil.” He prepared the enema clyster from a cow’s udder and a hookah tube. (Hansen 367) Hansen records Manucci’s medical success while foregrounding his deception: “in the country of the blind the one eyed man is king”.

Manucci acquired the fame of being an exorcist too, when he accidentally “cured” a possessed woman through a “nimbleness of wit”. (Manucci 217) Subsequently the “firang” physician was much sought after by the kith and kin of the deranged and the ailing. Manucci always believed that the Indians “pretended” to be mad and used therapy as nostrum to treat the deranged. He describes his treatment in his account:

Being credulous in matters of sorcery, they (Indians) began to bruit abroad in all directions that the Frank doctor had the power of expelling demons, including dominion over them. This was enough to make many come, and among them they brought before me many women who pretended to be possessed (as is their habit when they want to leave their houses to carry out their tricks, and meet with their lovers), and it was hoped that I could deal with them. The usual treatment was bullying, tricks, emetics, clysters, which caused much amazement, the actual cautery, and evil-smelling fumigation with filthy things. Nor did I desist until the patients were worn out, and said that now the devil had fled. In this manner I restored many to their senses, with great increase of reputation, and still greater diversion for myself. (Manucci 218)

Manucci’s narrative is rampant with his own slippages into theatricality, which he justifies as valid in order to survive in the hypocritical oriental society. The orient then becomes

analogous to the stage where all identities are performed, thereby creating a realm of hypocrisy which reflects the double standards of an individual. Manucci's finances increase proportionately to his duplicity. Hypocrisy secures him a comfortable life, although he refuses to accept it out of fear of losing his "honorable" European identity.

Having undergone a sea change from rags to riches in the Mughal Empire, Manucci realized that his Christian peers were jealous of his achievements. He recounts how several European rivals attempted to kill him and have his medical books stolen. (Manucci 104) He criticizes Europeans to be worse than Mohammedans and inadvertently subverts the moral image subscribed to the European.

After acquiring a considerable amount of wealth, Manucci attempted to flee the country several times in vain. He wanted to live among Christians again, being tired of living among oriental heathen. However, Shah Alam, Aurangzeb's son, always learned of his flights through his spies before he could cross the borders of the country, and brought him back to the Mughal court. (Manucci 283). On his fifteenth attempt at fleeing, Shah Alam makes him swear by Jesus not to flee the country:

I swore after the manner of Hindustan that is, by the feet of His Highness that I would appear again. But he refused this oath, and called upon me to swear by the name of the Messiah, and that then he would place faith in my words and permit me to quit the royal camp. Finding he required this of me, I swore by the terrible, venerable, and admirable name of Jesus that I would be faithful to my promise. (Manucci 283)

But Manucci does not keep his word. He attempts to flee the country from Goa. He uses his Faith to his convenience and "makes oaths only to deceive" like Aurangzeb, his oriental counterpart. Having lived for decades in India, he loses the "Europeanness" which he cherishes so much and indulges in duplicity, thereby subverting the antitheatrical philosophy of Europe and Christendom. He adapts to Indian clothes and starts dressing like a "desi", which would have caused Prynne to frown with fury:

The first was that, being dressed in the costume of the country, I fastened my gown or cabaya (qabd) on the right side, as is the fashion of Mahomedans. The Hindus fasten theirs on the left. I also went with my beard shaved, wearing only moustaches like the Rajputs, but without pearls hanging from my ears as they have. The Rajput officers wondered at this get-up, neither Rajput nor Mahomedan. They asked me what religion I belonged to; I replied that I was of the Christian religion. Once more they asked me whether I was a Mahomedan Christian or a Hindu Christian. For they recognise no other religions than these in Hindustan. I seized the opportunity to tell them a little about our faith. (Manucci 123)

Manucci assumes that he maintains "the Christian religion", which differs from Mohamedan and Hindu Christianity, by modifying his Indian attire, but he fails to see that he is subverting the antitheatrical Christian tradition by "disguising" himself in oriental clothes. He loses his European identity by adapting to the Indian lifestyle and culture, but always remains distinctly a "firang"- an alien who can never become a "desi" because of his western origins. He is neither an Indian, nor a true European as he lives on the margins of both cultures- living an Indian life but asserting a European identity.

Manucci never lost a chance to extol European supremacy to the Indian princes. When asked if Europe had armies, wars and squadrons, Manucci answered proudly, “we in Europe knew what war and fighting meant”. (Manucci 136) His European patriotism came quickly to the defense of his country’s masculinity and prowess in warfare. He explained further to the Indian Rajputs the tactics of European combat, which he believed were far more advanced than those used by the naïve Indian princes. Manucci secures Europe’s identity by outsourcing inefficiency, femininity and failure to the East.

Manucci’s superiority complex can be traced among other European travelers who visited the Mughal Empire during Aurangzeb’s reign, such as Francois Bernier, an aristocratic French doctor, who constantly compared Mughal India to seventeenth century France. Bernier compared the river Jumna to the Loire and the Indian naan to the Parisian baguette, making a note of how the former was a poor imitation of Parisian confectionary. (Visions of Mughal India: An Anthology of European Travel Writing ix) Both European travelers overlook the transformation incurred in their identities while occupying themselves with demeaning the Orient.

The Rajput king knighted Manucci as the “Firang Rajah”, as he confessed that he had never met such a versatile personality before. Manucci’s proficiency in the Persian and “Hindustan languages” gave him an edge over other Europeans in the Mughal court, and he used his multilingual skills to acquaint the Oriental princes with Europe’s splendor and Christianity’s virtuosity. (Manucci 104) By mastering foreign languages Manucci is subject again to theatricality as he performs the Orient orally.

By adapting to oriental culture and language, Manucci’s European identity undergoes a transformation, as Prynne always feared, performance displaces one’s identity. Manucci’s body too undergoes a change due to gastronomic reason. Having consumed Indian food for decades, the European physician’s body gets used to the Indian palate and can no more digest European food. Manucci’s corporeal cells too were subject to change due to his extended performance/theatricality: “For, as they told me, having become accustomed to the climate and the food of India, and being already advanced in age, I should not last very long in Europe.” (Manucci 255). Despite his transformation, Manucci always remains a “firang” in India and a misfit in the European tradition. He lives on the cultural margins of both the Orient and the Occident because of his theatricalized/ acquired identity and underscores the double standards of both cultures. He confesses towards the end of his memoir, how the Orient might have given him wealth, but has not affected his affection for Europe:

Some will say to themselves that in those lands there must be some delectable fields which caused my return there. But in reality, granting that by God's favour I did have the luck to attain some good fortune, yet never had I any desire to settle there. For, of a truth, they have nothing that can delight or win people from Europe, or make them desire to live there. The country is not good for the body, much less for the soul...The country is not good for the soul, as much from the licence one has there as from the absence of Catholic observances. Thus, when I could leave it, I did so; nor should I ever have gone back there had I not been forced by necessity. (Manucci)

Manucci affirms that there is nothing to delight Europeans in the Orient and that he stayed there more out of necessity than out of choice. He forgets to mention, however, the oriental pleasures and the luxurious life that he could afford as a reputed physician- a profession that he would never have been able to pursue in Europe. He disregards mentioning the riches he accumulated under various Mughal officials in Goa, Rajasthan, Madras and Pondicherry and is very reticent to talk about his property in Madras, his marriage to a lady of Portuguese descent and the birth of his son who lived only for a couple of months. His criticism of an “absence of Catholic observances” is an irony that speaks to his own slippages into theatricality/ hypocrisy while he worked as a physician in Mughal India and served as a negotiator, mediator and ambassador for both the Portuguese and the British during the reign of Shah Alam. He soon became perpetually involved in Indian politics, feigning and performing on the behalf of Europe, thereby becoming the very subject of theatricality, an art that he despised and associated with the orient.

Bernier too affirms his inclination to return to France after visiting the Mughal court: “I may indeed say, without partiality, and after making every allowance for the beauty of Delli, Agra, and Constantinople, that Paris is the finest, the richest, and altogether the first city in the world. ” (Bernier 286). Like Manucci, having almost become Indian during his long sojourn in the Mughal court, Bernier is reluctant to forsake his European identity. Although asserting himself to be an “objective” and an antitheatrical historian, Bernier too is compelled to theatricalize/perform the Orient in order to earn his living in the Mughal Empire.

Aurangzeb shares the marginalized space of Manucci because of his alien temperament. Aurangzeb’s antitheatrical philosophy subverts the theatricality of Indian culture and his stringent policies on the elimination of artistic performances marks him as an oriental tyrant in the eyes of his subjects, who are lovers of theatre/theatricality. His alterity estranges him from the theatricality that defines “Indian” culture and he is remembered as an eccentric and a fanatic tyrant to this day by some Indians (Hindus/ Christians/ Lovers of art?). Apart from his antitheatrical stance which marked him as different, Aurangzeb’s foreignness was theatricalized by his father since his childhood. By naming him the “white snake”, Shah Jahan discriminates Aurangzeb on racial and on humanistic grounds. Manucci recounts how a fakir warned Shah Jahan against Aurangzeb who would bring about the destruction of the Mughal Empire and who would be the cause for his death as well:

The faqir answered that it would be Aurangzeb, who in those days was quite a child. This was the reason that Sultan Khurram never had any love for Aurangzeb. From this time he (Khurram) began to scoff at him (Aurangzeb), calling him the White Snake, he being fairer than all his brothers. Sometimes he resolved to kill him, but his elder sister, called Roshanara Begam, always preserved him, and God reserved him to be the chastisement of his father. (Manucci 179)

By making his skin color a cause for discrimination and by dehumanizing him to a “dissimulating” snake Shah Jahan marks Aurangzeb’s foreignness. Having been scoffed as a “snake” from childhood, Aurangzeb’s identity evolved to suit the epithet given to him. He performed duplicity to establish his identity; his alterity can be read as a theatrical feat.

Both Aurangzeb and Manucci display theatrical and antitheatrical elements which construct their foreignness and bar them from qualifying as “Indian” or “European”. They change their identities constantly to suit their convenience and subvert nationhood and religion in the process. Their identities are constructed through performance, as a result of which they become aliens in their respective societies. Their identities are continually made, revised and remade to suit the situation. Subrahmanyam observes how these “passeurs culturels” mediate between Eastern and Western cultures effortlessly and become aliens in the process. (Subrahmanyam 138) He sketches the construction of foreignness and foregrounds how distance and nearness play an important role in the politics of belonging. The stranger “imports qualities into it (the group), which do not stem from the group itself”... “His position in this group is determined essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning”. (Subrahmanyam 176). The fluid identities of Manucci and Aurangzeb make them anti-historical figures, lacking internal unity and a progressive development.

Ironically, the historian Manucci dehistoricizes Europe through perpetual self-transformation. By disregarding the European doctrines that mark ideal citizenship, the deceitful Manucci is excluded from the modernity that defines Europe. His history of the Mughal Empire is a palimpsest of his own inconsistent identity. Chakrabarty advocates that such non-teleological narratives of the self enable “subjunctive possibilities” through human interaction, becoming contestable texts to examine the duplicity of modernity. (Chakrabarty 46). The anti-historicity of both Aurangzeb and Manucci is a cursor to the shifting patterns that undermine traditions, establishing performance as the discourse of identity.

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i. This does not hold true for Aurangzeb who was born an “Indian”. However, by subverting his religion and culture on several occasions, Aurangzeb acquires a fluid identity, becoming a stranger in his own land.