

3 Postcolonial Studies, Hybridization, and the Global History Approach

As early as 1998, Ania Loomba could attest that postcolonial studies had become “fashionable within universities the world over,”¹ and many of the universities in question are in the “West.” That “postcolonial studies” is to a great extent a product of “Western” universities and “Western” theory, above all French poststructuralism, illustrates very well the complexities of this theoretical approach.

“Postcolonial studies” developed from a perspective of the colonized to a mainstream theoretical perspective. This development made its way through the colonial educational system and became hegemonic by the appointment of such well-known exponents of “postcolonial studies” as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak as professors at the major U.S. universities. This development, along with the roots of “postcolonial studies” in French poststructuralism, illustrates well that the perspective emerged in an environment that was deeply “Western” in its origin. The educational system on which “postcolonial studies” based its assertiveness is in many respects rooted in national states and national narratives which were, in the 19th century, often colonial in their outlook.² The situation in the U.S. is no exception in this regard. In the late 19th century, the U.S. was one of the driving forces of imperialism³ and the Southern states of the U.S. were among the last to actively benefit from the exploitation of slaves whose predecessors had been taken there as a result of colonialism.⁴ One should not forget that the universities were always heterogenous. They could be at once nationalistic and conservative, on the one hand, and international and revolutionary, on the other. From the early 19th century onwards, students were an important political factor in all revolutionary movements (especially anti-colonialist movements) around the globe. Nevertheless, the underlying “Western” idea of the university as a site of power – in the sense of being an institution which organized and managed knowledge, and which, with the rise of the *Forschungsuniversität* model,⁵ also became the main producer of

1 Ania Loomba, *Colonialism / Postcolonialism*, The New Critical Idiom (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), xi.

2 Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 1132–47.

3 Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*, The Blackwell History of the World (Malden MA, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell, 2004), 229.

4 Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914*, 405.

5 Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 1134.

knowledge – cannot be overestimated. Postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha (Harvard University) and Gayatri Spivak (Columbia University) are the prototype of scholars who depend on that structure to maintain their hegemonic positions within the academic discourse.

In a sense, this view is similar to Hulme's idea of the use of "postcolonial" as "a badge of merit,"⁶ because the label seeks to demarcate a particular type of scholarly work from "colonial" scholarship. As a consequence, it tends to deny colonial grammars and to neglect neocolonial aspirations. Shohat describes this problem with reference to the example of the tendency towards the homogenization of (post)colonial experiences. If highly diverse areas such as settler colonies (Australia and the Americas) and governmental colonies (British India) are equated, and their populations, e.g. white settlers and native peoples, are categorized together, then "the term 'post-colonial' [. . .] masks the white settlers' colonialist-racist policies toward indigenous peoples not only before independence but also after the official break from the imperial center, while also de-emphasizing neocolonial global positionings of First World settler-states."⁷ However, Shohat does not assume that "post-colonial" studies "did" this on purpose, but rather that "the disorienting space of the 'post-colonial' generates odd couplings of the 'post' and particular geographies, blurring the assignment of perspectives." But "the unified temporality of 'postcoloniality' risks reproducing the colonial discourse of an allochronic other, living in another time, still lagging behind us, the genuine postcolonials."⁸

These critiques of the notion must be taken into account when we talk about "postcolonialism." But even if we avoid using the vocabulary of the "postcolonial," if we are to draw on approaches rooted in postcolonial thought then we must acknowledge its universalizing tendency. This means that we must take care about making claims about the validity of our analyses outside our own subject of research. Only detailed, historicized research can show whether certain theoretical approaches can be used to formulate plausibility in other contexts. I maintain that giving preference to postcolonial studies over other theories can be justified by the oft-repeated claim that "postcolonialism" insists on the agency of the colonized. This claim argues that, even if the orientalist discourse invented "the Orient" (Said), this "Orient" was (and still is) no monolithic entity (Bhabha and others), and that orientalists were largely influenced by local informants, the languages they learned, the texts they read, and by living in foreign

⁶ Peter Hulme, "Including America," *Ariel* 26, no. 1 (1995): 120.

⁷ Ella Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'," *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 102–3.

⁸ Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'," 104.

countries. Or, to put it in Stuart Hall's words, the "postcolonial" view marks a "transition from a conception of difference to *différance*. This obliges us to re-read binary oppositions as forms of transculturation, of cultural translation, which inevitably lead to permanently questioning the cultural dichotomy."⁹

In my opinion, this transition from a view of "difference" to a consideration of *différance* is the core of "postcolonialism" because it unmasks the colonial discourse as fragile and at risk of crumbling. Derrida's concept of *différance* shows that every performance of a text – understood in the broadest possible way – reshapes and therefore alters it. These small alterations are manifestations of individual agency.¹⁰ As Hall rightly explains, "postcolonial theory" tries to describe discourses which are not determined by dichotomies or teleologies, but are inherently incomplete and therefore ongoing.¹¹ This implies that discourses cannot be closed – although hegemonic actors have repeatedly tried to close them – while simultaneously implying the possible agency of every actor. This observation is borne out at several points in the present book, such as in the controversy about the concept of the human constitution in the Theosophical Society (see Chapter 12.8) or in the case of Vasu and Besant discussed in Chapter 13.3. Local scholars and "Western" scholars simultaneously engaged in the hegemonic discourse in multifaceted ways and reshaped this discourse according to their own agendas, as

9 English relay translation from the author, originally translated into German by Anne Emmert. "Übergang von einer Konzeption der Differenz [. . .] zur *différance*; [. . . Dieser] verpflichtet uns auch, die binäre Form selbst, in der die koloniale Begegnung so lange dargestellt wurde, neu zu lesen. Er verpflichtet uns, die binären Oppositionen als Formen der Transkulturation, der kulturellen Übersetzung neu zu lesen, die unweigerlich dazu führen, die kulturelle Dichotomie von hier und dort permanent infrage zu stellen." Stuart Hall, "Wann gab es »das Postkoloniale«? Denken an der Grenze," in *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Sebastian Conrad, Shalini Randeria and Regina Römhild, 2nd ed. enl. (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus, 2013), 204.

10 The (non)concept of *différance* is difficult to reduce to just one sentence, as I do above. However, in this context, referring to Hall's statement, it seems justified to describe it in such a way. Derrida talked about *différance* in at least four different ways: "There are (at least) four ways in which one might approach the concept of difference in the work of Jacques Derrida: difference as a poststructuralist critique of the supposedly post-metaphysical attention to meaning as generated through systems; difference as the post-phenomenological problem of time; sexual difference; and the difference between humans and non-humans" (Claire Colebrook, "Difference," in *A Companion to Derrida*, ed. Zeynep Direk and Leonard Lawlor, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 56 (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 57). For the use in Derrida's oeuvre that is in line with my description of *différance* above, see Jacques Derrida, "Signatur Ereignis Kontext," in *Randgänge der Philosophie*, ed. Peter Engelmann (Wien: Passagen Verl., 1988), 298–99.

11 Hall, "Wann gab es »das Postkoloniale«?," 215.

can be seen in the examples of Manilal Dvivedi, T. Subba Row, and Edmund Hardy. This shows that the repressive colonial discourse was never absolute but was constantly negotiated and renegotiated (Bhabha). This does not, however, mean that it was an egalitarian discourse but rather that the process of the attribution of meaning¹² was part of an entangled power structure in which the territorial occupation by the colonizers and the hegemonic production and management of knowledge were inseparable.¹³

The structures of knowledge production and management are much more of a focus of postcolonial studies – as I understand it – than are the territorial occupation and exploitation of the colonized. In my book, this knowledge production is understood as a process of negotiation (Bhabha) in which both colonizer and colonized partook, although the grand narratives, and especially the narrative of evolution, limited what could be articulated in this process.¹⁴ As will be discussed below (see Chapter 6), the discourse on evolution was also heterogeneous and in no way hegemonic when it emerged at the beginning of the 19th century. These narratives later came to occupy hegemonic positions within the discourse because they were sanctioned by institutionalized hegemonic positions, such as university affiliations or government positions.

So, if it were once again asked what the merit of the “postcolonial” is, one answer might be that it allows us to ask about the grand narratives and to renarrate them, as Hall puts it: “From this view the postcolonial perspective breaks with the conventional metanarrative of history that is essentially framed in terms of Western hegemony.”¹⁵ “Postcolonial” studies thus aim at renarrating “colonialism” by focusing on the agency of the colonized. Against this

12 María do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie: Eine kritische Einführung*, 2nd ed. rev., Cultural Studies 36 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 22.

13 English relay translation from the author, originally translated into German by Anne Emmert. “In dieser Hinsicht markiert die »postkoloniale« Perspektive einen entscheidenden Bruch mit der gesamten historiographischen Meta-Erzählung, [. . .] die im Wesentlichen im Rahmen der europäischen Parameter erzählt werden konnte.” Hall, “Wann gab es »das Postkoloniale«?,” 214.

14 This does not mean that “evolution” was uncritically received as “Darwinist” evolution or that everybody simply “believed” in “evolution” but that the narrative of “development” from simpler to more complex forms became a hegemonic narrative at the end of the 19th century at the latest. For the complex dynamics of the uptake of “evolutionist” theories and their different and often concurring currents, see Eve-Marie Engels, “Biologische Ideen Von Evolution Im 19. Jahrhundert Und Ihre Leitfunktion: Eine Einleitung,” in *Die Rezeption Von Evolutionstheorien Im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Eve-Marie Engels (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995); Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 3. ed., rev. and enl. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). See also Chapter 6.

15 Hall, “Wann gab es »das Postkoloniale«?,” 208.

background, I argue – and will illustrate with several examples – that in the era of British colonialism at the end of the 19th century, colonizers and colonized formed a global colonial discursive continuum in which both could, at least potentially, partake. In this discursive continuum, colonizers and colonized were both influenced through connections between numerous discourses and by new discourses that formed in and emerged from their multifaceted encounters.

3.1 Why Hybridity?

Bhabha's concepts of "hybridity" and "hybridization" have become widely accepted and often uncontested terms for describing processes of cultural exchange. The term "hybridity" is rooted in biology and first became popular during the 18th and 19th centuries in discourses about evolution and race. Robert Young has traced its origins from its application in racial discourses through its use by Bakhtin to its reception in the thought of Bhabha and in postcolonialism in general. He concludes that,

There is an historical stemma between the cultural concepts of our own day and those of the past from which we tend to assume that we have distanced ourselves. We restate and rehearse them covertly in the language and concepts that we use [. . .] Hybridity in particular shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and contemporary cultural discourse.¹⁶

Of course, the racial connotations of "hybridity" and its embeddedness in discourses about whether Africans are humans represent a severe case of academic complicity in colonialist discourses.¹⁷ Against this background, it is necessary to consider honestly whether a term like "hybridity" can be used to describe discursive structures of resistance in the colonial era, because, given its history, it seems to make a mockery of any such attempted description. If the language of "hybridity" is historically tarnished, it must be asked whether there are any other suitable terms available to us. Terms such as "syncretism," "inculturation," "assimilation," "adaptation," "creolization," and so on, might act as substitutes, yet these all have their own connotations and their own heritages. It is not a question of whether terms carry multifaceted meanings – they

¹⁶ Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 27.

¹⁷ Young, *Colonial Desire*, 1–28.

all do; there are no innocent terms! – but whether these connotations are discussed and taken into account when applying them in analytical contexts.¹⁸

As Shohat has argued, “hybridity” denies “pre-colonial” identities and is therefore apolitical. She claims that “the anti-essentialist emphasis on hybrid identities comes dangerously close to dismissing all searches for communitarian origins as an archaeological excavation of an idealized, irretrievable past.”¹⁹ In consequence, Shohat maintains that the “reinvention” of identity is the crucial task for “post-colonial” communities because a “celebration of syncretism and hybridity per se, if not articulated in conjunction with questions of hegemony and neo-colonial power relations, runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the *fait accompli* of colonial violence.”²⁰ Shohat makes a valid point, but she seems to overlook the way in which “new” identities can never be “new” nor “old.” As Bhabha might put it, every “identity” is necessarily “hybrid.” Nevertheless, Shohat is correct that this should not prevent (post)colonized societies from re-searching their (pre)colonial past and thus “digging up” “their culture,” as she puts it. A central question that she frames in a particularly precise way is this: “Who is mobilizing what in the articulation of the past, deploying what identities, identifications and representations, and in the name of what political vision and goals?”²¹ To what end and in pursuit of what agendas does anyone employ the narratives of stable identities? The way I understand Bhabha’s work, this is the central question to be asked as it directly interrogates the power relations that are at play in hegemonic discourses, claiming that a (national) identity can be understood as a discursive strategy aimed at establishing hegemony.

For the present book, the main problem with the concept of “hybridity” is that it lacks any kind of ability to differentiate and, as such, inherits notions of universalism and essentialism. Hence, as Shohat maintains, the “location” of “hybridity” must be discussed. “As in the term ‘post-colonial,’ the question of location and perspective has to be addressed, i.e. the differences between hybridities, or more specifically, hybridities of Europeans and their off-shoots around the world, and that of (ex)colonized peoples.”²² As Young argues in the context of the British

18 The problem discussed here is also discussed in relation to several other terms that feature frequently in this book: “postcolonialism,” “esotericism,” and “hybridity.” Indeed, the problem applies to all analytical terms, and probably to all other terms as well.

19 Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’,” 109.

20 Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’,” 109.

21 Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’,” 110.

22 Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’,” 109–10.

Empire, “hybridity” is an intrinsic characteristic because of the diasporic concept of “Englishness.”²³ He analyzes and traces this pattern of “Englishness” through different contexts and epochs, showing that it was – much more than “Frenchness,” for example – based on a “hybrid” relationship between “own and foreign” and “center and periphery.”²⁴ He explains that the notion of London as the “navel of world”²⁵ is necessarily ambivalent. In his words, “the moving machinery of London creates a strange economy of alienation and estrangement from the center, repeatedly translating the English around the world to haunt its furthest borders where they become at once other and by the same token, more English, in a distant, uncanny doubling of the origin.”²⁶ Although we have to be careful about simply assuming that “hybridity” is similarly applicable to all colonial settings, “hybridization” seems to be an appropriate concept when talking about British India. When we consider the specific contexts dealt with in this book, the “location” of “hybridity” can be identified in each of our examples. “Hybridity” is used here to describe, in particular, the discursive field within the Theosophical Society, a field that is, however, part of a broader global colonial discursive continuum (see Chapter 4.5). The notion of “hybridity” can be applied meaningfully in this context on several levels: Processes of “hybridization” can be identified in the formation of a specific concept of “Hinduism”²⁷ and in the development

23 Robert J. C. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell, 2008), 1–2.

24 Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 20.

25 Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 4.

26 Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, 4–5.

27 For instance, “Hinduism,” one of the most prominent terms in the present book, has often been discussed in the literature as ‘constructed’ by “Western” orientalist and the British government. Although many publications have shown that this analysis is accurate to at least some extent, it has also been criticized for downplaying, or even completely neglecting, the agency of Indians. Individuals such as Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Sarasvati, Radhakrishnan, Sri Aurobindo, and many others were deeply invested in the process by which “Hinduism” was “constructed,” and this process was considerably more complex and nuanced than the “constructivist” narrative leads us to believe. (For discussions on the “invention” of “Hinduism,” see e.g., Gavin D. Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5–22; Julius J. Lipner, “The Rise of ‘Hinduism’, or: How to Invent a World Religion with Only Moderate Success,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no. 1 (2007); Daniel Gold, “Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation,” in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. R. S. Appleby and Martin E. Marty, The Fundamentalism Project 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Angelika Malinar, *Hinduismus*, Studium Religionen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 13–26; Axel Michaels, *Der Hinduismus: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (München: C. H. Beck, 1998), 27–48; Heinrich von Stietencron, “Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a Deceptive Term,” in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Günther D. Sonthheimer and Hermann

of a pedagogical program in the Theosophical Society. Both of these emerged from a discourse between “Western” and Indian Theosophists and non-Theosophists that can be located within the broader global colonial discursive continuum. The events and conceptual developments described below take place in the British Empire at the end of the 19th century. In this context, Bhabha’s concept provides a perspective which allows one to perceive heterogeneity instead of presenting a “simple” homogenizing grand narrative.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to ask whether all “hybridities” are the same, or rather to what extent they are “the same” and to what extent they are “different.” We need to ask “what” is “hybrid”? And why is “it” “hybrid”? To describe these dynamics more concretely requires a terminology that allows for the description of “hybridity” and modes of “hybridization” on the textual level. In the next section, I will address Bhabha’s ideas about the “beyond,” “in-between,” “mimicry,” “hybridity,” and “hybridization,” taking the first steps towards the operationalization of his concepts.

3.2 The Idea of “Beyond” and “In-Between”

In his introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states that there has been an epistemological shift in academia towards the recognition of heterogeneity and the attempt to theorize and analyze those heterogeneities. He describes this shift in terms of going or thinking “beyond” stable categories. For him the “beyond” or the “in-between” categories are the spaces in which “identity” is negotiated. The “in-between spaces” are spaces in which identities are negotiated and demarcated from others. However, they can only be “signs of identity” because they always refer to “something” outside or “beyond” and thus remain intrinsically connected to this “other.” The articulation of differences is, as Bhabha puts it, a process of normalizing hybridity and therefore an attempt to inscribe it into an identity.²⁸

Kulke (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991)) Against this background, the language of “hybridity” seems to best describe the developments in which I am interested in my book, not least because “hybridity” is a concept derived by Bhabha and others mostly through the analysis of power relations and resistance in British India. Nevertheless, “hybridity” and “hybridization” still require further consideration as the language of “hybridity” also imports several other difficulties into any discourse in which it is used.

²⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: Locations of Culture,” in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1–3.

Reflecting on Renee Green’s exhibition in the Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, Bhabha explains that the connection between the polarities (the stairwell) is the location “in-between” which negates the possibility of dichotomies.

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities.²⁹

The “stairwell” connects two levels. More abstractly put, the stairwell signifies the articulated differences which always connect the “self” and the “not-self.” The connection reaffirms the difference while at the same time making the difference impossible. If this paradox is seen as intrinsic to every attempt at establishing “identity” then it opens up the possibility of thinking “beyond” “primordial polarities,” since every claim of identity remains intrinsically connected to that which it is not, and, thus, remains inherently fragile. As there are no clear-cut boundaries within any given category – such as race, gender, state of evolution, etc. – cultures are understood by Bhabha as fluid and as undergoing an ongoing process of ceaseless shaping and reshaping.³⁰ If scholars are to follow Bhabha, this would mean they can no longer compare “cultures” but, rather, have to zoom in on the constant formative processes of ongoing “shaping” and “reshaping.” Narratives of nationalism and tradition try to freeze the fluid described by Bhabha. He argues in the introduction to *Nation and Narration* that nations are constructed based on narratives which try to fossilize the identity or, better, to fix identity. Bhabha argues that nations are discursively constructed and that the narratives are necessarily unstable. Therefore,

it is the project of *Nation and Narration* to explore the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation. This turns the familiar two-faced god into a figure of prodigious doubling that investigates the nation-space in the process of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are *in medias res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made.³¹

It is, in my opinion, precisely this idea of meanings being constantly “*in medias res*” that is fundamental to Bhabha’s theory and is also what elevates the theory over its alternatives because it allows the undermining of any attempt to look for “originals” or pure entities which might be taken as fixed points in history.

²⁹ Bhabha, “Introduction,” 5.

³⁰ Bhabha, “Introduction,” 7.

³¹ Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: Narrating the Nation,” in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 3.

Strictly speaking, this claim resists *any* scholarly attempt to analyze “culture.” If it were to be properly taken into account, what would this mean for scholarly work? To begin with, scholars would have to describe processes instead of entities and, at the same time, they would also have to develop analytical tools to enable them to carry out this new type of analysis. A simple shift from a language of “culture” and “identity” to one of “process” and “negotiation” framed in terms of “hybridity” will not take us very far. Rather, one would need to show these dynamics in concrete examples. If texts are understood as points in an ongoing discourse, then what will be the consequence of this understanding? And what instruments could be used to analyze these discourses “*in medias res*”? In the following, I will describe an analytical tool which aims at describing “hybridization processes” in more detail and that will simultaneously allow for the differentiation of processes of “hybridization.”

3.3 Inherited Instability

Bhabha’s work induces a rethinking of categories because he convincingly argues for their instability. Hence, every “identity” – in the broadest sense in Bhabha’s work, including national identities, textual identities, and so on – is constructed through a demarcation from others. However, this demarcation is necessarily always temporary and can only be formulated and negotiated “in-between” identities. This is because – and think again of the stairwell, here – “self” and “non-self” are always connected by the difference which serves as the only point of reference for identity making. In this sense, “the ‘other’ is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously ‘between ourselves’.”³² In their interpretation of Bhabha’s work, Castro Valera, and Dhawan describe this feature of his theory as an act of self-assurance (Selbstidentifikation)³³ in which the colonial discourse is constantly accompanied by latent fear of loss of power.³⁴ In Bhabha’s interpretation of the colonial discourse, this dependency on the other undermines the dominant discourse³⁵ because it opens up a space for the other’s intervention.

Let us turn back to the questions raised at the end of the preceding section about the consequences Bhabha’s assumption might have for the analysis of

³² Bhabha, “Introduction,” 4.

³³ Castro Varela and Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie*, 255–56.

³⁴ Castro Varela and Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie*, 227.

³⁵ “Es ist gerade diese Abhängigkeit von den Anderen, die die eigene Identität kontinuierlich gleichzeitig stabilisiert und untergräbt,” Castro Varela and Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie*, 225.

(colonial) texts. One possible answer would be that the massive production of texts in the Theosophical Society can be understood as an ongoing attempt to close the discourse and to fix identity. If this possibility is kept in mind, one part of the analysis that follows is the identification of “signifiers of stability” and “signs of instability” in the Theosophical text production. I propose that we should understand the “signifiers of stability” as traces of “hybridization.” In the next chapter, instruments will be developed to identify these traces on the textual level.

3.4 Mimicry as a Strategy of Resistance

In Bhabha’s writings, “mimicry” can be understood as both an unconscious mechanism and a strategy of anti-colonial resistance. Indeed, it could be described as “hybrid” itself because it should be understood neither as a total assimilation into the hegemonic colonial discourse nor as a counter discourse. It is, rather, an (un)conscious strategy of the creative iteration of the colonial discourse.³⁶ Mimicry can thus be understood as both the effect of instability and, at the same time, a strategy, because it constitutes the colonial subject as “*a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite, [. . .] almost the same but not white.*”³⁷

The colonial narrative of supremacy can only be maintained if the “colonial mimicry” is never perfected. The colonial discourse needs another. Therefore, “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.”³⁸ Mimicry is described by Bhabha as “the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power.”³⁹ On the one hand, mimicry “produces” a reformed other, one that was civilized through the efforts of the colonizers. On the other hand, as the total adoption of the colonizer’s identity would destroy the colonial legitimization narrative, mimicry must always be flawed and incomplete. This shows that the “colonized” is (still) in need of the colonizer. At the same time,

36 Karen Struve, *Zur Aktualität von Homi K. Bhabha: Einleitung in sein Werk* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2013), 143; David Paul Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, Routledge Critical Thinkers (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 57.

37 Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 127.

38 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 122.

39 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 122.

this “slippage”⁴⁰ of the mimicry opens, in Bhabha’s opinion, the locus for the resistance of the colonized: “The ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite) does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence.”⁴¹ This “partial presence” in which the colonial subject is both “wild” and “tamed,” “civilized” and “uncivilized,” is the margin or “in-between” in which the instability of the colonial discourse becomes apparent. The colonized were constructed and became “authorized versions of otherness.”⁴² This “otherness” is understood by Bhabha as undermining the colonial desire to “civilize” the colonial subject, because this project must necessarily remain incomplete. “The repetition of *partial* presence, which is the basis of mimicry, articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority.”⁴³

In Moore-Gilbert’s adaptation of the notion, the idea of “going native” as a kind of contrary mimicry becomes a co-concept of Bhabha’s mimicry.⁴⁴ Annie Besant is a striking example of this “going native.” The resemblance in both forms of mimicry, which is also present alongside the otherness, is an even larger threat for the colonizers because it reveals that there is no entity that is independent of the “Other,” or, to put it another way, there is no pure original. “Its threat, I would add, comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory ‘identity effects’ in the play of a power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no ‘itself.’”⁴⁵ In Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, the “ambivalence” that is inherent in “mimicry” is the crystallization point of colonial power and resistance.

The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to menace – a difference that is almost total but not quite. And in that other scene of colonial power, where history turns to farce and presence to ‘a part’ can be seen the twin figures of narcissism and paranoia that repeat furiously, uncontrollably.⁴⁶

40 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 123.

41 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 123.

42 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 126.

43 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 126.

44 Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London, New York: Verso, 2000), 149.

45 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 128–29.

46 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 131.

Mimicry thus disrupts the colonial discourse and the “gaze of otherness”;⁴⁷ the gaze of the colonized constantly disturbs the unstable identity of the colonizers.⁴⁸

The idea of the unstable colonial discourse that is related to Bhabha’s view of the colonial discourse as “hybrid sites of cultural negotiation”⁴⁹ is, I think, a very fruitful avenue of approach. This idea allows us to go beyond binaries such as “good” and “bad,” and helps us instead to conceptualize colonial encounters as encounters between people. As a result, it allows us to think of spaces of mutual agency instead of closed discourses. In these spaces the colonized become subjects with their own agendas and not simply victims. This is not to marginalize the crimes committed in the colonial era of European expansion. Rather, the goal is to “salvage” the colonized subject from the dust of history. This agenda and these “agencies” must, however, be shown in the concrete texts if we are to see how colonized subjects actually took part in this discourse. Agency in this process of negotiation was located by Bhabha in the “liminal moment of identification – eluding resemblance – [it] produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative ‘unpicking’ and incommensurable, insurgent relinking.”⁵⁰ As will be explained in the following paragraph, this agency is manifested in the differences of each “iteration” of the colonial discourse, a repetition in which the (colonial) discourse becomes “hybrid.” As part of the operationalization of the analytical tool below, I will argue that this “repetition” can be identified on the textual level in the primary sources I discuss. However, before discussing this analytical tool in detail it will be necessary to look again at what Bhabha understands by “hybridity” and “hybridization.”

3.5 “Hybridity” and “Hybridization”

“Hybridity” is the key concept in Bhabha’s writings. He conceptualizes “hybridity” as a given fact in all cultures.⁵¹ As Huddart explains, “hybridity” “refers to an original mixedness within every form of identity.”⁵² Indeed, Bhabha even calls it a “historical necessity,”⁵³ because, for him, “hybridity” is the reason why

47 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 126.

48 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 126–31.

49 Homi K. Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency,” in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 255.

50 Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern,” 265.

51 Homi K. Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 31.

52 Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 6–7.

53 Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” 41.

transcultural endeavors are possible in the first place. In this sense, “hybridity [. . .] is an instance of iteration, in the minority discourse, of the time of the arbitrary sign – ‘the minus in the origin’ – through which all forms of cultural meaning are open to translation because their enunciation resists totalization.”⁵⁴ One of the difficulties in Bhabha’s theory is that he repeatedly describes “mimicry” and “hybridity” as entities which are at the same time structurally inherited and yet are also deliberate acts of resistance.⁵⁵ In the same manner, he claims that all cultures are “hybrid” while also talking of “strategies of hybridization.”⁵⁶ This leads to a tension between the two connotations of “hybridity” since the idea of “strategy” seems to imply “pure” identities which can be systematically “hybridized” or that “mimicry” is simply a disguise for some “original” that lies below the surface. It is exactly this tension that the term “hybridity” inherited from its roots in biology, where it describes the process of crossbreeding a “hybrid” from two “pure races.”⁵⁷ In Bhabha’s conception of the term, it describes the inscription of “the other,” which is already “hybrid,” into “the self,” which is also already “hybrid.”⁵⁸ One should, thus, differentiate between the process of “hybridization” and the state of “hybridity.”

Bhabha understands cultures as being constantly shaped and reshaped in an ongoing process which he called “hybridization.”⁵⁹ On his understanding, however, “hybridity” is the natural state of being. “Culture” is only the result of the (ab)use of power to fix the constant negotiations between “the self” and “the other.” His endeavor might be summarized as an attempt to explain how “the other” may inscribe itself into the hegemonic order of meaning⁶⁰ or, perhaps more accurately, an attempt to explain why the other was (and is) always part of the oppressive order of meaning. Bhabha understands this dynamic as both a universal fact of all cultures and a feature of all discourses, and as a strategy for resistance against any attempt at the authoritative fixation of discourses. In the example of Dvivedi (see Chapter 11), it makes a great deal of sense to speak of hybridity as a strategy. At the same time, the fragility and

54 Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 314.

55 Castro Varela and Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie*, 277.

56 Homi K. Bhabha, “Culture’s in-Between,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 58.

57 Cf. Young, *Colonial Desire*.

58 Bhabha, “DissemiNation,” 314.

59 Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, 7.

60 Castro Varela and Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie*, 238.

therefore the inherent hybridity is a prerequisite of Bhabha's theory because "hybridity" as a strategy could not otherwise influence the hegemonic discourse. These dynamics are discussed in terms of the argument between Row and Blavatsky (see Chapter 12.8).

3.6 A First Summary

To summarize, Bhabha's main concern is to describe the instability of discourses, especially as it relates to the building of colonial identity and to how the colonized can resist the hegemonic discourse. A number of premises underpin his theory. First, the idea of the inherent instability of discourses, which he explains by reference to the simultaneous inscription of the "other" in the process of identity building. Bhabha claims that identities can only be established through demarcation and that they therefore remain connected to that from which they demarcate themselves. He introduces the image of the "stairwell" to illustrate this idea and calls the space where meaning can be produced the "in-between" demarcation. In his view, this idea allows one to think "beyond" polarities and dichotomies. This leads him to claim that "hybridity" is common to every category and that the process of "hybridization" always leads from "hybridity" to "hybridity." Bhabha uses the idea of "mimicry" to illustrate this process, describing a strategy of resistance in the colonial discourse in which the instability is demonstrated by an assimilation which must be incomplete because there is no original that can be perfectly copied.

Although Bhabha bases his whole theory on the idea of "hybridization," it nevertheless remains a relatively vague concept. I argue that this is intended by Bhabha as a strategy for writing and reading against dichotomies. "Hybridity" in Bhabha's work must in many cases be read as a deconstructive strategy rather than a clear-cut concept. In this, he follows the example of Derrida's deconstructivism.⁶¹ Or as Moor-Gilbert puts it: "At times, indeed, his characteristically teasing, evasive, even quasi-mystical (or mystificatory) mode of expression seems designed to appeal primarily to the reader's intuition."⁶² He follows this by citing a telling passage from Bhabha's work: "If you seek simply the sententious or the

⁶¹ In her article on Derrida's "différance," Colebrook argues that Derrida often uses the term as a strategy and insists that it is not a concept (Colebrook, "Difference"; see also Jason Powell, *Jacques Derrida: A Biography* (London: Continuum, 2006), 80). As Bhabha is strongly influenced by Derrida's way of thinking, one might argue that Bhabha's "hybridity" has a similar purpose.

⁶² Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 115.

exegetical, you will not grasp the hybrid moment outside the sentence – not quite experience, not yet concept; part dream, part analysis; neither signifier nor signified.”⁶³ This comes very close to a description of a “deconstructivist” strategy which is “not yet a concept.”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Bhabha does provide several “definitions” of “hybridity” and “hybridization” throughout his work. Hybridity is described by Bhabha as a quality of the colonial discourse (the sign of the productivity of colonial power) but also as a subversive strategy.⁶⁵ “Hybridity” thus describes a fundamental state of uncertainty and instability in (colonial) discourses which includes the possibility of altering the discourse, but this depiction of the concept does not clarify how it is that “hybridization” as a process “works.” While working on the texts discussed in this book, it became clearer and clearer that a terminology describing the *process* of “hybridization” is needed if we are to analyze the “hybridity” that is detected in these texts. For this reason, the next chapter provides an analytical tool that will enable us to describe the process of “hybridization” on the textual level.

3.7 Overlaps and Common Claims of “Global History” and “Postcolonial Studies:” Global Connections, Relations, and Encounters

It is possible to articulate several claims that appear to be common to both “post-colonial studies” and “global history.” These include: a) that they both view their subject matter through the lens of heterogeneity instead of claiming homogeneity; b) they both think beyond national boundaries and Eurocentrism; and c) they both seek to widen the scope of their concerns to take in a global and multidisciplinary perspective. As Conrad puts it, overcoming disciplinary boundaries and national boundaries allows a perspective in which multifaceted global influences can be recognized.⁶⁶ In his recent introduction to “global history,” *Globalgeschichte schreiben*, Wenzlhuemer maintains that such claims are important as strategic

⁶³ Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern,” 260; also quoted by Moor-Gilbert Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 115.

⁶⁴ With reference to Colebrook (Colebrook, “Difference,” 65), who explains that Derrida’s *différance* was “not a concept,” I describe Bhabha’s “hybridity” as “not yet a concept” because it describes the constant process of terms and concepts in the making.

⁶⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817,” in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 159–60.

⁶⁶ Sebastian Conrad, *Globalgeschichte: Eine Einführung*, Beck’sche Reihe 6079 (München: C. H. Beck, 2013), 21.

statements that assist in the rethinking of certain categories, such as nation or race, but that they do not provide a research method.⁶⁷ He identifies an operationalization of the “global history” approach as a research desideratum and aims to provide an impetus towards such an operationalization.⁶⁸ This requirement is structurally similar to what was discussed in the previous chapter in connection to “hybridization.” It is argued below that “encounters” are the precondition of “hybridization.” The “global history” approach can provide theoretical considerations regarding the idea of “encounters” that will allow the use of these ideas in a more meaningful way in the operationalization of “hybridization.” As Conrad maintains, bringing “global history” and “postcolonial studies” into dialog with one another combines a macro-historical view that is often based on concepts such as “diffusion” and “integration” with a specific focus on the transfer process involved in encounters.⁶⁹ This is exactly what I aim to do in Chapter 4 by conceptualizing “hybridization.”

One important claim of “global history” is that there are no hermetically sealed spaces within history, only manifold connections, overlaps, and entanglements.⁷⁰ This view is connected to a methodological preference for analyses of transboundary connections and a non-Eurocentric view of history wherein “non-Western” actors are explicitly researched and included as key figures.

Common to the “global history” approach – as well as to “postcolonial studies” – is the attempt to rewrite the master narrative of the European *Sonderweg*. This is the narrative that claims that European hegemony was inevitable and that Europe was more or less the only active region in all of history. The idea of “conjunctures” seeks to contest this view. It tries to describe overlapping developments in the global context, such as the simultaneous colonial aspirations of empires such as the Chinese, Ottoman, Dutch, and Portuguese. According to this view, “colonialism” was not exclusively European and the European hegemony that resulted was not a necessary outcome. Following Chakrabarty, Conrad points out that, when describing “conjunctures,” terms such as “nation,” “empire,” and “colonialism” are used which were developed as parts of the European master narrative. They thus perpetuate that narrative

67 Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Globalgeschichte schreiben: Eine Einführung in 6 Episoden* (Konstanz, München: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017), 10.

68 Wenzlhuemer, *Globalgeschichte schreiben*, 13.

69 Sebastian Conrad and Andreas Eckert, “Globalgeschichte, Globalisierung, multiple Modernen: Zur Geschichtsschreibung der modernen Welt,” in *Globalgeschichte: Theorien, Ansätze, Themen*, ed. Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert and Ulrike Freitag (Frankfurt am Main, New-York: Campus, 2007), 23.

70 Conrad, *Globalgeschichte*, 9.

whenever they are employed.⁷¹ Chakrabarty claims that “one simply cannot think of political modernity without these and other related concepts that found a climactic form in the course of the European Enlightenment and the nineteenth century.”⁷² Hence, whenever scholars write about regions other than Europe, they use a set of terminology which inherits an epistemological blindness. Yet in order to be able to connect to the global discourse, it is necessary to use these terms. This is a scholarly dilemma. The hegemony of European scholarship also inscribed itself in the intelligentsia beyond Europe’s borders, especially in regions such as South Asia where a strong colonial education system was established. As a result, as Chakrabarty points out, a long tradition of scholarship from “Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic”⁷³ was supplanted by a European epistemology. This led to a lack of engagement with traditional thinkers on the part of the new generation of South Asian scholars, who turned instead towards “the European intellectual tradition.”⁷⁴ From Chakrabarty’s perspective, the “non-European” thinkers and their concepts are “dead” and therefore only subject to historical research, whereas “European” concepts are “alive” and accepted as universal explanations of how the world “works.”⁷⁵ Chakrabarty’s aim is not to introduce a new terminology that would be able to reverse the master narrative but rather to understand that,

European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought – which is now everybody’s heritage and which affect us all – may be renewed from and for the margins.⁷⁶

Chakrabarty’s claim is relevant for my considerations in two ways. 1) He identifies a paradoxical relationship between “European thought” and “non-Western nations,” with the European categories being “indispensable” and “inadequate” at the same time. 2) He claims that “European thought” is “everybody’s heritage” and can be “renewed from the margins.” This claim refers to an entanglement of discourses which enables the agency of the “non-Western” actors. If one is to follow Chakrabarty, attempts to erase colonial influences must be dismissed because of the irreversibility of the effects of colonialism. This

⁷¹ Conrad, *Globalgeschichte*, 22–25, 138–41.

⁷² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton Studies in Culture / Power / History (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

⁷³ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 5.

⁷⁴ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 6.

⁷⁵ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 108–11.

⁷⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 16.

insight became exceptionally influential and has since found many scholarly supporters. These have shown that, in the colonial era, European categories often began to be established as important points of reference for “non-Western” actors, especially in the South Asian elites. This is also true for earlier periods, but from the mid-nineteen century onwards, references to “European thought” became a *sine qua non* in “non-Western” scholarship.⁷⁷ One methodological trap would be to read these references as reflecting a total submission to the colonial discourse. Chakrabarty offers an alternative: to read them instead as “renewals from the margins.” These sorts of references to European scholarships can be observed in some of the material discussed below, especially in Dvivedi’s work. The sources discussed below draw a complex picture. Actors such as Dvivedi and Besant at the same time claimed a superiority for non-European writers while also “relationizing” them to – i.e., placing them into a relationship with – European thinkers.

These “relationizings” (see Chapter 4.6) were triggered by encounters which multiplied with the increasing density of global connections. Although far-away regions of the world were connected to each other via trade routes and other channels of exchange long before the 19th century, the density of these connections exploded⁷⁸ with the invention of the railway, steamships, telegraphy, and, eventually, airplanes. If the scope of research is narrowed to South Asia and its exchange with Europe then the connection reaches back at least to the time of Alexander the Great,⁷⁹ and probably beyond. If the focus is instead placed on the Americas or Australia, a much later date must be set for the beginning of the exchange with Europe. The question of periodization is a major issue for “global history.” What are the characteristics of a global history? How dense must the network of connection be to allow us to talk about a global history?

For this book, the question of periodization is less relevant as no one would deny that by the end of the 19th century a global network of multifaceted relations was long established and that there were almost no events after this point which were not connected to the larger context of global history. However, these

⁷⁷ Conrad, *Globalgeschichte*, 143.

⁷⁸ Conrad, *Globalgeschichte*, 150.

⁷⁹ Alexander’s invasion of “India” did not make much of an impact and Indian historians do not seem to have taken much notice of him. It was only later, when the Muslim conquerors imported the legend of Alexander, that his name became known in India (Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *Geschichte Indiens: Von der Induskultur bis heute*, 2nd upd. ed. (München: C. H. Beck, 2010), 78). This is an interesting instance of how the perspective can make “facts.” For the self-image of “Europeans,” Alexander’s crusade was and still is a powerful narrative that has even been transported into Hollywood productions. But for most South Asians at the time, it was of almost no significance.

connections were not simply a result of European expansion but of diverse interplays between a huge number of actors with at times very different agendas and methods of exploring and conquering the world. Although this process culminated in the mid-nineteenth century with the development of global markets and the emergence of nationalism, it is important to keep in mind that there was no sudden moment at which every part of the world became connected to every other part. Rather, the chronology and the pace of this process varied significantly from region to region.⁸⁰ Cities like Bombay, Shanghai, London, or New York were “global” long before rural regions both within and beyond Europe. Still today there are differing degrees of being “global.” Guttannen in Switzerland is much less “global” than Mumbai, for instance, despite the one being at the “center” of Europe and the other in a former colony. Nevertheless, from a macro perspective it can be said that around the end of the 19th century, a “global colonial discursive continuum” (my term) was established (see Chapter 4.5). This was no homogeneous or even teleological development towards a global society, but a dynamic process of overlapping continuities and discontinuities. It will be seen that the idea of “hybridization” helps in conceptualizing these processes and allows a view onto continuities and discontinuities as outcomes of meshing processes of “hybridization.”

“Global history” seeks to conceptualize global connections.⁸¹ I argue below that relations which can be identified in the texts discussed in this book are reflections of these global connections. Or to put it another way, “entanglement” and “hybridization” are mutually interdependent. In his *Globalgeschichte schreiben*, Wenzlhuemer develops a methodology for “global history.” His approach allows for the concretization of the idea of “hybridization” which is operationalized in the following chapter. Situating “hybridization” in the field of “global history” will provide an opportunity for each concept to augment the other.

⁸⁰ Conrad, *Globalgeschichte*, 152–56.

⁸¹ Wenzlhuemer, *Globalgeschichte schreiben*, 16.