

Introduction: Hybridity Today

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Abstract

This introductory chapter consists of two parts. In the first section we seek to present a critical discussion of the term hybridity and its use in contemporary post-colonial discourse. In so doing, we will address several viewpoints onto the idea of hybridity presented by theorists from Homi K. Bhabha to Néstor García Canclini. We will argue that the critical power of hybridity is in its ability to question what appears natural and complete, to problematize naturalized boundaries. The second part of this chapter presents briefly the theoretical and empirical studies collected in this volume. What unites the articles is that they seek to show the relevance of the notion of hybridity in approaching a variety of phenomena ranging from ethnic writing and theatre to contemporary cinema in a world characterized by transnational migration and the globalization of culture.

Setting the Scene

In her poem 'So *Mush* of Me,' the Ceylonese Malaysian poet Charlene Rajendran discusses the double heritage of a post-colonial subject with roots in two or more cultures:

So *mush* of me is English.
My dreaded colonial heritage.
From Enid Blyton to Beatrix Potter
my idylls lie distant in Yorkshire.

So *mush* of me lives Anglo.
My dreaded white inheritance.
From Laura Ashley to Marks & Spencer
my istanas all built in Windsor.

So, *mush* of me
misplaced.
Really I am Malaysian,
Ceylonese, Tamil,
Anglophone, All.
Mingled by history
not choice.¹

¹ Charlene Rajendran, 'So *Mush* of Me', in *Mangosteen Crumble: A Book of Poems*, by Charlene Rajendran (Kuala Lumpur: Team East, 1999), pp.17-8 (p.17).

While Rajendran's multicultural subject recognizes its constructed nature, reflecting on its 'Anglo' lifestyle and the significance of Englishness for its formation, it also comments on the jumbled state of post-colonial hybridity by describing the speaker's identity as '*mush*.' In so doing, the poem uses linguistic play to construct hybrid cultural post-coloniality as a state of in-betweenness constructed in and through historical processes. While the poem mixes languages and cultural traditions to convey a sense of multiculturalism, it is by no means a mere celebration of a post-national and hybrid subjectivity. Indeed, Rajendran's speaker's positionality is problematized as a result of hybridity and described as 'misplaced,' 'misfit,' 'mixed up,' and 'muddled.'² Yet this positionality, while 'dreaded,' also opens up new dimensions of experience where the global and the local generate something new, as shown in the final lines of the poem:

My anglicised fancies
in *tempatan* dreams
make *mush*
in so *mush* of me.³

Here, Rajendran's poem uses the Bahasa Malaysia word *tempatan* (Eng. local) to talk about the speaker's dreams. In connection with the metropolitan, *anglicised* fancies, these dreams build up the junction of global and local that is located in the speaker as the '*so mush* of me.'

Since the term hybridity has become a buzzword in recent cultural and literary criticism, the aim of this volume is to re-visit the concept and to critically assess its role in contemporary cultural and literary studies by presenting new theoretical positions and a series of case studies exploring a variety of narratives of contemporary hybridity from the various literary traditions of Britain, North America, and the post-colonial world. We are using the term *post-colonial* here in the specific manner John Thieme outlines in *Post-Colonial Studies* when he discusses the function of the hyphen in the word. Referring to Bill Ashcroft, Thieme argues that the post-colonial denotes a 'specific set of practices that are grounded in "the discursive and material effects of the historical 'fact' of colonialism"' rather than a blanket term for all kinds of cultural differences and marginalities.⁴ Correspondingly, we would like to propose that hybridity, in our framework, does not mean any given mixing of cultural materials, backgrounds, or identities, but implies a markedly unbalanced relationship.

² Rajendran, pp.17-8.

³ Rajendran, p.18.

⁴ John Thieme, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Essential Glossary* (London: Arnold, 2003), p.123.

While the term hybridity has a vexed and debated history, the articles in this collection show its relevance in approaching a variety of phenomena ranging from ethnic writing and theatre to contemporary cinema in a world characterized by transnational migration and the globalization of culture. What the individual contributions share is an interest in emergent cultural phenomena stemming from cultural contact and mixing. Rather than being merely celebratory, however, they also reveal that hybridity is a site of transformation and change where fixed identities based on essentialisms are called into question. Homi K. Bhabha, the foremost theorist of hybridity, describes this space as a 'stairwell':

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, presents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy[.]⁵

As several cultural critics, from Stuart Hall and Arjun Appadurai to Néstor García Canclini and Avtar Brah, have shown, the contemporary world is characterized by transnational migrations, cultural appropriations, and diasporic peoples, all contributing to increased cultural contact and mixing, and to the intermingling of the local and the global. While the term as such has gained an ambiguously prominent standing in recent criticism, the contributions to this volume seek to show that the concept can be approached critically without losing sight of the psychological pains that diaspora, forced migration and exile generate, and of the historical and cultural contexts in which such narratives of the intercultural emerge. We also hope that we are not guilty of what R. Radhakrishnan finds faulty in 'metropolitan' theorists: '[T]heir celebration of "difference" is completely at odds with the actual experience of difference as undergone by diasporic peoples in their countries of residence.'⁶ This reservation is all the more important as an ethics of investigation, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak warns against the dangers of 'triumphalist self-declared hybrid[ity]' of 'the postmodern postcolonialist' for 'the implicit collaboration of the postcolonial in the service of *neo-colonialism*.'⁷

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.4.

⁶ R. Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Meditations: Between Home and Locations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.174.

⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p.361; emphasis original.

Approaching Hybridity

As a critical term, hybridity is often discussed in connection with a set of other terms denoting 'intercultural transfer' and the forms of identity such a change generates: the three other key terms include syncretism, *mestizaje* (or *métissage*) and creolization.⁸ It has been suggested that syncretism often describes the cultural mixing evident in the religious and musical traditions in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean: as Andrea Schwieger Hiepkö points out, in Afro-Cuban religion West African deities are 'projected onto' Catholic saints.⁹ Creolization is often understood as a general (but often seen as peculiar to the Caribbean region) process of 'intermixing and cultural change that products a Creole society.'¹⁰ This suggests a process in which a new identity is formed from various cultural roots including European, African, and Native Caribbean. For instance, Edward Kamau Brathwaite argues that a Creole society is constructed in and through the interaction between the whites and the blacks in the slave society of Jamaica: as the various groups 'adapt themselves to the new environment and to each other,'¹¹ a new identity emerges.

The history of the terms hybridity and *métissage* has been shown to be connected to the discourses of the biological sciences. The hybrid is commonly thought to be a cross between two different species (botanical or animal), but owing to colonialist ideologies of race emphasising the alleged purity of the white colonizers the terms were understood in a negative manner. While hybridization suggests 'fertilization against natural tendencies,' *métissage* was once used to refer to 'the hybridization of human beings implicating a distinction into different races.'¹² As the traditional usage of the concept of hybridity is embedded in the narratives of evolution, the hybrid was originally conceived of as infertile and often as an inferior copy of the original. Since Western thought interpreted the term in the framework of racial thinking, it has been claimed that the term promotes nineteenth-century ideas of race and miscegenation, and thus it should be treated with caution. Such a view has been presented by Robert J. C. Young, whose *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* discusses the

⁸ Andrea Schwieger Hiepkö, 'Creolization', in *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by John C. Hawley (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp.116-23 (p.118).

⁹ Hiepkö, p.118.

¹⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.58.

¹¹ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'Creolization in Jamaica', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.202-5 (p.204).

¹² Hiepkö, p.118.

links between ideas of hybridity and mongrelity: 'Today, therefore, in reinvoking this concept, we are utilizing the vocabulary of the Victorian extreme right as much as the notion of an organic process of the grafting of diversity into singularity.'¹³ For Young, the use of the term suggests that the ideological baggage of the nineteenth century remains with the critic: 'it always reiterates and reinforces the dynamics of the same conflictual economy whose tensions and divisions it re-enacts.'¹⁴

In the process of the fallacies of racial thinking being revealed, the terms denoting hybridity have also been redefined. In contemporary cultural theories, as Peter Brooker argues, the original 'meanings have been extended to refer to the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities, or of texts which express and explore this condition.'¹⁵ Furthermore, they are also used in a counterdiscursive manner in order to provide an alternative to the once-dominant narratives praising white supremacy. The case in point is the work of the Chicana critic and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, whose *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* uses the figure of the *mestiza* to counter dominant views of the role and identity of women in the borderlands. In the words of Anzaldúa, it is in the borderlands where a new identity can be uncovered: 'a new mestiza consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*.'¹⁶ She describes it in the following manner:

In a constant state of mental nepantilism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?¹⁷

Yet it can be argued that the use of hybridity in literary and cultural texts (including Victorian) shows resistance to the monological raciology of colonial discourse. As Jopi Nyman argues in his studies of colonial animal narratives, and Kipling's *The Jungle Book* in particular, the position of Mowgli as linking the worlds of colonizer and colonized, of humans and animals, yet not belonging to either, renders him in this space of liminality where he is able to resist fixed identifications.¹⁸ Correspondingly, Joel

¹³ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.10.

¹⁴ Young, p.27.

¹⁵ Peter Brooker, *Cultural Theory: A Glossary* (London: Arnold, 1999), pp.120-1.

¹⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), p.77.

¹⁷ Anzaldúa, p.78.

¹⁸ See Jopi Nyman, *Postcolonial Animal Tale from Kipling to Coetzee* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2003), and Jopi Nyman, 'De/Constructing Hybridity: Reading Animal Writing', in *Representing*

Kuortti discusses the importance of the notion of hybridity in Salman Rushdie's fiction.¹⁹ When Rushdie writes counter-narratives for their colonial, national, and fundamentalist interpretations, he 'reiterates hybridity as a narratological posture.'²⁰ Thus, when read in a framework enabling the birth of what Stuart Hall would refer to as 'new ethnicities,'²¹ even colonial(ist) narratives are able to produce identity categories and positionalities challenging their overt intentions. Similarly, Nikos Papastergiadis has pointed to the fact that through the use of the term it is possible to address the role of contradictions and difference in the making of identity by saying that hybridity 'openly acknowledges that identity is constructed through a negotiation of difference, and that the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of failure.'²²

Many discussions of the term relate it to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. For Bakhtin, hybridization is a process involving both linguistic and cultural aspects, and it emerges when different linguistic codes meet with each other.²³ As Sabine Mabardi's analysis of Bakhtin's use of the term indicates, in his writings it implies a situation of double-voicedness, where 'there is a mixture of the authorial language with tracers, or influences, of the other language/voice with which it has dialogized.'²⁴ Pnina Werbner defines the term slightly differently: 'For Bakhtin, hybridisation is the mixture of two languages, an encounter between two different linguistic consciousnesses.'²⁵ Werbner suggests that Bakhtin distinguishes between two forms of hybridization: organic (unconscious) and aesthetic (intentional) hybridity.²⁶ In Werbner's view, Bakhtin's unconscious hybridity is a natural process in which one language or culture absorbs elements from the other without

Gender, Ethnicity and Nation in Word and Image, ed. by Karin Granqvist and Ulrike Spring (Tromsø: University of Tromsø, 2001), pp.41-56.

¹⁹ See Joel Kuortti, *Fictions to Live In: Narration as an Argument for Fiction in Salman Rushdie's Novels* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), and Joel Kuortti, *Place of the Sacred: The Rhetoric of the Satanic Verses Affair* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997).

²⁰ Kuortti, *Fictions*, p.231.

²¹ Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues*, ed. by David Morley and Kuan-hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.441-50.

²² Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Tracing Hybridity in Theory', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. by Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (London: Zed, 1997), pp.257-81 (p.258).

²³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. by Helen Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

²⁴ Sabine Mabardi, 'Encounters of a Heterogeneous Kind: Hybridity in Cultural Theory', in *Unforeseeable Americas: Constructing Cultural Hybridity in the Americas*, ed. by Rita De Grandis and Zilá Bernd (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp.1-17 (p.5).

²⁵ Pnina Werbner, 'Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. by Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (London: Zed, 1997), pp.1-26 (p.4).

²⁶ Werbner, pp.4-5.

making any fuss about it, whereas intentional hybrids ‘shock, change, challenge, revitalise or disrupt through deliberate, intended fusions’ and in so doing ‘create an ironic double consciousness.’²⁷ As a result of Bakhtinian ideas, literary critics have often sought examples of hybridity in the mixed expressions of post-colonial literatures combining Western and non-Western genres, languages, and literary forms.²⁸

With a reference to the development of musical histories, Simon Featherstone exemplifies the distinction between the two forms of hybridity. While what he calls ‘the great hybrid musics of colonialism and its aftermath – jazz, tango, salsa’ are, as results of non-foreseeable contacts and negotiations (related to the history of the Black Atlantic), examples of the former, today’s aesthetically oriented world-music, such as the co-operation of Ry Cooder and Ali Farka Touré seeking to unite blues with the musics of West Africa, are intentional hybrids.²⁹ In the opinion of Featherstone, cultural hybrids of the latter kind – which are typical of postmodernism – pose certain problems for post-colonial studies: ‘The resulting encounters may produce versions of hybridity that are aesthetically pleasing, but they are quite unable to sustain the political and cultural weight and energies that Gilroy, Bakhtin and Ishmael Reed assign to the “unintentional” histories of that process.’³⁰ In his critical discussion of the term hybridity in academic discourse, Featherstone argues that present-day critics occasionally use examples of contemporary cultural practices as illustrations of theoretical vocabularies and do not become involved in their analysis. Contrasting the case of Apache Indian, a popular music artist from Birmingham combining Indian and Jamaican music styles who enjoyed a brief period of attention as the embodiment of hybridity in popular music in the 1990s, with the postwar Trinidadian Calypso singer Lord Kitchener whose simple songs of immigrant life in post-1948 Britain mark cultural transitions and express diasporic experiences, Featherstone expresses the necessity of recovering histories of hybridity if we are to understand culture as a whole and its formation.³¹ As Featherstone puts it:

Their deceptively inconsequential narratives are often encrypted commentaries on the consequences of that experience, its liberations as well as its privations. Their audiences were also newly internationals – Trinidadian, African and British. Kitchener both acknowledged and developed this network of Black Atlantic culture. His was not a

²⁷ Werbner, p.5.

²⁸ See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Strikes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1988).

²⁹ Simon Featherstone, *Postcolonial Cultures* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p.45.

³⁰ Featherstone, p.46.

³¹ Featherstone, pp.47-54.

migration to 'the motherland,' but to a cultural nexus that allowed dialogues with other cultural migrations, African as well as Caribbean, and which, as with C. L. R. James, involved him West Africa at a decisive point in its postcolonial emergence.³²

As Featherstone's analysis shows, cultural hybridity is not only a question of combining different ingredients together to form and celebrate a hyphenated identity, but its analyses show different migrations and mobilities problematizing the histories of contemporary identities. In this process the work of such scholars as Homi K. Bhabha and Paul Gilroy has played a significant role in theoretical discussions of hybridity – indeed, responses to and developments of their work are also central in the articles collected in this volume.

Bhabha's major contribution is the idea that the *intercultural* space where hybrid identity is formed is a space of in-betweenness and liminality. To put his complicated argument simply, in what Bhabha calls the 'Third Space of enunciation,'³³ the liminal space between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized, migrants and other (post)colonial subjects go through a process that recasts their fixed sense of identity. While this reconstruction of identity may be positive and empowering, its transgressive character and location in the liminal space of borders and boundaries also, as Bhabha writes, poses potential dangers as it generates a new, hybrid subjectivity: "Beyond" signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future; but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary – the very fact of going beyond – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the "present."³⁴ Thus, to enter the Third Space, while it shows the potentiality of constructing a non-fixed identity, generates a new sense of identity that may resemble the old ones but is not quite the same. Bhabha describes this Third Space of enunciation by using the Freudian term of the uncanny, *das Unheimliche*, or the 'unhomely,' and suggests that what is involved in the construction of hybrid identity is an 'estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations.'³⁵

As the unhomely is defined as the 'paradigmatic colonial and postcolonial condition,'³⁶ it is no surprise that one of his examples of narrative texts embodying hybridity is Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a story revisiting histories of terror, violence, and haunting. A similar idea of the emergence of hybrid cultural identity with particular reference to Asian America has been

³² Featherstone, p.54.

³³ Bhabha, p.37.

³⁴ Bhabha, p.4.

³⁵ Bhabha, p.9.

³⁶ Bhabha, p.9.

expressed by the writer Meena Alexander: 'For us, here, the barbed wire is taken into the heart and art grapples with a disorder in society. In our writing, we need to evoke a chaos coequal to the injustices that surround us.'³⁷ The significance of hybridity in the making of contemporary identities can be seen in that, while some critics, like Roger Bromley in his study of contemporary diasporic fiction, prefer the concept of syncretism to hybridity, they explicitly frame their study in the cultural borderlands of hyphenated identities: 'The fictions concentrated on are "borderline" narratives, works of recombination and "hyphenation," texts of incomplete signification and hybridity: in-between spaces.'³⁸

Some critics of Bhabha, such as Aijaz Ahmad and Benita Parry, criticize his theory for its poststructuralist/postmodernist and textual emphasis. Ahmad, for example, argues that Bhabha lives in the same 'material conditions of *postmodernity* which presume the benefits of modernity as the very grounds from which judgements on that past of this *post-* may be delivered,'³⁹ and elsewhere argues against the anti-historicity of Bhabha's post-colonial theory.⁴⁰ However, it has also been argued that Bhabha's notion of the Third Space with its threatening ambivalence can be harnessed for emancipatory purposes and used to uncover narratives of nation: 'Hybridity is a threat to colonial and cultural authority; it subverts the concept of pure origin or identity of the dominant authority through the ambivalence created by denial, unsettling, repetition, and displacement.'⁴¹ While the work of Gilroy comes from a different theoretical tradition, relying more on sociological theories of modernity than on psychoanalytical and poststructuralist vocabularies, it is in their critiques of nations and nationalism that the two theorists meet. It is, indeed, these questions that are taken up by contributors to this volume.

In his famous counternarrative of West-centred modernity, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Gilroy shows how black Atlantic culture can be seen as a transnational and diasporic phenomenon that has challenged both Euro- and Afrocentric nationalisms.⁴² Thus the philosophical and artistic work of intellectuals from Frederick Douglass and

³⁷ Meena Alexander, *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), p.128.

³⁸ Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p.3.

³⁹ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1994), p.68; emphases original.

⁴⁰ Aijaz Ahmad, 'The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality', in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1996), pp.277-93 (p.291).

⁴¹ Mabardi, p.6.

⁴² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

W. E. B. Du Bois to Richard Wright is based on the movement and mutual exchange between different spaces and traditions. Britain, Europe, Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean have all played a role in this process, and it is not limited to any particular national tradition. In so doing, Gilroy comes to challenge all appeals to national and ethnic purity, and offers an alternative approach to the study of cultural hybridity.

As hybridity has become an accepted and widely-used critical term in recent years, it has been applied to a wide variety of cultural texts and phenomena. For instance, Néstor García Canclini's influential interpretation of hybridity as a central element in Latin American modernity has been seen as a critical and empirical counterpoint to Bhabha's psychoanalytically oriented abstract writing.⁴³ Focusing on the transformation of culture in the US-Mexican borderlands, García Canclini, by applying Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notions of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, shows 'intercultural hybridity'⁴⁴ at work in different spheres of urban life in Tijuana, where the border experience forms the centre of its inhabitants' definitions of space and self.⁴⁵ To quote García Canclini:

In the exchanges of traditional symbols with international communications circuits, culture industries, and migrations, questions about identity and the national, the defense of sovereignty, and the unequal appropriation of knowledge and art do not disappear. The conflicts are not erased, as neoconservative postmodernism claims. They are placed in a different register, one that is multifocal and more tolerant, and the autonomy of each culture is rethought – sometimes – with smaller fundamentalist risks.⁴⁶

The existence of such locations of hybridity where the traditional and the new co-exist problematizes standard narratives of modernity and postmodernity by generating 'mixed times' where 'premodernity, modernity and postmodernity [coexist]'.⁴⁷ A similar problematization of time can be found in the work of Bhabha: his notion of 'time-lag' suggests that the colonial past is present and informs the post-colonial now, that is, in the colonialist stereotype that surfaces in the present and troubles the linearity of modernity by repeating the past.⁴⁸ John Kraniuskas suggests that the theories of Bhabha

⁴³ John Kraniuskas, 'Hybridity in a Transnational Frame: Latin-Americanist and Post-Colonial Perspectives on Cultural Studies', in *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*, ed. by Avtar Brah and Annie E. Coombes (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.235-56 (p.245).

⁴⁴ Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. by Christopher L. Chiappiari and Silvia L. Lopéz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p.207.

⁴⁵ García Canclini, pp.234-8.

⁴⁶ García Canclini, pp.240-1.

⁴⁷ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 'Globalization as Hybridization', in *Global Modernities*, ed. by Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), pp.45-68 (p.51).

⁴⁸ See Bhabha, p.253.

and García Canclini share a belief in what he calls 'border times,' non-Western temporalities that counter the aspirations of Eurocentric narratives of modernity.⁴⁹

Through such reconceptualizations of the construction of cultural identity in contact situations, and also because of the transnationalization of the disciplines of American Studies and American literature, similar issues of identity have also been recently addressed in readings of hybrid, mixed-race or interracial identities, problematizing the traditional maintenance of allegedly pure categories.⁵⁰ In her memoir *Fault Lines*, Alexander expresses this problematic issue succinctly: '[A]m I American now I have lost my shining picture? Now I have no home in the old way? Is America this terrible multiplicity at the heart?'⁵¹ American literature, of course, is only one literary tradition where such processes of hybridization appear: the recent essay collection *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-Colonial Europe*, edited by Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniel Merolla, paves way for the study – both historical and contemporary – of various emerging hybrid and transnational literary traditions.⁵² Similarly, new and promising areas of application include such fields as the study of sexuality and science studies,⁵³ where the truths of narratives about nature have been interrogated, and the study of virtual realities. The discussions in the articles in this collection – in their geographical and generic multiplicity – also attest that such problematization is not restricted by, for example, geography or by genre.

The power of hybridity can be seen in its ability to question what appears natural and complete, to problematize naturalized boundaries. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse expresses the importance of hybridity:

Acknowledging the contingency of boundaries and the significance and limitations of hybridity as a theme and approach means engaging hybridity politics. This is where critical hybridity comes in, which involves a new awareness of and new take on the

⁴⁹ Kraniuskas, pp.249-50.

⁵⁰ See Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); *Mixed-Race Literature*, ed. by Jonathan Brennan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), and Anzaldúa.

⁵¹ Meena Alexander, *Fault Lines: A Memoir* (New York: City University of New York and Feminist Press, 1993), p.201.

⁵² See *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-Colonial Europe*, ed. by Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniela Merolla (Lanham: Lexington Books/Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

⁵³ See *Hybridity and Its Discontents: Politics, Science and Culture*, ed. by Avtar Brah and Annie E. Coombes (London: Routledge, 2000).

dynamics of group formation and social inequality. This critical awareness is furthered by acknowledging rather than suppressing hybridity.⁵⁴

Hybridity Now: Articles and Their Contents

This volume is divided into two parts. In the contributions to the first part, the writers develop theories of hybridity by challenging existing views on hybridity and presenting new perspectives on cultural and literary theorizations of the subject. The second part of the volume then presents a number of case studies which explore hybridity and its representation in a variety of literatures.

The first part of the collection, 'Reconstructing Theories of Hybridity,' begins with three reassessments of and challenges to Bhabha's theorizations of hybridity. It opens with David Huddart's discussion of the recent writings of Bhabha, produced in anticipation of Bhabha's forthcoming books *A Measure of Dwelling: Reflections on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism* and *The Right to Narrate*. Huddart pays attention to the ways in which Bhabha develops a practice of critical reading. In this practice, hybridity is understood as intervention rather than a feature of some existing practice, phenomenon, or subject. Furthermore, Huddart points out how this critical practice relates to the discourses connected with human rights. This, then, has very concrete bearings on subalternity in the face of global citizenship.

In her contribution, Sabine Broeck problematizes the metaphoricity of the notion of hybridity. While post-colonial theory often accounts for hybridity in terms of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, there is a very concrete 'reality of the bastard' to be faced in the post-colonial world. Broeck takes her lead from Robert J. C. Young's critique of Bhabha and argues for a more nuanced understanding of hybridity. One particular, and so far neglected, aspect that in Broeck's view needs to be considered through hybridity is the concept of whiteness.

Dimple Godiwala approaches Bhabha's theorization especially through the notion of mimicry. She perceives it as an unbalanced notion that does not mean the same for the hegemonic white as for the subaltern post-colonial. Godiwala considers the *performative mimicry* of post-colonial cultural texts in terms of either the *linguistic-cultural performative* or the *ideological-cultural performative* and sees texts like Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* as ambivalent. Like Broeck, Godiwala calls for a more concrete consideration of the biological hybrids.

⁵⁴ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 'Hybridity, So What? The Anti-Hybridity Backlash and the Riddles of Recognition', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 18.2-3 (2001), 219-45 (p.239).

In Jeroen Dewulf's article, the notion of hybridity is discussed in terms of anthropophagy. The organizing idea that all languages are hybrid, or creole, is developed through a consideration of the German language. The idea of pure language and its originality is contested through analyses of Brazilian materials: the Tupari people, Brazilian modernist fiction, and anthropophagical mythology. Dewulf suggests that an anthropophagical interpretation of languages, cultures, and identities is both truthful – since it acknowledges the *true* course of their development and construction – and ethically valuable – since it resists monological truths and absolute, singular identities.

Paul Sharrad writes about strategic hybridity in his article on Pacific interpretations of post-colonial theory. Playing explicitly with Spivak's notion of *strategic essentialism*, Sharrad suggests that the many and varied uses and misuses of the term hybridity may successfully be used in a strategic manner. Through an assessment of particularly Pacific materials, Sharrad argues that the ambivalence of the metaphoricality and reality of the term is such that it is open for re-translation in new situations, and while sometimes there may be losses in its application, at other times there will be gains. Sharrad maintains Pnina Werbner's idea of hybridity as processual, and vouches for an understanding of the multiplicity of hybridity.

The first part concludes with Andrew Blake's discussion of *postalgia*. Blake reads Gilroy's recent book *After Empire* and the cycle of Matrix films by the Wachowski Brothers. Blake sees Gilroy's work as an *alternative* to the prevalent post-colonial application of hybridity. Gilroy employs the term melancholia to discuss the post-post-colonial anti-nostalgia in popular culture, and Blake perceives in Gilroy's writing a clear sense of – at least partly unfounded – anti-Americanism. In the Matrix films then Blake sees an ambivalent, complex engagement with, and contestation of, any simplistic understanding of cultural imperialism. Challenging simplistic anti-American attitudes towards American popular culture, Blake anticipates that the Matrix in its ambiguous Americanness offers an American postalgia instead of British nostalgia.

The second part of the collection, 'Reading Hybridity,' includes eight articles that take up a more textual approach to reconsider the notion of hybridity. The first contribution in the second part is by Zoe Trodd, who looks at Native American autobiographies and the issue of cultural hybridity. In her discussion, Trodd considers the collaborative autobiographies of William Apress, Black Elk and Mary Crow Dog as hybrid constructions that are heterotopic renditions in which a multiplicity of voices exist. Trodd describes the dialogic encounter between the autobiographers and their collaborators as an open curve where the past informs the present and creates the future in an infinite regression.

Questions of race and mixed race subjectivity are dealt with in Sheng-mei Ma's article. Ma discusses the ways in which Asian American multiracial reality is reflected in three instances: in the diametrically opposed identity strategies of the Eaton sisters, Onoto Watanna and Sui Sin Far; in the genre of *lomansu*, or interracial romance; and in interracial theatre by the playwrights Velina Hasu Houston and Dmae Roberts. In these instances, Ma argues, the problematics of Asian American mixed race discourse is shown to be a Sisyphean task contesting issues of racism, passing, and ambiguous identity.

Jopi Nyman analyses the issue of Asian American subjectivity in Cynthia Kadohata's first novel *The Floating World*. Nyman argues that the haunting presence of the past in the form of the unhomeliness of home underlines the traumatic experiences of hybrid diasporic identity. Analysing the construction of the immigrant subject and the diasporic hybrid space of America, he shows how Kadohata problematizes the ideas of pure identity, closure and uninterrupted transition. Nyman's analysis of hybridity seeks to discuss the ambivalence of hybrid time and space through the writings of Walter Benjamin.

The close textual analysis by Joel Kuortti of Jhumpa Lahiri short story 'This Blessed House' brings forth the problems of hybrid identity. Applying the somewhat metaphorical concept of cultural translation, Kuortti demonstrates how Lahiri invokes diasporic identity as a translated site of hybridity. There is a constant negotiation between the different parts – times, cultures, locations – of a person's life, with many ways to confront this dilemma. In Kuortti's analysis, Lahiri's story opens up avenues in which post-colonial hybrid identity can reverse the colonial hierarchy to carve out a new self.

Andrew Hammond's article takes up Hanif Kureishi's screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette* and discusses it in the context of Margaret Thatcher's Britain. Hammond shows how Kureishi's text, along with his other texts such as *The Buddha of Suburbia*, displays a frustration with, and contestation of, British politics concerning immigrants and multiculturalism. Although Kureishi has been criticized for his alleged leanings towards hegemonic Western models, Hammond argues that his works nevertheless offer a valuable analysis of the problems of hybrid subjectivity.

While Hammond discusses Kureishi's screenplay, Valerie Kaneko Lucas in her article takes up two contemporary plays that deal with the ways in which Black Britons and British Asians negotiate hybrid cultural identities. The plays in question are *Fix Up*, by Kwame Kwei-Armah, and *Fragile Land*, by Tanika Gupta. Lucas sees both plays as expressions of a feeling of loss in view of their characters' hybrid identities. However, they do make an

effort to challenge the prevailing ideas of purity, be such ideas ethnic or national.

In his contribution, Samir Dayal discusses Rushdie's novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*. A major concern in Dayal's analysis is the ethical dimension of hybridity in the discourse on ethnicity. The hybrid minority subject position exemplified by the character of the Moor shows how difficult such a position is and what frustration and distress it causes. Dayal argues that Rushdie's novel speaks for the importance of ethico-political commitment to social justice in order to achieve cultural pluralism. He is also critical of the achievement of the novel, as he sees ambiguities in its own commitment to this ethics.

The anthology's concluding article by Mita Banerjee analyses Kureishi's novel *Gabriel's Gift* and Rushdie's novel *Fury*. Like Hammond and Dayal, Banerjee also perceives problems in the texts of Rushdie and Kureishi, especially in the way they represent the otherness of postcommunist Eastern Europeans. Banerjee argues that both novels, while allegedly post-colonially postethnic, at the same time seem to revert to colonial, Orientalist manners of representation. She considers the ethics of post-colonial literature and discusses the possibilities and pitfalls of hybridity in the new millennium.

Towards the Zone of Hybridity

Owing to the character of the present anthology, hybridity seems to obtrude as something in itself, an entity or theory on its own. This is not, however, the case. Hybridity as we see it does not constitute a separate field or spell out interests of its own kind. It stems from and is thus closely linked with different fields of inquiry. In this context of reconsiderations of hybridity, we connect it especially with American Studies and Post-colonial Studies, although, as we have already noted about American literature, these do not saturate or pre-empt the notion. As the subtitle of this collection signals, the articles in this volume are studies of cultural transitions, and they also pave way for further transitions in the field of postcolonial studies. Indeed, the best attestation of the relevance of the notion of hybridity is the array of articles in this collection. They take critical looks at hybridity and give back challenging reconsiderations of it – and they all do this within specific contexts.

The joint effort in this volume to reconsider hybridity in its limitations, challenges, and potential is not meant to be a mere intellectual exercise. In the articles one can also read a strong ethical note which we share. In connection with the post-colonial, as Frantz Fanon defines it, it is never a

specific moment but an ongoing struggle, a continual emergence, a 'zone of occult instability.'⁵⁵ Likewise, what we wish to emphasize with this collection is the possibility of hybridity as such a zone where people can meet – themselves or each other – and where 'our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light.'⁵⁶

While the Introduction has been written in collaboration, Jopi Nyman has drafted the text for the general introduction while Joel Kuortti has drawn together the synopses for the articles. The editors should like to express their gratitude to the Academy of Finland (Project 205780) for funding the research of which the anthology is a part. We should also like to thank Ms. Anne Karhapää for her assistance in preparing the final manuscript.

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⁵⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1990), p.183.

⁵⁶ Fanon, p.183.

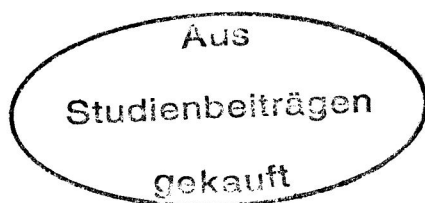
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Reconstructing Hybridity

Post-Colonial Studies in Transition

Edited by
Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman



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