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Approaches to the *post-colonial* through culture and *Bildung* - Critique of the a priori myth of (neo-)colonial narratives

Abordagens para o pós-colonialismo pela cultura e pelo *Bildung*: crítica do mito, a priori, de narrativas (neo)coloniais

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Abstract: In this article, I argue that cultures cannot be understood as fixed entities. This is also linked to a critique of the idea of cultural identity. Furthermore, I will show that the attribution of cultural identities was an integral part of European colonial thought patterns and was integrated into mechanisms of oppression. By colonial thought patterns, I mean a certain attitude to the world that cannot tolerate difference and that forcibly integrated non-European cultures and peoples into its own world view by classifying them as inferior. Using Edward Said's work *Orientalism* and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern speak?* as examples, I will show how the representation of the 'Other', the non-European, has maintained the illusion of superiority of European cultures. Furthermore, I will discuss a particular understanding of *Bildung* as a way to deconstruct colonial thought patterns.

Keywords: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, *Bildung*, Representation, Orientalism, Subalternity

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Resumo: Neste artigo, discute-se que culturas não podem ser entendidas como entidades fixas. Isso também se liga à crítica da ideia de identidade cultural. Além disso, mostra-se que a atribuição de identidades culturais foi parte integral dos padrões do pensamento colonial europeu e estava integrada a mecanismos de opressão. Padrões coloniais de pensamento aqui se referem à certa atitude por parte do mundo de intolerância do diferente e à ideia de que culturas e pessoas não europeias forçosamente integradas à sua própria perspectiva mundial são classificadas como inferiores. Usando o trabalho *Orientalismo*, de Edward Said, e o ensaio *Pode o subalterno falar?*, de Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, como exemplos, apresenta-se como a representação do Outro, do não europeu, tem mantido a ilusão de superioridade das culturas europeias. Também, expõe-se um entendimento particular de *bildung* como uma forma de desconstruir padrões de pensamento coloniais.

Palavras-chave: colonialismo, pós-colonialismo, *bildung*, representação, orientalismo, subalternidade.

1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

“Modern theories of enunciation always oblige us to recognize that enunciation comes from somewhere. It cannot be unplaced, it cannot be unpositioned, it is always positioned in a discourse. It is when a discourse forgets that it is placed that it tries to speak for everybody else” (Hall 2000, 36).

I will briefly turn to the terms of *culture and Bildung*². However, the paper will not give any exhaustive definitions. The main concern is to identify so-called ‘problem fields’. The term *post-colonial* is given a special attention in this paper and will be discussed in more detail.

Culture - My approach to the idea of *culture* refers to François Jullien’s contribution to the discussion of cultural identity. Jullien’s position in this discussion is: “There is no cultural identity” (Jullien 2018). However, this normative setting needs further explanation. Jullien’s standpoint must first be understood as a critique of the current renaissance of national rhetoric and politics (ibid., 7). He classifies this renaissance as a “reaction to globalisation”³ (ibid.). In the discussion on cultural identity(ies), Jullien’s starts off by pointing out terminological inaccuracies and simplifications. When juxtaposing different cultures, the focus usually lies on their ‘differences’. In contrast, Jullien argues that cultures are not isolated capsules that collide with each other, as, for example, Samuel Huntington systematically presented it in “The Clash of Civilizations” (1996). Rather, in the discussion about cultures, one should speak of ‘distances’ (Jullien 2018, 7). To understand Jullien’s critique on identity politics the precise use of the terms ‘difference’ and ‘distance’ is important: “Both terms mark a separation; ‘difference’, however, relies on a *distinction*, while

² *Erziehung and Bildung*; these are the words used in German to differentiate pedagogical thinking. There is an important difference in content between education and upbringing. The translation of education into English is uncomplicated: *Erziehung* = education. *Bildung*, on the other hand, is not so easy to translate: *Bildung* ≠ education. Unfortunately, there is no equivalent to *Bildung* in English. The content-related difference between *Erziehung* and *Bildung* would be lost in a translation. In this paper I will try to mark this difference.

³ Translated by the author of the paper: “Reaktion auf die Globalisierung”.

the latter focuses on the gaze on a distance”⁴ (ibid. 36). Distinctions aim at identifications: “The difference that operates with distinctions separates one species from another and highlights their distinctive characteristics using comparisons. It presupposes a superordinate genus within where the difference is manifested and thus determines identity”⁵ (ibid., 38). The ‘distance’, on the other hand, opens an ‘in-between’ (ibid., 40 f.). Jullien emphasises that thinking in ‘differences’ and ignoring the ‘in-between’ had already begun in ancient Greek philosophy: “Indeed, we cannot think the in-between. Because the *in-between* has no ‘being’. [...] Because the Greeks thought of ‘the being’ in the sense of being – that is, in the sense of destiny and property (which is why they were terrified of the indeterminate), they were not able to think the ‘in-between’ [...]. For the ‘in-between’, which is neither one nor the other, has no self, no essence, nothing of its own. More precisely: the *in-between* is ‘not’”⁶ (ibid. 41).

This paper will discuss European colonialism and its relation to non-European cultures. My train of thought is following the thesis that European colonialism had to eradicate the ‘in-between’ to articulate its superiority over the non-European. The eradication of the ‘in-between’ created a specific myth (μῦθος), a myth that shows the supposed superiority of European culture and indulges in the illusion of being able to leave the ‘in-between’ to position oneself *a priori*. Ralf Koerrenz, however, emphasises that the human being is formed by history: “From an early age, a human being is woven into history and into the stories that have been created and are created in it. [...] An escape from the history of stories is impossible”⁷ (Koerrenz 2014, 13). The *a priori* myth wants to escape from its historicity. During the course of this paper, the dominance of this *a priori* myth within (neo-) colonial motifs will be elaborated.

Bildung - The following considerations are essentially based on Ralf Koerrenz’s understanding of *Bildung*. Together with education, *Bildung* serves as one of the main concepts of pedagogical thinking (Koerrenz/Winkler 2013, 59). Although the term *Bildung* is closely linked to the German language and history (Koerrenz 2020, 16), it can, under the anthropological premise that all people learn (ibid., 15), mark something universally human: “*Bildung* is a mark of how human beings, through their selves of whatever kind, control their learning process. Education is a label for how people are both free and responsible in this control” (ibid.)⁸. Koerrenz further understands *Bildung* as an enlightening program, and in doing so, he reformulates the self-reflective criticism of the self vis-à-vis

⁴ Translated by the author of the paper: “Beide markieren eine Trennung; Die Differenz setzt dabei jedoch auf eine *Unterscheidung*, während der Abstand den Blick auf eine *Entfernung* richtet“.

⁵ Translated by the author of the paper: “Die Differenz, die mit Unterscheidungen vorgeht, trennt eine Art von anderen Arten und stellt über Vergleiche fest, was ihre Besonderheit ausmacht. Sie setzt eine übergeordnete Gattung voraus, innerhalb welcher die Differenz sich zeigt, und bestimmt so die Identität.“

⁶ Translated by the author of the paper: “Es stimmt, dass wir das ‘Zwischen’ nicht denken können. Denn das Zwischen hat kein ‘Sein’. Weil die Griechen das ‘Sein’ im Sinne des Seins – das heißt im Sinne von Bestimmung und Eigenschaft gedachten haben (weshalb es ihnen vor dem Un-Bestimmten graute), waren sie nicht in der Lage, das, ‘Zwischen’ zu denken [...]. Denn das Zwischen, das weder das eine noch das andere ist, hat kein An-sich, nichts Eigenes. Genauer gesagt: Das Zwischen ‘ist’ nicht“.

⁷ Translated by the author of the paper: “Ein Mensch ist von klein auf in Geschichte und in die in ihr entstandenen Geschichten verwoben. [...] Eine Flucht aus der Geschichte der Geschichten ist unmöglich“.

⁸ Translated by the author of the paper: “Bildung ist eine Kennzeichnung dafür, wie Menschen durch ihr wie auch immer geartetes Selbst ihre Lernprozesse steuern“.

the conditions of their possibility of cognition (ibid., 23 f.). In this paper, I will use select examples of *post-colonial* thinkers to explain how the awareness of the conditions of one's own possibility of cognition was erased in (neo)colonial narratives.

Under hermeneutical perspective, Koerrenz describes *Bildung* in terms of dealing with one's pre-judices (ibid., 30 ff. and Koerrenz 2014, 13 - 28). Koerrenz's merit is that he initially frees pre-judgements from the simple accusation of being expressions of ignorance and unawareness. Koerrenz understands pre-judgements as existential: "When a Person looks in the mirror, they see one thing above all else: a being full of pre-judgements" (Koerrenz 2020, 30). This being is powerless against the fact of perceiving, sorting and relating to the world along the lines of pre-judgments: "Every human being brings their prejudices into the construction of what they think they will find at every moment of their relation to the world. And not only can this not be switched off, but it is also not negative. It is a part of understanding. Understanding is based on prejudices, operates with them and constantly checks them. What is bad, however, is when exactly this crucial point is not clear: the starting point of and ultimately being trapped in one's perspective, because only through that, 'truth' can be attained"¹⁰ (Koerrenz 2016, 46).

The focus on prejudices should not be an absolution, according to the motto: "That is just the way I think". Quite the contrary! Becoming aware of one's pre-judgments promotes two critical moments: firstly, the knowledge of the positionality of one's own thinking and secondly, that thinking comes to no end. Pre-judgments open a time *gap*. They stand between the subject and the world. A judgment, on the other hand, is. A pre-judgment is yet to come, it is not.

In the following section, I will attempt to systematise the *post-colonial* in the face of one of many possible readings of colonial history. Then two articulations of the *post-colonial* – the Invention of the Orient and Subaltern Speechlessness – which challenge the *a priori* myth and show ways of reintegrating it into the secular.

2. THE *POST-COLONIAL* PARADIGM

"As soon as any contemporary intellectual movement is established, arguments always follow about its name. This is because naming involves important forms of political power structures [...]. The drawback for any name that ends in an 'ism' is that it will be taken to imply a set of shared ideas, and a single, homogeneous ideology. Such characterization will of necessity be a broad generalization, produced after the event. The practice is always far more diverse and heterogeneous [...]. Colonialism and imperialism were just as heterogeneous as concepts and as practices. [...] It would be a mistake to assume that postcolonialism involves a unitary theory espousing a single perspective and position" (Young 2001, 63).

Following Young, the approach to the *post-colonial* can only be fragmentary. Attempts to identify the *post-colonial* would end in an epistemological impasse. The *post-colonial* tends

⁹ Translated by the author of the paper: "Blickt der Mensch in den Spiegel, so sieht er/sie/es vor allem eines: ein Wesen voller Vor-Urteile".

¹⁰ Translated by the author of the paper: "Jeder Mensch bringt in jedem Moment seiner Weltbeziehung seine Vorurteile in die Konstruktion dessen ein, was er meint vorzufinden. Und das ist nicht nur nicht ausschaltbar, sondern überdies auch nicht schlimm. Es gehört zum Verstehen dazu. Verstehen basiert auf Vor-Urteilen, arbeitet mit ihnen und prüft sie ständig. Schlimm ist es jedoch, wenn einen genau dieser entscheidende Punkt nicht klar wäre: Das Ausgehen von und letztlich Gefangen-Sein in der eigenen Perspektivität, weil nur durch sie hindurch 'Wahrheit' erlangt werden kann".

to mark an ‘in-between’, which, depending on the approach chosen, opens possibilities to readjust cultural identifications (Jullien) and prejudices (Koerrenz).

A historical approach can be a first attempt to visualise the scientific range that the *post-colonial* implies. We find similar approaches in the German introductory volumes by Maria do Mar Castro Varela/Nikita Dhawan (2015) and Ina Kerner (2012). Furthermore, we discover a more systematic approach by Young (2001), which attempts to differentiate between the terms *colonialism*, *imperialism*, *neocolonialism* and *postcolonialism*. Nevertheless, Young also understands his volume as “an historical introduction”.

Some might say historical approaches are plausible. But they should not create certainty about a specific field of knowledge. By referring to African studies and its interdisciplinary approaches, Steven Feiermann rightly points out that historiography is not subject to a simple addition method for which new variables can be used (Feierman 2013, 405).

If we initially exclude the prefix *post*, then the term *colonial* triggers a chain of associations that is held together by a supposedly secure and neutral historical perspective. Single associations in this chain are linked to a history of *colonialism* by selected events of the past that mark a starting and an ending point. The images created in our minds by looking back in time acquire supporting pillars through dates which simplify mental leaps and thus systematisation. A first leap can be traced back to 1492 when Christopher Columbus set out to find an alternative sea route to India on behalf of the Spanish monarchy. A few years later, the areas *discovered* by Columbus were under the influence of the Spanish and Portuguese kingdoms, with disastrous consequences for the indigenous populations. What marks the year 1492, and what symbolic charge does Christopher Columbus experience? In Barcelona, there is a monument in honour of Christopher Columbus, inaugurated during the Universal Exhibition of 1888. Perpetuated as a bronze figure, Columbus is enthroned above the city at the height of 60 metres, his right forefinger, his gaze and his right foot, which steps slightly above the pedestal, facing the sea. Holding a scroll in his left hand, his left foot is firmly anchored to the pedestal. In 2004, Venezuelan activists brought down a statue of Columbus in Caracas and in 2002, the President at that time, Hugo Chavez, declared 12 October “Day of Indigenous Resistance” (Kühn 2015, unpag.). Similar events and protests took place in many Central and South American countries (Kanopka/Dießelmann 2017, unpag.).

Memory is ambivalent. On the one side sits the hero and a historical date that signify the rise of Europe as the dominant geopolitical power. On the other side is the oppressor, murderer, hate figure and date that signify the beginning of mass murder, enslavement, exploitation and oppression. Do both sides share the same history of *colonialism*, or does each tell its own? It seems almost impossible to define *colonialism*. The period (if we take 1492 as a possible starting point and the end of British colonial rule in Hong Kong in 1997 as a possible endpoint, then we are talking about a period of 500 years), the space (colonialism was a global phenomenon) and the heterogeneous manifestations (settlement colonialism and planter colonialism were fundamentally different), all render a definition difficult. The formula does not fit: The colonial ruler versus the colonised. Such a simple dualism would be misleading, since any attempt to approach the subject always carries the danger of a generalisation with simultaneous inevitability of generalisation(!). *Colonialism* describes the relationship between a mother country and a region outside its territory, whose population has been subjected and robbed of its right to self-determination (Osterhammel 1995, 16). Osterhammel also characterises the colonial rulers’ belief in their cultural superiority as the basis for legitimising their exploitation and foreign control (ibid., 20). This feeling of superiority is threaded through the history of relations between the European colonial powers and their colonies. It manifests itself in a specific movement of detachment from one’s own pre-judgment structure/perspectivity and the worship of a myth that wants to erase its historicity to be able to sit *a priori* in history. The illusion of an overview is created

and creates a specific authority, that Walter D. Mignolo¹¹ unmasks as a hidden and at the same time expansive epistemic violence in his examination of modernity as a supposedly exclusively European project: “This idea, which in reality is only one side of history, was spread and gained truthfulness, which enabled it to hide the other side of history. The magic trick was to make its geo-politics and body-politics of knowledge disappear successfully and people forget that modernity as a historical epoch is told by figures who can inhabit it and who can speak in it: Modernity is the narrative of imperial, speech-powerful subjects who tell about their history and conceal their belonging to a region”¹² (Mignolo 2012, 113).¹³

At first, it sounds paradoxical: the myth wants to remain unrecognised and to leave history behind, and at the same time it is a cycle of self-referentiality, although it is not seen as such. Mignolo sets the beginning of this “colonisation of space and time”¹⁴ (ibid., 117) in the European Renaissance, from which hierarchical patterns of ordering knowledge and thought also began their global conquest: “Thus, for example, languages and forms of knowledge were excluded that were not based in Latin or Greek. Persons who did not know the Latin alphabet or believed in gods that did not correspond to *the* god were made pagans and barbarians. The self-foundation of the idea of *Humanitas* required exteriority of the *Anthropos* and in the barbarian. In the 18th century, in this civilised epoch, the colonisation of time, which had already created the Middle Ages, was extended to include the colonisation of the barbarian realm: The Middle Ages and the rest of humanity now belonged to the past. Modernity thus remains in the *present of time* and the *centre of space*”¹⁵ (ibid., 117 f.).

¹¹ To discuss a *post-colonial paradigm* and Walter D. Mignolo in the same paper is risky. Mignolo criticises *post-colonial* approaches and their representatives by accusing them of a form of academic elitism (cf. Mignolo 2012, 54). The discussion between *post-colonial* and *decolonial*, *emancipation* and *liberation* must be conducted elsewhere. For strategic reasons, the present contribution will incorporate Mignolo’s criticism of a particular gesture of modern thinking under the cipher of *post-colonial*.

¹² Translated by the author of the paper: “Diese Idee, die in Wahrheit nur einen Teil der Geschichte ausmacht, wurde verbreitet und erlangte Wahrhaftigkeit, wodurch es ihr gelang, den anderen Teil der Geschichte zu verbergen. Der Zaubertrick bestand darin, die eigene Geo- und Körperpolitik der Erkenntnis erfolgreich zum Verschwinden zu bringen und in Vergessenheit geraten zu lassen, dass die Moderne als historische Epoche von Figuren erzählt wird, die sie bewohnen und die sprechen können: Die Moderne ist die Erzählung imperialer, sprachmöglicher Subjekte, die von ihrer eigenen Geschichte berichten und ihre Zugehörigkeit zu einer Region verschleiern“.

¹³ The edition of Mignolo’s text used here has been translated from Spanish into German. The Spanish title is *Desobediencia epistémica. Retórica de la modernidad, lógica de la colonialidad y gramática de la descolonialidad* and was published in 2010. In the same year Mignolo wrote a similarly titled text in English. This version, however, lacks important thoughts of Mignolo. The translators and editors of the German version were also aware of this fact, which is why they translated from the Spanish original into German (cf. Kastner/Waibel 2012, 41). I will therefore rely on the German version and translate the necessary passages into English on my own.

¹⁴ Translated by the author of the paper: “Kolonialisierung von Raum und Zeit”.

¹⁵ Translated by the author of the paper: “So wurden etwa Sprachen und Wissensformen ausgeschlossen, die nicht im Lateinischen oder Griechischen angelegt waren. Personen, die das lateinische Alphabet nicht kannten oder an Götter glaubten, die nicht *dem* Gott entsprochen, wurden zu Heiden und Barbaren gemacht. Die Selbstbegründung der Idee der *Humanitas* bedurfte einer Exteriorität des *Anthropos* und im Barbaren. Im 18. Jahrhundert wurde in dieser zivilisierten Epoche die Kolonialisierung der Zeit, durch die bereits das Mittelalter geschaffen wurde, um die Kolonialisierung des barbarischen Raums erweitert: Das Mittelalter und der Rest der Menschheit gehörten nun der Vergangenheit an. So bleibt die Moderne in der *Gegenwart der Zeit und im Zentrum des Raums*”.

This claim to a dominion over space and time is extended by colonial expansion and the confrontations with people who stood outside (geographically as well as culturally). They were the supposedly already known Other, which in the European context were people of Muslim or Jewish faith. With the introduction of the 'primitive', the European pattern of order has been further extended: "the invention of the 'primitive' and 'tradition' was thus the first step towards a contemporary translation into underdeveloped zones, populations and, most recently, into emerging economies. While the barbarians coexisted in space, the primitive, underdeveloped and aspiring are placed in a (underdeveloped and aspiring) 'before', even if they coexist in the 'now'. Thus, the primitive and the traditional appear as 'objects' outside Europe and beyond modernity"¹⁶ (ibid., 121).

One's own forms of world relationship, meaning the use of one's language, cultural rituals and religious customs, may remain from the logic of myth, but they do not share the 'now'. They are banished into the spatial sphere of the 'traditional' and the temporal 'before'.

That this was also a banishment in the minds of the colonised populations is illustrated by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o regarding the discussion about the restructuring of the Kenyan school system after the independence from Great Britain (wa Thiong'o 2005, 87 - 108). The long-lasting effects of this ban are illustrated by wa Thiong'o concerning the academic dispute about the position of Kenyan literature to European "classics", as he at the same time refers to the question of an African self-image in the face of colonial heritage: "Africa as a continent has been victim of colonial exploitation, oppression and human degradation. In the field of culture she was taught to look on Europe as her teacher and the centre of man's civilization, and herself as the pupil. In this event, Western culture became the centre of Africa's process of learning, and Africa was relegated to the background. Africa uncritically imbibed values that were alien and had no immediate relevance to her people. Thus was the richness of Africa's cultural heritage degraded, and her people labelled as primitive and savage. The coloniser's values were placed in the limelight, and in the process, evolved a new African who denied his original image, and exhibited a considerable lack of confidence in his creative potential" (ibid., 100).

Frantz Fanon sketches a similar educational attitude, which determines the self-conception of the colonised subject, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon also underlines the use of the 'right' language as constitutive of the relationship between colonised subject and colonial ruler: "In school the children of Martinique are thought to scorn the dialect. One avoids *Creolisms*. Some families completely forbid the use of Creole, and mothers ridicule their children for speaking it" (Fanon 1952/2008, 10). According to Fanon, colonialism has transformed the colonised territories into "societ[ies] of comparison" (ibid., 165), whose point of reference is the self-mystified white Europe. In this situation, the colonial subject is exposed to a heteronomy that is not always visible, yet remains omnipresent: "I came into the world imbued with the will to find meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. [...] In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology – once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside – does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. [...] The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man" (ibid., 82 f.).

What role does the *post-colonial* now play in the face of the ruptures outlined above? It can serve as a pooling language field and subsumes a multitude of interdisciplinary approaches

¹⁶ Translated by the author of the paper: "Die Erfindung des 'Primitiven' und der 'Tradition' waren somit die ersten Schritte zur gegenwärtigen Übersetzung in unterentwickelte Zonen, Bevölkerungen und zuletzt in aufstrebende Ökonomien. Während die Barbaren im Raum koexistieren, werden die Primitiven, Unterentwickelten und Aufstrebenden in einem (unterentwickelten und aufstrebenden) 'Davor' situiert, auch wenn sie im 'Jetzt' koexistieren. Dadurch erscheinen das Primitive und das Traditionelle als 'Objekte' und jenseits der Moderne".

which, despite all the problems implied by generalisation, emphasise the reciprocal effects of European colonialism and its consequences (Kerner 2012, 9 ff.). It could now be argued that this counteracts the danger of *post-colonialism* being appropriated by select disciplines and concentrated in a specific geographical area. However, this dynamic can also lead to the *post-colonial* as a methodological perspective becoming blurred and losing its critical potential (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2015, 286 ff.). Simultaneously, extremely heterogeneous experiences are subsumed under one cipher: Is the protest against the glorification of Christopher Columbus in the same way *post-colonial* as the criticism of the Kenyan school system with its Eurocentric orientation and the suppression of mother tongues?

Stuart Hall discusses the *post-colonial*¹⁷ along the lines of Ella Shohat's critique, which explicitly warns against a universalising tendency due to the imprecision of the relationship between 'post' and 'colonial' (Shohat 1992, 100). For Shohat, the term *post-colonial* is historically vague and not useful as a category of analysis. It is not clear whether 'post' means that we are living in an epoch *after* colonialism. Shohat is also sceptical about the tendency to increasingly question the clear separation between the colonial power and colonised people and the approach to focus more on interdependencies between both. Former and current power structures are increasingly pushed into the background by an allegedly shared experience: "Since the experience of colonialism is shared, albeit asymmetrically, by (ex)coloniser and (ex)colonised, it becomes an easy move to apply the "post" also to First World European Countries" (ibid., 103). In this reading, the *post-colonial* threatens to become an ideology. She vehemently attacks the alliance between *post-colonial* and poststructuralist approaches and its upholding of hybrid concepts of identity, since, according to Shohat, both approaches condemn the claim and the search for "traces of an original culture" of formerly colonised people as a utopian fantasy. This is problematic for Shohat because the reflection on and the memory of the pre-colonial situation is one of the most important forms of resistance of oppressed cultures (cf. ibid., 110). Hall counters Shohat's defence of identity politics by stating that even in the colonial situation, no binary and distinguishable positions can be traced (cf. Hall 1996, 242 - 246). The ambiguity and difference continue in the *post-colonial*.

This focus on the interdependencies between the centre and the colonial periphery, between a supposedly closed interior and its edges, contains a deconstructive moment that makes it possible to challenge the illusion of myth: "It follows that the term 'post-colonial' is not merely descriptive of 'this' society rather than 'that', or of 'then' and 'now'. It re-reads 'colonisation' as part of an essentially transnational and transcultural 'global' process - and it produces a decentred, diasporic, or 'global' rewriting of earlier, nation-centered imperial grand narratives (Hall 1998, 247)".

The *post-colonial* thus opens the potential to reintegrate the myth into the secular, which does not mean a reactionary return to *European* values or identities. It is rather an awareness of one's own speaking position and structures of prejudice, in Mignolo's words: "you are from where you think, instead of knowing that you are because you think"¹⁸

¹⁷ Homi K. Bhabha calls the prefix 'post' a 'beyond' marking a moment of unstable simultaneity. "The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon nor a leaving behind of the past. Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit, where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* - here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither back and forth" (Bhabha 2000, 1).

¹⁸ Translated by the author of the paper: "man ist von wo aus man denkt, anstatt zu wissen, dass man ist, weil man denkt".

(Mignolo 2012, 162). However, before the “epistemic disobedience”¹⁹ (ibid., 161) called for by Mignolo can take place, it is necessary to look at the distribution of speaking roles in the colonial as well as *post-colonial* situation, to show who has been and still is silenced by the *a priori* myth: “The construction of the idea of modernity as a description of a being and a historical process blinded the eye by drawing attention to the event and what was said, but hid what was happening in what was said: who is actually speaking?”²⁰ (ibid., 122).

3. THE INVENTION OF THE ORIENT

“colonial discourse produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once an “other” and yet entirely visible and knowable” (Bhabha 1999, S. 371).

Is there a possibility of opposing the narratives of modernity with counter-narratives to initiate a movement of de-centring the myth from outside? This would be desirable as it would shift attention away from modernity and its dominant protagonists.

Following Enrique Dussel, Mignolo formulates modernity as a dialectical relationship to an outside that is constitutive of itself (Mignolo 2006, 58 f. and 67 - 73). In other words: The idea of modernity cannot be thought without colonialism, colonialism cannot be thought without the idea of modernity.

The American-Palestinian literary theorist Edward Said has taken up the challenge of de-centring the narrative of modernity. The narrative of modernity, which he subjects to a fundamental critique, is that of *Orientalism*. The peculiarity of Said’s work results from the contextualisation of European sciences, especially Orientalism and Indology, into the mechanisms of colonialism (ibid., 96). Said demystified the supposed objectivity in the oriental discourse regarding the knowledge of colonial subjects and their culture and history. Knowledge about *the other*, in Said’s analysis *the Oriental*, means to gain power over *the other*. According to Said, *the Oriental* assumes the role of an alter ego and, in its negative difference, acquires the function of an “underground self”, which becomes substantial for European self-understanding (Said 1979, 3 f.). An instrument of power with which the *a priori* myth continuously confirms itself. However, the collected knowledge not only found its way into the scientific publications of the so-called ‘Oriental research’. In the 19th century, artefacts of *the Orient* increasingly filled the museums of the European colonial states. There was an obsession to represent foreign worlds and *the other*.²¹ Timothy Mitchell outlines this obsession in his essay *The World as Exhibition* (1989) Mitchell includes in his analysis observations made by Egyptian scientists who attended the 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris. Parts of the World Exhibition had set themselves the goal of representing the *Orient* as accurately and *authentically* as possible. Mitchell refers to the reports of the Egyptian scientists: “The Egyptian exhibit had also been made carefully chaotic. In contrast to the orderliness of the rest of the exhibition, the imitation street was arranged in the haphazard manner of the bazaar. The way was crowded with shops and stalls, where Frenchman, dressed as Orientals, sold perfumes, pastries, and tarboushes. To complete the effect of the Orient, the French

¹⁹ Translated by the author of the paper: “epistemischer Umsturz”.

²⁰ Translated by the author of the paper: “Die Konstruktion der Ideen von Moderne als Beschreibung eines Wesens und eines historischen Prozesses blendete den Blick durch die Aufmerksamkeit auf das Ereignis und das Gesagte verbarg, was sich im Gesagten ereignete: Wer erzählt tatsächlich?”.

²¹ The verb *represent* has a double connotation. In one reading it can mean re-present, in the other it can mean *speak for*. The difficulty of separating the two terms and the moment of oppression inherent in *representation* are the subjects of the following chapter since for Spivak the two modes of representation in the context of (post-)colonial realities require special attention.

organizers had imported from Cairo fifty Egyptian donkeys, together with their drivers and the requisite number of grooms, farriers, and saddlemakers” (Mitchell 1989, 217).

Mitchell further argues in his essay that this form of *showing the other* is characteristic for the relationship of the *modern West* to an outside world imagined by it. Indeed, that ordering, defining and systematising transforms the world into an “endless exhibition” (cf. *ibid.* 218). His analysis is based on the description of non-Europeans who perceived the relationship of Europeans to their fellow world as a “visual arrangement” (*ibid.*, 222.). This view of things was, at least in the perception of the Egyptian scientists, not only to be observed in exhibitions and museums but much more generally: “Everything seemed to be set up as though it were the model or the picture of something, arranged before an observing subject into a system of signification, declaring itself to be a mere object, a mere ‘signifier of’ something further. [...] The representation of reality was always an exhibit set up for an observer in its midst: an observing gaze surrounded by and yet excluded from the exhibition’s careful order. The more the exhibit drew in and encircled the visitor, the more the gaze was set apart from it, as the mind (in our Cartesian imagery) is said to be set apart from the material world it observes” (*Ibid.*, 222 and 223 f.).

The gaze that conceives the world around it as an exhibition – as an arrangement of contemplation – not only appears with absolute certainty about itself and its representation of reality, it also unfolds its geopolitical power in the context of colonialism. For the colonial subject, this view led to a double form of subjugation: as an exhibit, it is at the mercy of constant observation, it stabilizes the *a priori* myth and is silenced by the colonial representation. Part of the silencing representation is the privilege of attributing certain other characteristics to the colonial gaze (Said 1979, 11 - 15). The prerogative is based on judgments that confirm themselves through the constant accumulation and reproduction of knowledge: “Knowledge means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant. The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; this object is a ‘fact’ which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable. To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it’ – the Oriental country – since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it” (*Ibid.*, 32).

By knowing about *the other*, in this case the *Oriental*, the European view tried to bridge a difference. However, in this way, *the other* is fixed, the qualities that make it *different* have their origin in the view of it. Thus, the relationship becomes hierarchical because *the other* becomes *the other* within the space created by the myth. Said also emphasises the paternalistic character of the relationship between the European gaze and the colonial alter ego. He examines the remarks of the British colonial official James Balfour, who, in a speech to Members of Parliament in 1910, justified the occupation of Egypt. For Balfour, the instrument of justification is comparison and the same time differentiation: In contrast to the European nations, the Egyptian population lacked the capacity for self-government (*ibid.*, 33). In their conviction that the colonised cannot be ruled other than by the colonists, the colonial masters act in a double role: they see themselves as rulers and advocates at the same time. On the political level, this leads to the consistent suppression of any form of self-representation that claims to play an advocacy role in opposition to the colonial rulers (*ibid.*, 39 f.).

The *a priori myth* is the prerequisite for judging the Orient and the Oriental, *the other*. The myth has the claim to fix: “An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition” (Bhabha 1999, S. 370).

4. SUBALTERN SPEECHLESSNESS

Can the colonised subject speak and thus disrupt the narratives of modernity, disillusion, leave the exhibition and reintegrate the myth into the worldly? A brief reference shall be made here to Boubacar Boris Diop's commentary on the use of colonial languages in the context of African literature. Like Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, he criticises African writers who use French or English to make their works and issues, conflicts and interests they deal with visible to an international audience. According to Diop, these writers shy away from the question of their own linguistic and cultural tradition and continue, albeit unconsciously, a form of (neo)-colonial paternalism (Diop 2018, 187 f.). Confronted with the accusation that his criticism promotes nationalist rhetoric and emulates a pre-colonial longing, Diop responds with the absurdity of the (post)-colonial situation: "Whenever I am asked how I came to write on Wolof, I point out that I come from a country that is supposedly French-speaking, but where almost no one speaks French in everyday situations"²² (Diop 2018, 190). Diop attests this accusation an exclusive and elitist tendency: "As a literature born of a sublime dream of social justice, it has gradually closed itself in on its tête-à-tête with the colonial ruler, speaking on behalf of the oppressed of Africa and forgetting to speak to them itself"²³ (ibid., 191).

The use of one's own mother tongue seems to open up possibilities for Diop, to step out of silence, to speak for himself thus to unmask the *a priori* myth as an inner-worldly point of view. This form of resistance is based on the premise that all people are in fact able to speak. However, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts this premise up for discussion. Her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak*, published in 1988, is still one of the most influential, but also most controversial works within *post-colonial* debates. Spivak discusses three 'problem-fields': the subject, subalternity and representation. One of the strengths of the essay is its repetitive *shift* between the discourses of the Global North and the Global South. Neither discourse can rest on its laurels: Spivak focuses on them both. The bipolarity between former colonial powers and former colonies, which dominated *post-colonial* work especially after Said's major work, is not dissolved but rather expanded by a critical view of the dominant narratives during the colonial struggles for independence and their reproduction in the newly founded nation-states, with the essay primarily dealing with India. Spivak shows that in these narratives too, mechanisms are at work that exclude and silence certain groups of people. She expands the *post-colonial* situation by addressing the speechlessness of the subaltern populations. According to Spivak, the *post-colonial* primarily addressed the conversation between the colonial subject and the elites of the Global North. This dialogue excludes those who do not speak its language and are outside the hegemonic order. Regarding Antonio Gramsci's analyses, Spivak emphasises that subaltern population groups cannot name advocates, since they do not understand themselves as a group and are not included in the circle of politically visible groups. In the hegemonic dialogue they are silent: *they cannot speak!* It is essential for Spivak to accentuate that subalternity is not an identity (Spivak 2014, 269). Her reading of the term is to be understood more as a description of a position that cannot be left and always stands opposite the audible social groups. From the point of view of hegemony, the subalterns must be prevented from speaking, as they are in danger of interrupting the dominant groups' speaking. This can be seen in the *post-colonial* situation in India: The power vacuum that arose in India after the withdrawal of the colonial rulers was taken over by a small elite that claimed to speak for the Indian population, including marginalised groups like the Adivasis (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2015,

²² Translated by the author of the paper: "Immer wenn ich gefragt werde, wie ich dazu kam, auf Wolof zu schreiben, weise ich darauf hin, dass ich aus einem Land stamme, das angeblich französischsprachig ist, dem aber fast niemand in alltäglichen Situationen Französisch spricht".

²³ Translated by the author of the paper.

191). The *Subaltern Studies Group*, a research collective of which Spivak herself is a member, has set itself the task of uncovering counter-narratives that have not been considered by hegemonic historiography or understood as resistance to the colonial order (ibid., 186-190). In the dominant narrative of the history of the anti-colonial struggle, the national elite, primarily Hindus, and the British colonial power, face each other. However, this dualism can only be reproduced if the anti-colonial resistance of subaltern groups is consistently excluded from the hegemonic dialogue (ibid., 188). Without a doubt, the work of the *Subaltern Studies Group* has problematised the discourse on Indian independence and the persistence of colonial patterns and pluralised it by highlighting subaltern resistance movements. Such a project, however, suggests that there is a hitherto hidden shared subaltern consciousness that has only been suppressed but can be exposed. This kind of concern, namely to give the subalterns a voice and identity, is not possible for Spivak in the following way: it tries to force the complexity and heterogeneity of subalternity into a system of representation that has its origins in the logic of hegemonic knowledge production (ibid., 191). She is referring to the premises of an autonomous subject and language as the sole and universally valid expression of subjectivity. Additionally, Spivak discusses the possibility of speaking *for* the subalterns, as she negates the question of whether the subalterns themselves can speak at the end of her essay.

Anyone who does not deal intensively with this negation and does not question their pre-judices regarding the supposed universal meaning of certain terms is one of the critics who accuse Spivak of denying the subalterns any form of articulation and autonomy. The *silence* of the subalterns is only reinforced by Spivak's statement and paralyzes the resistance against the hegemonic dialogue which Spivak wants to undermine (Spivak 1993, 287). It is therefore advisable to problematise the associations behind the field of *speech* to approach Spivak's concerns. First of all, the following premise should be questioned: *I speak for myself*. It is performative: the speech act and action coincide. Nevertheless, a speech act is never unconditional. If a speech act is not heard or cannot be heard, then it is silent. In her essay, Spivak stresses that this precondition is forgotten, especially in global contexts. According to Spivak, speaking cannot be understood as an individual act: "By speaking I was obviously talking about a transaction between the speaker and the listener" (ibid., 289). Who or what now prevents the subalterns from carrying out their speech act completely? Who interrupts their speech and thereby silences them? To answer these questions, Spivak draws on a dialogue, i.e. a mutual speaking and listening, between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. The background of this dialogue are the riots in France in May 1968. The two intellectuals discuss, above all, the role of the *working class* in these riots. According to Foucault and Deleuze, their political actions – strikes, roadblocks and demonstrations – revealed that *working class* can speak for themselves and do not need advocates. What understanding of reality lies behind this prejudice? First one detects the *a priori* myth: "Although the history of Europe as Subject is narrativized by the law, political economy and ideology of the West, this concealed Subject pretends it has 'no geo-political determinations [In other words: it mystifies itself]. The much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject" (Spivak 1988, 271 f.).

Starting from the events in France, Foucault and Deleuze abstract the national industrial action to a global level. Every revolutionary action joins this struggle because the *working class* shares a common interest. But this supposedly shared interest is only an illusion of the intellectual desire of Foucault and Deleuze. Their desire has a formulated goal in mind: the overthrow of existing conditions. For Spivak, such a gesture has the momentous consequence of silencing heterogeneous interests. The global labour struggle proclaimed by Foucault and Deleuze forgets the starting point of its production. In other words: It has a global claim but is the result of a reaction to national events (France 1968). The desire ignores its limits. It forgets that capitalism was already increasingly global in 1968 and that the production sites of consumer goods were relocated to the periphery of the global South (ibid., 272).

In her criticism, Spivak seems surprised that Foucault and Deleuze reduce the complexity of subject production to the formula that the *masses* are aware of their oppression, follow the general desire and do not need representatives to *represent* them (ibid., 275). Going unnoticed, the *a priori* myth is maintained by creating a space that is supposed to allow all subjects to speak. But doesn't this mean the end of colonial representation, when the advocates withdraw behind the premise: *Everyone can speak!* and moreover make room for the previously suppressed speech acts? For Spivak, such universal assumptions continue the "epistemic violence" of colonialism (ibid., 280 ff.) Through her interest in the representation (advocacy) of India's rural female population, Spivak attempts to show how individuals are silenced by the premise *everyone can speak!* These women are, in Spivak's words, affected by a "super-exploitation" that prevents both individual and collective public appearances (Spivak 2014, 243 f.). In a review of the narrative of the Indian independence movement, Spivak focuses on the problem of the representation of the *female*, which became the venue for the power interests of the British colonial power and Indian nationalism: "Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence'. It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak 1988, 287).

Spivak cites two examples that illustrate how *women* have been silenced by the dominance of two meta-narratives – *tradition* and *modernity*. For the first example, she formulates the sentence: "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (ibid., 296). She places this sentence in the context of Hindu widow-burnings. By burning herself, the widow pays her respects to her deceased husband, at least in the *traditional* reading of male Hindu nationalists: "The woman actually wanted to die" (ibid., 297). Now the *modern* reading, represented by the British colonial power, is taking up the challenge. Via their self-proclaimed colonial civilising mission, the British condemn this form of *self-sacrifice* and see their colonial rule legitimised in the service of *modernity* by a legal ban on widow-burning. In other words: The *a priori* myth is reaffirming itself. The "ideological battle-ground" (ibid., 300) between the two meta-narratives silences the *women's* narratives. Since there is no record of the heterogeneous motives of the widows and even their names were misspelled by the British colonial officials (ibid., 297) their lost voices cannot be exposed either. The pursuit of their traces leads nowhere.

The traditional meta-narrative has also silenced the voice of Bhuvanewari Bhaduri. The young woman was charged with a political assassination during the Indian struggle for independence but was unable carry out her mission out of moral conviction (ibid., 307). She committed suicide. *Traditionally*, her death would have been explained as a reaction to an unwanted pregnancy, but since she was menstruating, the *traditional* understanding failed (ibid.). Bhaduri had deliberately chosen the moment of her suicide to escape the *traditional* meta-narrative (ibid.). Her family, however – Spivak had contacted them – spoke about her death as a way out of an unwanted pregnancy (ibid., 308).

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I first presented Julien's understanding of an 'in-between' along with his critique of the concept of cultural identity. The 'in-between' was marked as a threat to colonial narratives. I then discussed Koerrenz's concept of *Bildung*. Learning, as a critical approach to one's own structures of prejudice, was defined as a way of relating to the world without falling into a myth of absolute knowledge. Subsequently, an attempt was made to approach the *post-colonial* through a reading of the history of European colonialism. At this point, a different story could have been told. Learning, however, obliges us to

choose a position that marks a possible beginning of systematisation with simultaneous deconstruction. Following Stuart Hall, the *post-colonial* could be chosen as a frame of reference to reintegrate the *a priori* myth into the inner worldly. Works by Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak were used as articulations of this integration program. Said's remarks condensed the *a priori* myth as a colonial instrument of power that must continuously confirm itself through representation outside the secular (advocacy and representation). Spivak confronted us with the question of whether all people *can speak*? We learned that even in retreat from the role of the advocates, the *a priori* myth can creep in. Only when one's position within power structures and mechanisms of oppression is recognised does one have the chance to deal with them. This implies that concepts, texts and ideas that have a certain, in my case European, colour cannot simply be put aside. It would be tantamount to denying one's pre-judices and would reactivate the myth. At the same time, concepts, texts and ideas that do not have this imprint must be included for one's own thinking, learning, speaking and listening.

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