

Part A

Delineating transculturality

3

Cultural hybridity and transculturality¹

Axel Michaels

'Hybridity'

In times of globalization, almost everything seems to have become 'hybrid'. There are hybrid music and dance styles (Indo-jazz, salsa); there is fusion food; there is Bollywood; there are hybrid vehicles that use two or more distinct power sources; there are hybrid computers combining analogue and digital features. Hybridity, it seems, has become the normal status quo, and contributes to a positive connotation of many objects, practices and phenomena. This is important to highlight since originally, the term 'hybridity', stemming from Latin, meant the off-spring of a tame sow and a wild boar, hence a half-breed or bastard. As a result, for long there have been mostly negative undertones: hybrid meant something barren, bastard, inauthentic, less fine and thus degraded or hotchpotch.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe, the term came to be prominently used in natural sciences in the sense of fusion (nuclear physics), amalgamation (chemistry) or crossbreeding (biology). It was taken over in the humanities and social sciences, especially in anthropology, sociology, history and literary studies. Its normative association with 'less pure' and thus 'less valid', even 'threatening', continued in this realm, especially in a teleological lineage of 'civilized' versus 'primitive', 'advanced' versus 'backward' (see König, in this volume). According to Robert Young (1995), hybridity became the key term in racialized discourses of nineteenth-century evolutionism. Today, it has become a common term that is used differently according to disciplines. For instance, in history, the process of Hellenization with the transcultural processes of Romans and Greeks, the Islamic Spain, the Ottoman Empire, the Byzantine, Jewish and Muslim contributions to Renaissance; in literary studies, one may associate hybridity with new genres such as the Japanese manga comic or the Arab novel; in linguistics, mixed languages such as Pidgin English, Cappadocian Greek (comprising mostly Greek root words, but with many Turkish grammatical endings and Turkish vowel harmony – and without gender) or Wutunhua (a mixture of Chinese and Tibetan language); and in religious studies, hybridity allows for analysis of syncretism, patch-work religions or New Age. As a consequence, the literature on these topics is vast and seemingly open-ended.²

In cultural studies, hybridity developed into a key term associated with 'one of the most widely employed and disputed terms in postcolonial theory' (Ashcroft *et al.* 1998: 118;

cf. Kraidy 2002). In this context, it was mostly employed as a trope to analyse a 'by-product of the transcultural dynamics between tradition and modernity sometimes conceptualized as the local and the global' (Kraidy 2002). Homi Bhabha, for instance, in his seminal book *The Location of Culture* (1994), discusses hybridity as a form of colonial anxiety on the one hand, and resilience of the subaltern or colonized against colonial influence, domination and power of the colonizers, on the other hand. He thus understands hybridity as a political term allowing for ambivalence, mimicry, camouflage (1994: 193) or heresy (1994: 226) in hybridizing expressions in processes of a postcolonial modernity, creating new hybrid identities and thus new ways of difference. For Bhabha, hybridity is linked to a 'process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences' (1994: 252). Hybridity was therefore mostly limited to phenomena in the context of cultural colonization and globalization (cf. Hutnyk 2005). The debates in Anglo-American popular culture became the paradigm for such studies.

Nevertheless, all these theories presuppose separate cultures as a starting point in their analysis of cultural 'mixing' or entanglement. This is challenged in a transcultural approach, where cultures are never just homogeneous spheres, linguistically or geographically marked off or delimited, even if so intended by the actors. With respect to cultural studies, several similar terms such as *metissage*, *melange*, *pot-pourri*, *cross-over*, *transculturality*, *creolization*, *entanglement*, *histoire croisée*, *mestizaje* 'anything goes' (Feyerabend 1975: 28) or 'Third Space' (Homi Bhabha) have made remarkable careers, allowing them to underline how and in what way cultures and languages are based on intrinsic 'fusion' and are to be considered, in this sense, as a priori hybrid. All these terms support the idea of a vast multiplicity, dynamics and fluidity in cultures which indeed are much more open and porous than it has been assumed by many nineteenth and twentieth century scholars. Moreover, they are working less in a normative, positivist way, but allow for a critical heuristic approach.

Today we can therefore say that nothing is 'pure', and that attempts to call 'something' as such are manmade and thus intentional. Nations, cultures, languages, ethnic groups, objects and artifacts, images, concepts, practices (rituals) – all these are transculturally linked and entangled. There are particularly favourable localities/spaces where these entangled forms of cultural interactions and exchanges seem to appear and can be well observed: metropolitan cities, frontiers, market places (see Grüner, in this volume) or harbours. Moreover, there are particularly positioned persons who promote transculturality and cultural hybridity: cultural brokers or middlemen (see Jaspert, in this volume) such as diplomats, missionaries, travellers, seafarers, traders, interpreters, political asylum seekers or migrants.

Such cultural brokers enforce the intercultural exchange and thus trigger transculturation and a number of transcultural processes such as accommodation, acculturation, adaptation, appropriation, assimilation, borrowing, circularity, exchange, glocalization, mimesis, migration, negotiation/bargaining, othering, reciprocity, robbery, supplementation (accretism), syncretism, transfer, translation, etc.

This emphasis on cultural hybridity and especially transculturality is largely directed against 'essentialism', today's most despised term in cultural studies. Essentialism has been used to propagate fundamental cultural characteristics of a particular nation, people or culture, implying that there are cultural realities beyond history, language and locality. Contrastingly, most scholars of cultural studies now reject essentialism as a form of determinism or absolutism with the potential of developing dangerous concepts – racism, fundamentalism and nationalism being three striking examples. Hence, in cultural studies, scholars increasingly prefer another approach, one that contextualizes, historicizes and localizes cultural tropes within a neighbouring or global net of social interactions and cultural relations. Rightly so, they reject entities that claim absolute validity or even superiority.

This also has a political aspect as Kraidy argues, pointing out the procedural and transcultural implications of the term hybridity, which

needs to be understood as a communicative practice constitutive of, and constituted by, sociopolitical and economic arrangements. Understanding hybridity as a practice marks the recognition that transcultural relations are complex, processual, and dynamic. In addition to failing to grasp the ontological complexity of cultural interactions, a merely descriptive use of hybridity also poses the risk of undermining the political potential that hybridity might or might not have.

(Kraidy 2002: 317)

Another argument against essentialism is that all ideas and concepts are based on a language that originates from, and is shaped in, communication with other languages. There is no pure language, and therefore there is no single concept of institutions such as marriage, family, people or nation, not to speak of death or god. This points to a cultural variability at the beginning of any religious, social or political idea. Nevertheless, reductions on history, myths, rituals, heroes of art and culture or cultural heritage are sometimes necessary factors of identification in a given society since only the cultural phenomena can be contextualized, historized and localized in a web of social interactions and (trans)cultural relations. These reductions make for cultural memory (Assmann and Hölischer 1988; A. Assmann 1993; J. Assmann 1997), out of which history as a joint point of reference emerges. However, any claim of cultural absoluteness or even superiority must fail due to the fact of cultural contingency.

In the next part of this chapter, I illustrate, using a recent example from ancient India that concerns the concept and origin of certain ideas in the late Vedic period (roughly 850–400 BCE) and early Buddhism, how misleading such an approach, but also how problematic the notion of hybridity, can be, because it might suggest cultural units that ‘in reality’ are much more transcultural than assumed.

How ‘Buddhism’ began – its career as a term

Buddhism as a religion is a broad concept that was construed only in the early nineteenth century, even though the term ‘Buddhism’ appeared sporadically before the end of the eighteenth century. Engelbert Kaempfer, for instance, writing between 1692 and 1705 (in German), in a 1727 English translation, has a chapter in his Japan travelogue, *Das Heutige Japan* (‘Today’s Japan’), with a subsection, ‘Of the *Budsdo*, or Foreign Pagan Worship, and its Founder’:

[. . .] for several hundred years the Religion of *Siaka* made a very slow and insignificant progress, till about the year of Christ 518, one *Darma*, a great Saint, and thirty third successor of the holy See of *Siaka*, came over into China from *Tenjiku* [= India, in seventeenth century Sino-Japanese] [. . .] and laid properly speaking the first sure foundations of the *Boudsoism* in that mighty empire.

(Kaempfer 1727: 248)

This ‘Butsudō’ is Japanese for ‘the way of Buddha(s)’ and can figure as the translation for Buddhism even today. By ‘the founder’, Kaempfer, refers to ‘Siaka’ [= Shakyamuni] and provides his alleged biography. According to David Mervart, Kaempfer must here be drawing on pre-existing Jesuit knowledge, and states that the first Jesuit reports, which appeared slightly earlier than Kaempfer’s book, ‘have possibly some generic reference to the superstitious doctrines

of (what today would be) Buddhism, and it is possible some cognate of the term itself appears there' (personal communication, 20 July 2013).

In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term 'Buddhism' (spelled 'Boudhism') appears only in 1801. Until then, Europe did not recognize Buddhism as a 'world religion', only Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Paganism.³ A unified Buddhist identity across all Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, Zen and other 'denominations' and Buddhist countries, only emerged in the nineteenth century. The model for this construction of other religions was, of course, Christianity, with a historical founder of a religion in the centre. The case I present here is related to such essentialist constructions.

In 2007, the Indologist Johannes Bronkhorst published his challenging monograph, *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India* (2007). Despite criticism,⁴ this book has stimulated an ongoing debate on the origin of religions in India, especially Buddhism and Jainism. Bronkhorst addresses major puzzles and conundrums in the history of ancient India, e.g.: How did Buddhism and Jainism begin? Was it a reaction to late Vedic, i.e. ancient Indian ritualism? Where do the 'typical Indian' ideas of *karma*, rebirth and liberation come from? After all, these ideas are absent in the early Vedic texts. Or were they a new, independent development that later influenced and merged with Brahmanical Vedism, in a way the predecessor of Hinduism? In short, did Buddhism or Jainism with their strong focus on ethical karma theories originate within or outside Vedic Brahmanical tradition?

The standard answer to these problems, repeatedly found in histories of Indian religions, is the following: The dominant Brahmanic-Vedic religion was rejected by several spiritual leaders. Among them, the Buddha and Mahāvīra figured most prominently. One example must suffice: 'The central teachings of the Buddha came as a response to the central teachings of the old *Upaniṣads*, notably the *Bṛhadāranyaka*' (Gombrich 1996: 31; cf. 1988: 65–72). Bronkhorst believes that this view is incorrect and instead proposes that Buddhism and Jainism originated in a non-Vedic culture that he calls 'Greater Magadha'. It is an area in north-east India covering Magadha and its surrounding lands: roughly the geographical area in which the Buddha and Mahāvīra lived and taught. With regard to the Buddha, this area stretched by and large from Śrāvastī, the capital of Kosala, in the north-west to Rājagṛha, the capital of Magadha, in the south-east (2007: 4).

Bronkhorst proposes that this culture 'existed prior to the appearance of Jainism, Buddhism and other currents' (Bronkhorst 2007: 53) such as Ājīvikism. He also claims that this culture 'remained recognizably distinct from Vedic culture until the time of the grammarian Patañjali (ca. 150 BCE) and beyond' (2007: 265). His basic evidence is the following:

- 1 The early definition of *āryavārta*, 'the land of the Āryas', or the heartland of Vedic culture and religion in the *Mahābhāṣya* of the grammarian Patañjali (ca. 150 BCE) as opposed to the land east of the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers which was considered 'foreign territory' (2007: 2) by the Vedic Brahmuns;
- 2 a 'fundamental spiritual ideology', i.e. the belief in rebirth and karmic retribution that Bronkhorst calls 'by far the most important' (2007: 75) feature of the new culture and that cannot be found in early Vedic sources;
- 3 the archaeological (and textual) evidence of sepulchral mounds as a sign of a distinct funerary practice later adopted by the Buddhists and, to a lesser extent, Jains;
- 4 the distinct 'empirico-rational'⁵ structure of Āyurveda as opposed to the largely magico-religious Vedic healing systems using sorcery, spells and amulets; other features such as Kapila as an *asura* (demon) or the cyclic time.

This theory creates methodological problems because we only have sources from a non-Magadha context; there are no textual documents in Magadhī, the language which might have been spoken by the Buddha. Moreover, the question of absolute and relative timeframes of late Vedic and early Buddhist texts widely remains open. However, Bronkhorst repeatedly insists on his thesis

that there existed, during the late-Vedic period, (at least) two segments of society, or rather, two societies, which independently preserved radically different traditions and approaches to reality. What is more, we are in a position to identify these two societies: they are (the descendants of) Vedic society and the society of Greater Magadha, respectively.

(Bronkhorst 2007: 60)

Interestingly, Bronkhorst uses the term ‘Vedic society’ only in his introduction where he identifies it with Vedic culture; due to the lack of sources, almost nothing is known about the social and religious structure of Greater Magadha, its inhabitants, its pantheon (with the exception of Kapila, no further names of deities are given), and little is known about their language, administration, social stratification or economy.

There is little to say against Bronkhorst’s identification of ‘culture’ with ‘society’, given the 150 or so definitions of ‘culture’ that Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn (1952) had already collected. What matters more is Bronkhorst’s attempt to construct opposed monolithic cultural blocks that are separated by ‘the enormous divide that existed between Vedic culture and the culture of Greater Magadha’ (2007: 269), i.e. ‘two altogether different cultures that existed next to each other without profoundly influencing each other (initially)’ (2007: 266).

Following this approach, cultures are defined by clear boundaries manifested through territory, language and predominantly (religious) ideas and not as entangled cultures. Consequently, Bronkhorst discovers more differences than mutual influences. Looking for origins and authenticity, he sees a ‘cultural division of northern India’ (2007: 85). In other words, he constructs cultures as geographically bounded, internally cohesive and linguistically homogeneous spheres.

Seyla Benhabib (2002: 4) would probably call such a problematic procedure and methodology the ‘reductionist sociology of culture’. I agree that this approach cannot appropriately handle the intrinsic complexity, hybridity and diversity of human groups and their exchanges. It presupposes cultures as consistent entities, which are congruent with an ethnic group or nation and thus can be separated from each other. It confines cultures as such self-contained units of inquiry, and interactions between them as secondary or epiphenomenal. It is based on defining (and reifying) cultures – and disciplines – in accordance with the nation model of the nineteenth century.

Bronkhorst thus falls short in his conclusions based on contrasting Vedic religion to and differentiating it from Buddhism and Jainism in this early period. During precisely the period in question, Buddhism had not yet attained a status and acceptance as a separate reified ‘religion’. And as mentioned earlier, it also did not regard itself as a ‘religion’. In Vedic times, Buddhism and Jainism were two of many religious currents that neither showed nor uttered clear separate identities – except for their emphasis on salvational goals.

Even in a Śaiva ritual text from the second half of the eleventh century, the *Somaśambhūpaddhati*, a ‘Buddhist identity’ cannot be found. This text includes a conversion ritual

(*lingoddhāra*) by which one becomes a follower of Shiva and attains salvation. In this ritual, it is essential to obliterate the traits (*liṅga*) acquired through previous karma at birth from followers of non-Shaivaite religious traditions or schools, by wiping out all merit accumulated in past births through consecration (*dīkṣā*). The list of non-Shaiva religious traditions includes Buddhists, Jains, followers of the Vedas, worshippers of Bhagavān or Viṣṇu, Śāktas, astrologers (Jyotiṣa), Pāśupatas, materialists (Cārvāka), Vedāntins and followers of other philosophical schools of thought (Brunner-Lachaux 1977: 553). As Heinrich von Stietencron (1995: 66) and Jörg Gengnagel (2010) have convincingly pointed out, this list is remarkable in three respects: (a) Buddhism and Jainism are not treated differently from other schools of thought, i.e. they have not yet become separate religions; (b) Śaivism, Vaisnavism and other so-called ‘Hindu’ groups do not appear together as *one* Hindu community; (c) religious and philosophical schools of thought are not separated. There are only several paths that lead to salvation; 1,500 years earlier, when Buddhism began, the situation seems to have been similar.

If we were to apply a transcultural approach, the situation in ancient India (ca. 500 to ca. 150 BCE) would look remarkably different from Bronkhorst’s ‘double culture’.

- It would point out the connectivity and connectedness between these currents (not religions), for instance with regard to Buddhist Brahmins or ‘Vedic Buddhists’. To be sure, the Vinaya gives only five references to Brahmins who received land grants from the kings of Kosala and Magadha and only seven Brahmanic settlements in the same regions, but the majority of the early Buddhist monks were Brahmins (Gokhale 1980; Gombrich 1988: 55f.).
- It would mention many mutual flows (which Bronkhorst too attests), for instance with regard to the circulatory practices and rituals (Falk 1988; Meisig 1992) which until today have much in common with Hindu rituals (cf. Gellner 1992; Gutschow and Michaels 2005, 2008, 2012).
- It would regard karma as a transgressing concept (cf. Gombrich 1996: ch. 2), which is not confined to ascetics.⁶
- It would stress the many wandering ascetics (*śramaṇa*, *parivrājaka*, *bhikṣu*, *jatila*, *saṃnyāsin* etc.) of various denominations, who often act as cultural brokers. Many of them (though none from the early Brahmanical tradition) have been mentioned in early Buddhist texts, e.g. the ‘six teachers of other schools’ or the 10 renouncers. All these wandering ascetics share the practice of austerities and the cultivation of meditative or spiritual techniques aimed at liberation (Gethin 1998: 10). The Buddha, as one of them, wandered not only in Greater Magadha but also in the northern and north-western area of Kosala, Kāśī or Vajji (Witzel 2009: 289). It would point to the linguistic overlapping (see von Hinüber 2001). After all, the Vedic people and the people of Greater Magadha had common language roots. They both spoke Indo-Aryan languages, but ‘the Buddha is well aware of Late Vedic speech, which he calls *chandasa*’ (Witzel 2009: 294). In general, Witzel’s statement is valid when he argues that, there are numerous features in late Vedic and the MIA of the early Buddhist texts that overlap language boundaries, as both forms of Indo-Aryan were used by people that were actually interacting with each other on a daily basis (2009: 295).
- It would try to examine processes rather than look for origins.
- In sum, the results of this limited investigation, which intentionally excluded the development of thought, uphold the ‘traditional’ view of several consecutive linguistic, textual and historical layers from Vedic to the earliest Buddhist texts (2009: 310).

If one looks, in this way, for contact zones or cultural brokers,⁷ overlapping and dynamic processes of entanglement, many borders and differences fade away and one comes from cultural difference to cultural fusion (Kraidy 2005: 151). Even Bronkhorst concedes that

[m]any of the features of this (Magadha) culture did not disappear with the confrontation with Vedic culture. They survived, sometimes in modified form, sometimes, it seems, without even undergoing dramatic alteration. The most important of these features, i.e. the belief in rebirth and karmic retribution, survived the confrontation very well, as far as we can tell.

(2007: 72)

And Bronkhorst also gives an example of transculturality by pointing out that both Buddhists and Jainas claim the early kings of Magadha – Śreṇika, Bimbisāra and Ajātaśatru – as their own.

From hybridity to transculturality

What does all this mean for a better understanding of the concepts of cultural hybridity and transculturality? Primarily, that hybridity in cultures is not the exception but the norm. 'Instead of hybridity versus plurality, [. . .] it is hybridity all the way down' (Rosaldo 1995: xv). Cultures interact through a constant exchange of people, ideas, concepts, practices, objects, images, etc., because of which cultures are *per definitionem* mixed. In fact, many scholars came to conclusions that resulted in fuzzy truisms such as this: 'all cultures are involved in one another [. . .] none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous' (Said, cited in Burke 2009: 51), or, 'precisely because of its elasticity and open nature, the hybrid model can be appropriated by anyone to mean practically anything' (Gómez-Peña 1996: 12).

Indeed, the entangled cultural processes are so numerous that one can justifiably say that 'all cultures are involved in one another [. . .] none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous'. However, we may also want to state that if hybridity is ultimately all-pervasive, and if 'all culture is always hybrid, [. . .], then hybridity is conceptually disposable' (Kraidy 2002).

A transcultural approach is different from seeing cultures as hybrid because the notion of transculturality neither presupposes pure cultures nor at least two or more homogeneous cultural units. Methodologically, this seems to lead to an aporia: in order to analyse what is transcultural, one has to separate the components, while denying their existence due to their transcultural contingency. The solution for this dilemma lies in the fact that in cultural studies, one mostly does not talk about boundaries in 'reality', but about conceptual strategies and discourses. One identifies cultural items only in contrast to other cultures. Cultures or cultural phenomena are therefore always in a relationship, and consequently, the boundaries are porous, open and fluid.

Understanding cultures is therefore always historically and locally contingent besides originating in 'the West' and being 'white' due to 'the disproportionate influence of the West as a cultural forum' (Bhabha 1994: 21) and the asymmetry in educational institutions.

How challenging an understanding of the transculturality of cultures is becomes evident when we consider the history of cultural encounters (see, among others, Bitterli 1976). It is a history of denying and repression or, in other words, continuous misunderstanding of transcultural implications. Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) already facilitated a mediation between cultures when he argued in his essay *On Cannibals* (1580):

I do not find that there is anything barbaric or savage about this nation, according to what I've been told, unless we are to call barbarism whatever differs from our own customs. Indeed, we seem to have no other standard of truth and reason than the opinions and customs of our own country. There at home is always the perfect religion, the perfect legal system – the perfect and most accomplished way of doing everything. These people are wild in the same sense that fruits are, produced by nature, alone, in her ordinary way. Indeed, in that land, it is we who refuse to alter our artificial ways and reject the common order that ought rather to be called wild, or savage.⁸

But only with the Enlightenment did it become possible to deviate from the evolutionary view on cultures and religions which has and still does dominate so many cultural theories. Thus, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) declared India the early childhood days of mankind, because he recognized in it his ideal of a unity of poetics, religion and philosophy. Enlightenment, however, realized parallels and entanglements in religions and cultures, and defined religion as a matter of the individual and not just of institutions (e.g. the Church). Reason became more important than authority. Enlightenment brought a *religio naturalis*, a 'religion' of reason, which underlies all religions and which endures all historical religions. Enlightenment also promoted the idea of the universality of cultures and a *Universalgeschichte* of cultures (cf. Häfner 1994). Only through this 'discovery' of a unity in cultural diversity could disciplines such as cultural studies emerge.

An even more radical change came through Romanticism, especially through Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). In his *Über die Religion* (On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, 1799), religion became 'essentially an intuition and a feeling'.

This way, the doors were opened for other than Christian religions and cultures. Astonishment, the will for discovery of 'the new' and 'the other' became part of the quest for salvation, even in Schleiermacher's secularized attempt to compare cultures. However, only the secularization of religion, i.e. the discovery of culture, made this possible. The interest in 'other' cultures and, implicitly, cultural mediation, became part of Western culture since a similar interest – as I will demonstrate below – cannot easily be found in all cultures alike.

Transculturality itself cannot avoid intercultural misunderstandings, projections, otherings and contortions, but it gives us a methodological reflexivity that facilitates a multi-sited approach to our fields of inquiry. Such an approach is based on the principle of relationality. If one thus concentrates on relationships one can focus on processes that show how cultures work and what drives them. This implies that '[i]mportance of the two directions is a matter for empirical research' (Burke 2009: 42). One has to look for precisely such entanglements since they do not, as in hybridity, always reveal themselves easily, nor do they point to a simple 'mixture'. On the contrary, given the fragility and vulnerability of cultures which are time and again endangered by calamities and conflicts such as economic crises, military conflicts, natural disasters, revolutions, migrations, etc., humans often search for stabilizing strategies which are generally forms of reductionism that reject transcultural connectivities in favour of reification. One such strategy is exclusivism, another is inclusivism.

The form of inclusivism is the strategy of cultural homogenization; its modern form is called globalization. This is frequently expressed, together with the fear that cultures can conquer or dominate other cultures: seventeenth and eighteenth century France in Europe in the past (French was then the erudite language); the USA in the present; the global in the future (Burke 2009: 113). It might be a beguiling perception but it indeed seems that cultural variety diminishes and that cultures increasingly converge. However, as Burke aptly remarks, '[t]oday's hybrid forms are not necessarily a stage on the way towards a homogeneous global culture'

(2009: 115). As a kind of counter reaction towards cultural uniformity we observe processes of localization or glocalization, i.e. adaptation to localities partly as a reaction to the feared cultural uniformity (see Beck 1998; Baumann 2000).

The other example refers again to India and another special form of transculturality: the Indian form of xenology or inclusivism, both characterized by a form of ignorance of other cultures and religions. It is indeed surprising that the 'others' who entered the Indian subcontinent – Muslims, British, missionaries – are seldom reflected in classical Indian literature. Rarely did Indians travel to Europe, even though there were early trade and religious ties with South-east Asia. 'Was die Literatur uns in dieser Hinsicht bietet, ist weitgehend eine Tradition des Schweigens und der Aussparung' (What Indian literature has to offer us in this respect, is a tradition of silence and recess), says Indologist and philosopher Wilhelm Halbfass (1940–2000), and he adds that one's own identity is not looked for in contradistinction to another.⁹ It is true that the construction of Hindus as one religious community mainly happened through external 'influences'. 'Hinduism' is not an Indian term, but one that was coined by outsiders (see Bloch *et al.* 2010).

The term 'inclusivism' was introduced into Indology by Paul Hacker (1913–1979) and triggered a lasting debate (for reference see Michaels 2004: 332); he defines it thus:

Inclusivism means that one declares that a central idea of a foreign religious or ideological group is identical with one or another central idea of the group to which one belongs oneself. Usually inclusivism includes the explicit or implicit statement that the foreigner who is declared identical with one's own, is subordinate or inferior in some way. Moreover, proof of that is that the stranger who is identical with one's own is usually not taken in.
(Hacker 1983: 12)

Hacker has also said that inclusivism can be 'a special identification with a special intention', and thus, in short, cites the 'Vedic practice of identification' as an example (1983: 12). Albrecht Wezler pointed to the clear parallels between Vedic identifications and Hackerite inclusivism. He thus characterized the inclusive form of thought as 'a non-marginal element of the continuity of the Vedic time in later India' (Wezler 1983: 80), as I too draw a big arc from the sacrifice ritual identifications in Ancient India to an identificatory habitus that is still tangible in Indian thinking and behaviour (Michaels 2004: 5–11, 325–40). I regard it as a distinguishing feature of Vedic and Hindu religions, i.e. the capability to belong to two 'different' religions. One can, for instance, practise Hindu life-cycle rites (which themselves preserve a lot of non-Hindu folk-religious elements) and adhere spiritually to Buddhist meditative practices. Mohandas K. Gandhi described his own religion, 'an idiosyncratic mixture of Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist and Christian' (quoted from Burke 2009: 21).¹⁰ This 'identificatory habitus' (Michaels 2004) underlines how and why Hinduism – like a sponge – has absorbed (or ignored) so many 'other' religions including Islam and Christianity.

Conclusion

Examining the results from Bronkhorst's inspiring *Greater Magadha*, we have seen that transculturality is a term that seems more appropriate in differentiating and analysing cultural phenomena than hybridity. It better helps to overcome disciplinary limitations that gave rise to misleading concepts and reifications such as early Buddhism as a separate religion. It does not necessarily presuppose homogeneous cultural units, though for methodological reasons it might be indispensable to construct them. And it opens ways of studying processes rather than static

forms of cultures, and historically or locally special traditions of appropriation, such as the Indian inclusive reactions towards otherness, which suggest that 'Hinduism' for long has been more open for appropriation than (say) 'Islamic culture'. 'Japanese culture', with its many forms of appropriation of Chinese and Western influences, could perhaps here be mentioned as a similar case.

To overcome the aporia that one has to define culture or cultural elements which, transculturally seen, one has to deny, it is necessary to differentiate between at least three forms of transculturality. I call them open, hidden and methodological transculturality. Open transculturality is evident in the cultural mixtures which I mentioned in the beginning; the components of these mixtures can be easily and clearly separated, since their historical process of amalgamation is comparatively short. Indo-jazz, a mixture of hybridization of American jazz with influences from classical Indian music and instruments, would be such a form of open transculturality. No wonder these open forms of transculturality have so far mostly been studied under the umbrella term 'cultural hybridity'. Hidden forms of transculturality, though, must be seen in all cultural phenomena at all times even if the components are not on the surface. The sarod used in Indo-jazz, for example, is not an 'Indian' musical instrument but developed in Afghanistan. It is only by using a methodological transculturality as a default mode or heuristic concept, i.e. by looking at the formative and transformative processes resulting in any given cultural manifestation, that we discover such cultural entanglements as a result of processes of negotiation, bargaining and competition which allow conclusions on monopolies of interpretation and power relations.

Does this result make the world any better? Perhaps not. But it at least helps not to claim that cultures have an essence, should be pure and uncontaminated. They simply cannot.

Notes

1. This chapter was triggered by a lecture delivered at the university president's reception for visiting scholars, 31 January 2012, Heidelberg University, and in a shortened version at the award ceremony for the 'Höffmann-Forschungspreis für interkulturelle Kompetenz der Universität Vechta', February 2016. I am grateful to Christiane Brosius and Madeleine Herren-Oesch for many valuable suggestions.
2. For overviews and summarizing see: Hall (1992), Werbner and Modood (2000), Kraidy (2002, 2005) and Stockhammer (2012).
3. One example would be the American Baptist historian David Benedict, *A History of All Religions, as Divided into Paganism, Mahometanism, Judaism and Christianity* (Providence 1824); see Waterhouse (2005: 53).
4. See the reviews by Klaus (2011), Neelis (2008), Cort (2007), Sarao (2008) and Schmitt (2008).
5. This is a term Bronkhorst borrows from Zysk (1985: 8).
6. Cf. Witzel (2009: 303): '[T]he Buddha's non-*ātman* theory is clearly based on the long history of *ātman* speculation in the late Brāhmanas and early Upaniṣads'.
7. See Firges and Jaspert, both in this volume.
8. Retrieved from the OLPC Wiki: www.wsu.edu/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_2/montaigne.html (accessed March 17, 2017).
9. Halbfass (1999: 132, 134); see also his opus magnum *India und Europa* (1981).
10. Bronkhorst (2007: 3) notes that Candragupta converted (!) to Jainism. However, without clear religious borders conversion remains a problem: see Gengnagel 2010. Aśoka's 'religion' is clearly not just Buddhist.

Bibliography

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (1998) *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, New York: Routledge.
- Assmann, A. (ed) (1993) *Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktion der kulturellen Erinnerung*, Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer.

- Assmann, J. (1997) *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, 2nd edn, Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Assmann, J. and Hölscher, T. (eds) (1988) *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Baumann, G. (2000) 'Dominant and demotic discourses of culture: Their relevance to multi-ethnic alliances', in P. Werbner and T. Modood (eds) *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Antiracism*, 2nd edn, London: Zed Books, 209–25.
- Beck, U. (1998) *Was ist Globalisierung? Irrtümer des Globalismus – Antworten auf Globalisierung*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Benhabib, S. (2002) *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994) *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Bitterli, U. (1976) *Die 'Wilden' und die 'Zivilisierten' – Grundsätze einer Geistes- und Kulturgeschichte der europäisch-überseeischen Begegnung*, Munich: C.H. Beck.
- Bloch, E., Keppens, M. and Hegde, R. (eds) (2010) *Rethinking Religion in India. The Colonial Construction of Hinduism*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Bronkhorst, J. (2007) *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India*, Leiden: Brill.
- Brunner-Lachaux, H. (ed and trans.) (1977 [1963, 1966]), *Somaśambhupaddhati*, 3 vols., Pondicherry: Institut Français d'Indologie.
- Burke, P. (2009) *Cultural Hybridity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cort, J. (2007) Review of J. Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, *Religious Studies Review*, 33(2): 171–2.
- Falk, H. (1988) 'Vedische Opfer im Pāli-Kanon', *Bulletin d'études Indienne*, 6: 225–54.
- Feyerabend, P. (1975) *Against Method*, New York: New Left Books.
- Gellner, D. (1992) *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest. Newar Buddhism and Its Hierarchy of Ritual*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gengnagel, J. (2010) 'Conversion or initiation? On the removal of the sectarian marks (li> the rem) in Śaiva Siddhānta', in A. Zotter and C. Zotter (eds) *Hindu and Buddhist Initiations in India and Nepal*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 281–98.
- Gethin, R. (1998) *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gokhale, B. G. (1980) 'Early Buddhism and the Brahmins', in A.K. Narain (ed) *Studies in the History of Buddhism*, Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 68–80.
- Gombrich, R. F. (1988) *Theravāda Buddhism. A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- . (1996) *How Buddhism Began. The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*, London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone.
- Gómez-Peña (1996) *The New World Order: Prophecies, Poems, and Loqueras for the End of the Century*, San Francisco, CA: City Lights.
- Gutschow, N. and Michaels, A. (2005) *Handling Death. The Dynamics of Death and Ancestor Rituals Among the Newars of Bhaktapur, Nepal*, *Ethno-Indology*, 3, with contributions by J. and N. Sharma, and a film on DVD by C. Bau, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- . (2008) *Growing Up. Hindu and Buddhist Initiation Rituals Among Newar Children in Bhaktapur, Nepal*, *Ethno-Indology*, 6, with a film on DVD by C. Bau, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- . (2012) *Getting Married. Hindu and Buddhist Marriage Rituals Among Newars of Bhaktapur and Patan, Nepal*, *Ethno-Indology*, 12, with contributions by M. Bajracharya and C. Brosius and a film on DVD by C. Bau, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012.
- Hacker, P. (1983) 'Inklusivismus', in G. Oberhammer (ed) *Inklusivismus: Eine indische Denkform*, Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität.
- Häfner, R. (1994) *Johann Gottfried Herders Kulturentstehungslehre. Studien zu den Quellen und zur Methode seines Geschichtsdenken*, Hamburg: Meiner.
- Halbfass, W. (1981) *Indien und Europa: Perspektiven ihrer geistigen Begegnung*, Basel and Stuttgart: English edn (1988) *India and Europe. An Essay in Understanding*, New York: SUNY Press.
- . (1999) 'Kulturelle Identität und interkulturelle Begegnung: Beobachtungen am Beispiel Indiens', in G. and H. Waldenfels (eds) *Religion und Identität. Im Horizont des Pluralismus*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 127–40.
- Hall, S. (1992) 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies', in L. Grossberg, T. Nelson and P. Treichler (eds) *Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge.
- Hinüber, O. von (2001) *Das altere Mittelindisch im Überblick*, 2nd edn, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

- Hutnyk, J. (2005) 'Hybridity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28: 79–102.
- Kaempfer, E. (1727) *The History of Japan, giving an Account of the ancient and present State and Government of that Empire; of Its Temples, Palaces, Castles and other Buildings; of its Metals, Minerals, Trees, Plants, Animals, Birds and Fishes; of The Chronology and Succession of the Emperors, Ecclesiastical and Secular; of The Original Descent, Religions, Customs, and Manufactures of the Natives, and of their Trade and Commerce with the Dutch and Chinese*, vol. 1, London: Printed for the Translator.
- Klaus, K. (2011) Review of J. Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, 161: 216–21.
- Kraidy, M. M. (2002) 'Hybridity in cultural globalization', *Communication Theory*, 12(3): 316–39.
- . (2005) *Hybridity or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Kroeber, A. L. and Kluckhohn, C. (1952) *Culture: A Critical Review of the Concepts of Definitions*, Cambridge: Peabody Museum.
- Meisig, K. (1992) 'Zur Entritualisierung des Opfers im frühen Buddhismus', *Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte*, 7: 213–21.
- Michaels, A. (2004) *Hinduism. Past and Present*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Montaigne, M. de (1999) *On Cannibals*, in P. Brians, M. Galloway, D. Hughes, A. Hussain, R. Law, M. Neville, R. Schlesinger, A. Spitzer and S. Swan (eds), *Reading About the World*, vol. 2, 3rd edn, San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace College Publishing.
- Neelis, J. (2008) Review of J. Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 18(3): 381–3.
- Rosaldo, R. (1995) 'Foreword' in N. Garcia Concinlini and C. L. Chiappari (1995) *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, xi–xviii.
- Sarao, K. T. S. (2008) Review of J. Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, *Orientalische Literatur-Zeitung*, 103 (2): 250–4.
- Schleiermacher, F. 1991 [1799] *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten und ihren Verächtern*, 7th edn, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; trans. J. Oman (1893) *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, London: Kegan Paul.
- Schmitt, R. (2008) Review of J. Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, *Acta Orientalia*, 69: 319–32.
- Stietencron, H. von (1995) 'Religious configurations in pre-Muslim India and the modern concept of Hinduism', in V. Dalmia and H. von Stietencron (eds), *Representing Hinduism. The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Stockhammer, P. W. (ed) (2012) *Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization – A Transdisciplinary Approach*, Transcultural Research – Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context, Heidelberg: Springer.
- Waterhouse, D. M. (2005) *The Origins of Himalayan Studies. Brian Houghton Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling 1820–1858*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Werbner, P. and Modood, T. (eds) (2000) *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-cultural Identities and the Politics of Antiracism*, 2nd edn, London: Zed Books.
- Wezler, A. (1983) 'Bemerkungen zum Inklusivismusbegriff Paul Hackers', in G. Oberhammer (ed) *Inklusivismus: Eine indische Denkform*, Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität.
- Witzel, M. (2009) 'Moving Targets? Texts, Language, Archaeology and History in the Late Vedic and Early Buddhist Periods', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 52: 287–310.
- Young, R. J. (1995) *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London: Routledge.
- Zysk, K. G. (1985) *Religious Healing in the Veda*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 75.7, Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society.

Asymmetry in transcultural interaction

Rudolf G. Wagner

This chapter maps the potential of the concept of asymmetry as an analytical tool for the study of transcultural interaction. It first presents a theoretical outline, which serves the function of a chain of hypotheses, and then tests these hypotheses with a case study about the development of the Chinese press.

Theoretical outline

Introduction

Asymmetry is a negative term that seems to signal the lack of something integral to the relationship between two entities – i.e. symmetry. It is based on comparison. Symmetry is the marker of overall stability and viability, and is therefore associated with order and beauty. In contradiction, asymmetry is the marker of instability and unsustainability. In its pure form, symmetry is an abstract concept; in reality, it only occurs as an unstable but low level of ‘fluctuating asymmetry’ (Lomkins and Kotiaho 2001: 1–5). As many processes in observable asymmetrical and chaotic reality tend towards the establishment of symmetry with its accoutrements of stability and viability, there is a dynamic relationship between the two, or, to be precise, between high and low levels of fluctuating asymmetry.

This is visible in the simple snowflake with its very low (but still traceable) levels of asymmetry that make for a stable structure allowing it to interact with other such stable structures. However, it is generated and regenerated on a sub-atomic level by a whirl of processes that seem highly asymmetrical, but can be explored for an underlying symmetry because they are able to sustain such a symmetrical and relatively stable surface structure. This dynamic relationship is also visible in the association of low levels of asymmetry in outward appearance and functionality with the ability to successfully cope with the challenges of reproduction. Low levels of outward asymmetry lead to high reproductive success among complex organisms endowed in this manner, while a strongly asymmetrical appearance does not.¹ At the same time, the inside of such symmetrical outsides is an utterly asymmetrical arrangement that is dictated by economy of space and the requirements of statics with, for example, a heart only on one side, and the left lung smaller to make room for it. The dynamics of symmetry and asymmetry seem to be operative in these processes themselves to accommodate perceptual preferences for