

## 14 Conclusion

At the top of this small hill, you have found yourself at the zero point of the world, at the centre of time itself. Paradoxically, for Greenwich to be the centre of the world in time it must be inscribed with the alterity of place. Stand to the left-hand side of the brass strip and you are in the Western hemisphere. But move a yard to your right, and you enter the East: whoever you are, you have been translated from a European into an Oriental.<sup>232</sup>

(Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire*, 1995)

Greenwich – as the epitome of the British desire to explore, describe, measure, categorize, map, understand, rule, dominate, and conquer the world – touches the center of this book. Only “move a yard” and “you have been translated from a European into an Oriental.” There is only a “brass strip” dividing “East” from “West” and preventing one from being “translated” from the one into the other: There is only the social construct, the desire to categorize, in order to *know* who we are, that lies in that yard between “East” and “West.” This desire was so powerful that it remains up till today the basis for all kinds of dichotomies: “East” and “West,” “civilized” and “uncivilized,” “first world” and “third world,” and, as some have suggested, even that between “global north” and “global south.” All these dichotomies can only exist together and are only brought into existence in relation to each other. The relations between these opposites are the “in-betweens,” the “stairwells” described by Bhabha, that “hybridize” that which must “already be hybrid” because “hybridity,” in the sense of a resistance towards totalization, is the condition that ideas can be repeated, transferred, de- and recontextualized, and relationized. All these processes of “hybridization” establish new and alter existing relations.

In the present book, I have analyzed those processes in the Indian Middle Class from which the notions of the Theosophical stages of initiation emerged. Both the Theosophical Society as a “mediating structure” and its members as “actors” were parts of a larger discursive field which I have identified as the (uppercase) “Indian Middle Class.” This is distinct from the notion of the (lowercase) “Indian middle class” as a social stratum. The (uppercase) “Indian Middle Class” is only one of the “fields” in which all of these actors (often members of the (lowercase) “Indian middle class” and “Western” Theosophists) were involved: While encountering each other, they at the same time realized connections between a multitude of other discursive fields.

The stages of initiation that emerged from these encounters were the corner stones of the grand scheme of Theosophical evolution, which was based on a

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232 Young, *Colonial Desire*, 1.

notion of self-development. This path of self-development was elaborated and systematized by Annie Besant in her concept of the “Quickening of Evolution,” according to which the stages of initiation formed the last few yards of the path. Both the “Quickening of Evolution” and the stages of initiation were re-contextualized in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*, the textbooks for religious instruction of the Central Hindu College, as the basis for the moral education expounded therein. The Central Hindu College was later incorporated into the Benares Hindu University, the first Indian Hindu University, where the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* were used as textbooks for religious and moral instruction from 1915 on.<sup>233</sup> The morality discussed in the *Text Books* provided several sets of virtues, each of which is relative to particular stages of the individual’s evolution. Manifesting these virtues would secure a swift progress towards initiation for the pupils of the Central Hindu College. This moral education should be understood as part of the grand scheme of Theosophical evolution; as such, it aims at initiation and the establishment of a more advanced humanity.

### 14.1 The Emergence of the Stages of Initiation and the “Quickening of Evolution” From the Indian Middle Class: Mapping out a Multifaceted Discursive Field

This book has identified the “Quickening of Evolution” as one of the fundamental topics of Besant’s early Theosophy. Besant’s view is based on an idea of evolution as self-improvement directed towards the acceleration of one’s own evolution. Initiation is regarded as the stage of this evolution during which the most rapid progress can be made. On each succeeding stage of initiation, a set of qualities and virtues is developed while certain powers, often identified as the *siddhis*, are acquired. These include powers which correspond with the display of clairvoyant faculties by Besant and Leadbeater.

In sum, the “Quickening of Evolution” provides a program that mediates between the two poles of the Master Paradox (see Chapter 7.1). The Theosophical masters were conceptualized as evolutionarily highly developed human beings: According to the Theosophical account, on the usual evolutionary path, it would take almost countless reincarnations to reach the level of a master. At the same time, the masters were understood as teachers who conveyed their wisdom to others through education. The vast evolutionary gap between the

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<sup>233</sup> At the current stage of research, it is unclear how long they were used as such.

masters and their students, ordinary human beings, could be bridged by a method which provided swifter progress, Besant’s “Quickening of Evolution.”

*The Voice of the Silence*, one of the late works of H. P. Blavatsky, has often been described as an important book for Theosophy, and is frequently referred to in the primary sources as central text of the Society. Surprisingly, there have been no previous studies that analyze the contents of this book. The close reading of Blavatsky’s *The Voice of the Silence* provided in the present book showed that the work is intended as a book of initiation. Not only does its structure as a dialogue between a master and a chela suggest such an interpretation, but so too does the description of the stages of initiation which can be found therein. These stages are presented in language that is opaque at times and loaded with references to a wide range of Theosophical concepts. Applying the analytical tool described above allowed the conceptualization of this work as a “hybrid” book based on “already hybrids.” Interestingly, there is a direct link to Manilal Dvivedi’s work in this context, for Blavatsky relied on Dvivedi’s *Rāja-Yoga* in her description of the stages of initiation.

As a book of initiation, *The Voice of the Silence* was also pivotal for Annie Besant’s own initiation by the Theosophical masters, with it being alleged that Besant met a Theosophical master for the first time after she read the work. Besant presented the stages of initiation later in a systematized way in her *The Path of Discipleship* and *In the Outer Court*, and these two works should thus also be read as “books of initiation.” These texts provide the clearest exposition of Besant’s notion of the “Quickening of Evolution.”

Both *The Voice of the Silence* and Annie Besant’s notion of the “Quickening of Evolution” emerged from numerous encounters in the “Indian Middle Class.” The Indian members of the Theosophical Society were initially seen in this discursive field as the experts on “Hinduism,” while the non-Indian members were the experts on “occult” matters. This gradually changed around 1890. At this time, the non-Indian members started to claim expertise on “Hindu” matters, while the Indian members tried to claim authority over occult matters as well. Describing these dynamics as relationalization has allowed the identification of certain formulations as markers for “hybridization processes.” These formulations aimed at claiming hegemonic positions in the discourse.

Manilal Dvivedi’s *Rāja-Yoga* is of great interest in the context of this discourse. I have argued that Dvivedi’s work was the blueprint for the idea of the stages of initiation in Theosophy. Being itself an “already hybrid,” it was the starting point for numerous “hybridization processes” which led to the uptake of rājayogic states of meditation and the Advaita Vedānta concept of approaching the guru as stages of initiation in the grand scheme of Theosophical evolutionism.

Another key player in this discourse was T. Subba Row. Row's work developed from a presentation of Advaita Vedānta that denied theistic ideas to a presentation of a theistic *bhakti* Advaita Vedānta in his *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*. His ideas concerning the merging with the Logos as the goal of human evolution and about the acceleration of this process seem to have been the blueprints for the later reception of "Hinduism" in the Theosophical Society. His work provides a paradigmatic description of the discursive dynamics in the Theosophical Society. Row claimed superiority for his theistic *bhakti* Advaita Vedānta not only over other systems of "Hinduism" but also over Theosophy as a whole. This led to an argument with Blavatsky in which Row could not prevail. The idea of absolute tolerance towards all other religions that was propounded in the Theosophical Society proved to have boundaries of its own, which were negotiated between the Indian and the non-Indian Theosophists around the 1880s. Row played a pivotal role in this negotiation.

The mapping out of the discursive field from which emerged the Theosophical ideas of the stages of initiation as the culmination of the "Quickening of Evolution" provided the background against which I conceptualized the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* as "hybrid" books of initiation. Several of the preliminary and the actual stages of initiation were identified as the blueprints for the ethics discussed in the *Text Books*. In some instances, the stages are explicitly named in these institutional texts for religious instruction.

The combination of these ethics with ideas about the *āśrama* system and the *varṇas* translated these notions of Indian social stratification into a scheme of (Theosophical) evolutionism. Following the ethics and ways of conduct described in the *Text Books* would help students to accelerate their own evolution, that of the nation, and, ultimately, the evolution of all of humanity. The nationalistic and, at times, royalist undertones of the *Text Books*, together with their views on hero worship, make them peculiar writings which differ in some important respects from Besant's (early) Theosophy. These differences indicate that these textbooks were a part of a continuing "process of hybridizations" in which numerous Indian and non-Indian actors partook.

As textbooks for religious instruction in the Benares Hindu University, the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* became yet another starting point for multifaceted "processes of hybridization" and played an important part in the emergence of Hindu nationalism. In this respect, their importance for the history of the Theosophical Society and for the wider context of the Indian independence movement, and, thus, for global history more broadly, have until now been underestimated.

In short, the present book describes a heterogeneous discursive field. Following the stages of initiation and the "Quickening of Evolution" through the

material considered here illustrates that “processes of hybridization” do not lead to discontinuities but rather provide continuity within new and altered relations. Referring to Foucault’s ideas about genealogy, and their inherent difficulties, Bergunder writes: “It is never a decision between one or the other. There is neither pure continuity nor pure discontinuity; there is always both, and scholarly assessment necessitates balance between them.”<sup>234</sup> Thinking of genealogies in terms of “processes of hybridization” while employing the analytical tool developed in this book allows one to “balance between” “pure continuity” and “pure discontinuity” because it helps one to think beyond ideas of “purity” and dichotomies of “continuity” and “discontinuity.” It allows the drawing of complex pictures of “exchange” processes while simultaneously maintaining heterogeneity and describing the succession of knowledge as a complex “metaprocess of meshing hybridizations.”

The analysis of these processes of hybridization shows that the Theosophical Society was neither “purely Western” nor “purely Eastern,” but part of a wider “field of encounters” that was embedded in the “global colonial discursive continuum.” The Indian and non-Indian Theosophical actors realized multifaceted connections in this continuum. This conclusively shows that the Theosophical Society as a structure was a significant cultural broker at the turn of the centuries from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup>, connecting Indian and non-Indian discourses alike by a process of mutual – but not necessarily equal in terms of power-asymmetries – agency of both “Easterners” and “Westerners.” This book thus provides a substantial contribution to a fundamental reconceptualization of the Theosophical Society and indicates numerous research desiderata which, when analyzed thoroughly, will draw an even more complex, and therefore more comprehensive, picture.

## 14.2 A View of Theosophy that goes “Beyond”

Theosophical thought is based on an idea that several higher planes of being exist above the physical world and that humans have several (generally seven, although the number may differ see Chapter 12) bodies which correspond to the physical and the higher planes of existence. The topics identified in the Theosophical writings considered in the present book are initiation into occult knowledge, the possibility of achieving higher knowledge by developing higher faculties of perception, and the possibility of accelerating evolution by self-

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<sup>234</sup> Michael Bergunder, “‘Religion’ and ‘science’ Within a Global Religious History,” *Aries* 16, no. 1 (2016): 133.

development. Theosophical reflections on these topics are often backed by references to Indian scriptures and ancient Indian writers. Similar elements have often been discussed in the scholarship as typologies for “esotericism”<sup>235</sup> in general or for Theosophy in particular.<sup>236</sup> So what is new here?

For one, I understand the references to the Indian scriptures *not* as another illustration of the well-known narrative of “Theosophical orientalism,” but rather as an indicator of a fundamental and mutual “exchange process.” To analyze these processes of “exchange,” I required an analytical tool which would allow me to draw a complex picture and to describe the heterogeneity of these “exchanges.” The language of “exchange” proved to be incapable of depicting such a complex picture because it is based on a conception of the simple “trading” of ideas that has no effect on the traded nor the traders. The analytical tool developed in the present book, which is based on Bhabha’s notion of “hybridity” and on concepts from the global history approach, provides a language that is more sensitive to the alterations which are the results of such “exchanges.”

Secondly, drawing on this analytical tool allows this book to go beyond descriptions of “initiation,” the “Eastern influence,” or “Theosophical evolutionism” to consider the “meshing processes of hybridization” between “East” and “West” which established numerous new relations and altered existing ones. Analyzing these processes made it clear that dichotomous ideas, such as that of a completely distinct and monolithic “East” and “West,” are untenable. On the basis of the theoretical framework laid out in Chapters 3 and 4, the resurfacing in my sources of elements from the typologies mentioned above proves my point, rather than undermining it, because it illustrates how “processes of hybridization” establish new relations and do not destroy but alter existing ones. However, the approach taken in the present book is very different from any typological methodology because, instead of being essentialist, it draws attention to multifaceted ongoing “meshing processes of hybridization.”

### 14.3 An Analytical Tool to Describe Hybridization Processes on the Textual Level

The discussion of Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity” threw up evidence that he did not provide a *useful* analytical tool for describing “hybridization.” His ideas should rather be understood as non-concepts and epistemological strategies for

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235 E.g. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*; Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*.

236 E.g. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*; Lubelsky, *Celestial India*.

thinking “beyond” (see Chapter 3.2). The notion of a “non-concept” is based on Derrida’s insistence that his idea of “différance” is not a concept.<sup>237</sup> Being a “concept” would undermine the effectiveness of différance, which should rather be read as a deconstructivist strategy.<sup>238</sup> I argue that “hybridity” should be understood as a structurally similar idea. Not only is Derrida’s “différance,” and the related notion of “iteration,” the theoretical foundation for Bhabha’s “hybridity,” but “hybridity” is also described by Bhabha using a language of “hybridity” that makes his notion and his manner of writing about it an epistemological strategy rather than a concept. As such, it remains problematic as an analytical category. “Hybridity” as a figure of thought is nonetheless well established in the scholarship. The development of an analytical tool in the present book has made it possible to not only *think* beyond but also to *research* beyond.

On the textual level, it is impossible to “observe” “hybridization” directly. It can only be identified by its “traces.” This means that two levels must be distinguished when analyzing “hybridization processes”: a) the level of the “traces of hybridization,” e.g., texts, and b) the level of “hybridization,” which is to be located on the level of discourse. Developing a language which allows for the identification of “traces of hybridization” has made it possible to differentiate between modes of “hybridization.”

In sum, the analytical tool allows the identification of numerous “traces of hybridization” on the textual level. By first identifying these traces, several different processes of “hybridization” can then be described. What is usually simply called “hybridization” should rather be understood as a multifaceted “meshing of processes of hybridization.” Such a view increases the level of detail perceivable. As such, it is the precondition for a research agenda which focuses on heterogeneity instead of homogeneity and allows us to conceptualize the potential connectedness of discourses. As such, this tool is not confined to research on the Theosophical Society but can be adapted to other fields of research in Religious Studies and beyond.

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<sup>237</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of a Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 11.

<sup>238</sup> Colebrook, “Difference,” 59.

#### 14.4 The Notion of “Already Hybrids”: Conceptualizing Non-Originals and Fields of Encounters as Premises for “Hybridization”

Following Bhabha, “hybridity” is understood here as a necessity. For it is only if concepts resist totalization, meaning that they can be used apart from the wider contexts in which they were first uttered, and also detached from the act of their first utterance, that they can be repeated in the multitude of contexts, which repetition is indicative of their “hybridity” (see Chapter 3.1). Hence, the “movement” of ideas, either from one linguistic system into another or within the same linguistic system to different synchronous and asynchronous contexts, can be understood in terms of “hybridization processes” of “already hybrids.” These “already hybrids” all have their own historicity and are part of numerous traditions repeating them in multifaceted contexts. Movements of “already hybrids” do not happen in abstract spaces but are triggered in encounters between actors and actors or between actors and texts. Numerous “actual spaces of encounters” often constitute what I have called “fields of encounters,” such as the “Indian Middle Class” (see Chapter 5) or “early orientalism” (as described in Chapter 10).

However, one cannot encounter any “originals” in these “fields of encounters” but only “already hybrids” in which numerous discursive fields are connected. These fields are all part of the global colonial discursive continuum in which all discursive fields are “potentially,” but not “actually,” interconnected. When actors encounter each other (also via texts), these connections become actualized. This is the precondition of “hybridization processes.” Actors then translate the connections made in these encounters into relations which can be identified by their traces on the textual level. Such traces can include, among other things, transliterated or translated words, references, certain elements and/or structures, or relationizings (see Chapter 4.6).

#### 14.5 Future Research

This book contributes to at least three fields of research: 1) research on Theosophy, 2) Postcolonialism and research on “hybridity,” and 3) global history. The first field is fast developing towards the inclusion of theoretical approaches derived from the latter two. Still, scholarship in this area is only beginning to implement sophisticated sets of theories and methodologies. My book makes a substantial contribution to this development.

In the research on the Theosophical Society, insular views prevail. What is required for a more comprehensive understanding is a view that includes the numerous fields in which individual Theosophists and the Society as a structure were engaged. The present book makes a contribution to such a view by identifying the importance of the Theosophical Society and Theosophical thought for education in India. This is not only an important part of the history of Theosophy, but also of the British Empire and of global history more generally. More fundamental research into Theosophical sources is needed to provide a foundation for future research in this area. Not only are comprehensive bibliographies and critical editions of the major Theosophical works currently lacking, but there are also no biographies of many major Theosophists which satisfy basic scholarly standards. Besant and Blavatsky might be exceptions in this respect, but, as I indicated in Chapter 8.1, numerous research desiderata also remain with respect to Besant's vita.

The analytical tool developed in this book helps one to perceive and manage an increase in complexity and a perspective on heterogeneity instead of homogeneity. However, a major difficulty is that I, as the author of the present book, constantly deploy "processes of hybridization" while elaborating my thesis. I have an interest in arguing my position and presenting it as superior to other positions when judged against epistemological or chronological criteria. Relationalization is one of the basic modes of scholarly work. I constantly refer to "distinguished scholars," "experts in the field," "instructive examples," and so on, to strengthen my argument. This is sanctioned by the scholarly tradition, but it is not *neutral*, and it is not devoid of power asymmetries. In taking this approach, I put forward another "already hybrid" based on "already hybrids" and when someone reads this text, he or she encounters these "already hybrids" which are repeated and altered in the very moment the text is read. The development of a formally structured and systematic methodology, and a constant reflection on and reevaluation of that methodology, cannot avoid this involvement, but it can at least render it more visible. It is to be hoped that in the future such a methodology will be developed based on the analytical tool introduced in the present book.

Global history makes high demands. One would have to know, or at least try to know, everything that was written about a particular period of time in order to describe all the global connections which influenced certain developments – and this would only satisfy the synchronic dimension of historical analysis. To acquire such a complete knowledge is impossible. What is possible is the development of research programs in which the complexity of "hybridization processes" can be described in more depth. That is why in the future more collaborations between scholars from diverse academic fields are needed. Bringing together

scholars of Religious Studies, Indology, and History, and scientists from different fields of the natural sciences (and hopefully many other disciplines) has the potential to assist in the development of research programs in which the complexity of “hybridization processes” can be described in more depth. The hope is that such collaboration will yield maps of networks of knowledge which would not rely on exclusion to reduce complexity but would rather feed on the inclusion of complexity. This would go *beyond* the theoretical claims of both postcolonialism and global history.