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Translation, Adaptation, and Appropriation in Brook's *Mahabharata*

In this article So-Rim Lee closely investigates the *Mahābhārata* in relation to – but quite distinct from – *The Mahabharata: a Play* (1985) by Peter Brook and Jean-Claude Carrière. Since the ancient text of the *Mahābhārata* does not have a definitive author, version, or form, So-Rim Lee argues that Brook and Carrière's framing of their modern reading as an adaptation of the ancient text poses a series of questions regarding the politics of recontextualizing a South Asian text in Western terms, the methodological process involved in doing this, and the ethical stance espoused by the transcultural adapters. She then questions whether the audience actually finds Brook and Carrière's international, multi-racial production as cosmopolitan and multicultural as the authors claim it to be. If *The Mahabharata: a Play* is a matter of cultural appropriation rather than adaptation, what transgressions are involved in reframing the source text and how does it produce what Gayatri Spivak calls 'epistemic violence'? Lee is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Theater and Performance Studies at Stanford University. She has previously reviewed for *Theatre Survey* and *Performance Research*.

Key terms: postcolonialism, multiculturalism, Spivak, epistemic violence, *dharma*, *itihāsa*, Linda Hutcheon.

IN 1985, a nine-hour production of *The Mahabharata* premiered at the Avignon Festival. Written for the stage by Jean-Claude Carrière and directed by Peter Brook, it would stir up a series of debates on the ethics of interculturalist theatre among scholars and critics. Thirty years later, February 2016 witnessed the opening of Brook's new play, *Battlefield*, at the Young Vic in London as a sequel to the past production.

It is because Brook followed up on *The Mahabharata* with this imagined aftermath of the Kurukshetra War that in this article I follow suit and revisit Brook's 1985 production, rearticulating it in relation to its source text *Mahābhārata*, the Sanskrit epic whose origins could be traced as far back as the first millennium BCE.[1] The epic has a group of narratives surrounding the Kurukshetra War where the five Pandava brothers fought against their cousins, the Kauravas, over the dynastic succession of the Indian Kingdom of Kuru.

As a colossal series of tales with no definitive author, a definitive version, or even a definitive form, the *Mahābhārata* prompts several questions. Can it be justified as a transcultural adaptation? If not, what makes it an instance of cultural appropriation, and of what Gayatri Spivak might call 'epistemic violence'? Does Brook perpetuate a universalistic framing of the source text, and how does he assume his role as an adapter in the process? How are we to interpret the particular choices that bleed through the interstices between the texts, the translations, and the adaptations? How might theatre scholars in 2016 re-evaluate Brook's production to reconstrue what stirred the academic debates on the ethics of his adaptation in *The Drama Review* from 1986 to 1992?

The opening lines of *The Mahabharata*, written by Jean-Claude Carrière in French and translated by Brook into English, immediately present a temporal disjunction between the interlocutors:

VYASA: Do you know how to write?
BOY: No, why?
The man is silent for a moment before saying:
VYASA: I've composed a great poem. I've composed it all, but nothing is written. I need someone to write down what I know.

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From the 2016 production of *Battlefield* at the Young Vic, directed by Peter Brook. Photos: above, Caroline Moreau; below: Simon Annand



BOY: What's your name?

VYASA: Vyasa.

BOY: What's your poem about?

VYASA: It's about you.

BOY: Me?

VYASA: Yes, it's the story of your race, how your ancestors were born, how they grew up, how a vast war arose. It's the poetical history of mankind.[2]

Carrière frames the story as simultaneously 'of' the Boy who represents '[all] mankind', and a story 'told to' the Boy who has no knowledge of his ancestral genealogy. In fact, the Boy does not have any seeming

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relation to the characters in the story: he is neither Parikshit, Arjuna's grandson, nor Janamejaya, Parikshit's son. Only much later is he revealed as a descendant of Uttara, Parikshit's mother, 'centuries and centuries' after the *Mahabharata* takes place.

Carrière's own creation, the Boy becomes much more than a narrative device in that he embodies Brook's point of view that the *Mahābhārata*, the source text of their play, pertains to all peoples including those who are unfamiliar with it. In this way, Brook and Carrière set up their production as the Westerners' access point to the Brahmanic lore. Time sets the Boy apart from the story, as it is the reason why the Boy has no knowledge of the story of 'his race' – that is, his very own 'history'.

Yet the politics of visual culture always lie deeper than words on a page. When Vyasa is played by a French actor onstage who 'seems white', and the boy is played by a French-Indian actor who 'seems South Asian', how do we interpret this scene as something other than a sinister spoon-feeding of history from a colonizer to the colonized? In this article I will comparatively analyze Brook's adaptation vis-à-vis its source text in two aspects: first, to investigate how Carrière's play misconstrues the source text and omits certain crucial notions such as *itihāsa* and *dharma*; second, to understand the problems posed by the adapters' attempt to universalize their source text. I focus on the mistranslation of *dharma* and employ Linda Hutcheon's theories on translation, adaptation, and appropriation to question the legitimacy of Brook and Carrière's production in relation to the *Mahābhārata*.

The *Mahābhārata* as *Itihāsa*

I believe their adaptation poses ontological questions of what the *Mahābhārata* is and whether it is translatable and/or adaptable. What are the complex ethical limits to the politics of translation and adaptation? Is Brook and Carrière's *Mahabharata* an 'adaptation' of the source it claims to draw from, or is it a (cultural) appropriation? In order to explore these questions, it is necessary to go back to the *Mahābhārata*, and identify its quintessential notions of *itihāsa* and *dharma*.

Carrière identifies the *Mahābhārata* as 'one of the world's greatest books'.[3] This *Mahābhārata* designates a Sanskrit epic comprising around 200,000 verse lines and approximately 1.8 million words in total. While the authorship of this written text has traditionally been ascribed to the poet Vyasa, the text itself remained unknown in Europe until the eighteenth century, when Charles Wilkins first translated and published the *Bhagavad Gītā* in 1785. The *Mahābhārata* encompasses simultaneously *itihāsa* ('history') and a text about *dharma* (Hindu moral law), mythological and genealogical material, featuring a central heroic narrative of the Kurukshetra War between two lineages of princes. As John D. Smith puts it in his introduction to the 2006 Penguin abridged translation of the epic, it is 'a strange conglomeration of heroic tale, myth, theological tract, free-standing narrative', and much else besides.[4]

And yet the *Mahābhārata* as a narrative further exists in a plurality of forms, far exceeding its textual form or any other written text in South Asia. Rather, as an umbrella term, the *Mahābhārata* signifies the various performances that materialize history, myth, religion, and cultures prescribed to the collective lived experience of its peoples. These *Mahābhārata*s as performances defy any formalization into written text, but are handed down from generation to generation, varied in form and content according to the respective cultures of different regions throughout South Asia; embedded vernacular memories distinctive of their place; as embodied practices transmitted from bodies to bodies. As both tradition and modernity, mythology and history, and oral work and literature, the *Mahābhārata* lives on as echoes that have ceaselessly shaped its resonance anew.

As *itihāsa*, or 'historical narrative', the *Mahābhārata* is on the threshold between history and myth. Vamsee Juluri articulates these notions in *Hinduism and its Culture Wars*:

> There has been a great deal of misunderstanding about what the 'myths', or the stories of the gods, mean in the lives of Hindus. Suffice it to say that, until the 1980s, when the Hindu nationalist move-

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ment entered the political mainstream, myth was more important to us than history. History was, at best, a subject one got through in school, and an unimportant one compared to maths and science, which were the stuff of global careers in engineering and medicine. . . . Myth, on the other hand, was something we were steeped in, regardless of how and how much we believed in it.[5]

Juluri's account offers a frame through which to situate the *Mahābhārata* in the 1980s in India, a nation state in which eighty per cent of the population identify themselves as Hindu. The *Mahābhārata*, together with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, has generated a history of Hindu cultures and traditions throughout ancient, medieval, and modern South Asia.

Since India is a conglomeration of different cultures and religions, among which Hinduism has a part, the *Mahābhārata* cannot be defined essentially as 'Hindu' or reductively as 'Indian'; it is *of* Hindu and *of* India, and the two notions must co-exist. Most of all, Juluri explains why 'Hinduism' might become a problematical term, and I am not using it in this article precisely because, in India in particular, it signifies cultural, political, social, and religious notions all at once. The *Mahābhārata* as *itihāsa*, or a narrative simultaneously embodying the notions of history and myth, exemplifies such plurality of meanings.

John D. Smith offers another valuable means of approaching the *Mahābhārata* from outside the Hindu and/or South Asian cultural contexts. He addresses the broader issue of whether using the Western genre term 'epic' to describe the *Mahābhārata* presents the danger of 'imposing our own [Western] exotic categories . . . to texts from a culture that recognizes no comparable genre'. In the process of distinguishing 'genre' from 'category', he expounds on the notion of *itihāsa*:

In India the term most commonly used for *Mahābhārata* – aside from the very general words such as *ākhyāna*, 'story' – is *itihāsa*, 'historical narrative', and it is worth bearing in mind that for believing Hindus the events *itihāsa* describes are real happenings that took place in India's ancient past. By contrast, *Rāmāyana*, which tells a comparable story in similar metre, language, and style, is more normally thought of as a *kāvya*, 'literary composition, poem'.[6]

Smith's comparison situates *Mahābhārata-itihāsa* ('event from the past' – the literal translation from Sanskrit being 'so indeed it was') between fiction and non-fiction, thereby juxtaposing it against the clearly fictional *Rāmāyaṇa-kāvya* (a particular, Sanskrit literary style used by Indian court poets in the seventh century AD).[7] This comparison is possible due to the use of *itihāsa* and *kāvya* as generic genre terms in Indian literature, especially when the Western categories of fiction and non-fiction do not prove applicable to literary systems outside its frame of reference.

Since *itihāsa* cannot be ascribed solely to fiction or to non-fiction but lies pervious in between them, identifying genres apart from categories becomes crucial in making cross-cultural comparisons. Pointing out that genres are not impermeable constructs as categories – 'since a poem can be "rather novelistic" or "rather romantic"' – Smith concludes that genre terms can indeed be used in cross-cultural comparisons.

Instead of contemplating the validity of assigning a genre to a text, Smith insists on the importance of making comparisons between texts within the same genre. This removes the tension involved in making comparisons between the *Mahābhārata* and, say, the Homeric epics, by rendering such a comparison essentially futile. Instead, the genre term 'epic' becomes a channel for comparison between *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* with other 'large-scale heroic narratives' from around the world.[8] In fact, Smith warns readers that regarding the *Mahābhārata* as 'one more heroic epic' or aligning it with the *Iliad* would be 'serious over-simplification'.[9] Acknowledging that no literary system can be used universally, Smith demonstrates the possibility of navigating the interstices between different literary systems, and in doing so, approach and understand the unfamiliar.

Dharma

The question of translatability in cross-cultural contexts also points toward *dharma*, a key notion to understanding the *Mahābhārata*, which can be translated variously in

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different contexts as law, duty, virtue, morality, or lot in life, among other senses. The factors that constitute *dharma* are multifaceted notions of social groupings. According to the *Manu-smriti*, the earliest and most authoritative Hindu scripture, a Brahman's *dharma* would include studying the Vedas as priests and scholars, whereas a Ksatriya's *dharma* would include fighting in the battlefield, ruling over subjects, and punishing wrongdoers as warriors, governors, and administrators of law.

For a Vaishya (agriculturalists, traders, and cattle raisers) or a Shudra (service providers for the three aforementioned *varnas*) to study the Vedas would be *adharma*, the antonym of *dharma* meaning what is not right and unnatural. *Dharma* is continuously unstable, changing according to one's shifting roles in life as much as to external circumstances. As it gives logic as well as a breath of life to the many narratives of the *Mahābhārata*, without *dharma* one cannot possibly understand why seemingly illogical events unfold in the narrative as they do.

Dharma makes reincarnation crucial as, in Hindu cosmology, it marks time cyclically. For 'only by performing one's own *dharma* can one hope to improve [one's] station in life at the next rebirth'. Fulfilling one's *dharma* greatly affects one's next place within the *varnas*, thereby gaining more significance than merely fulfilling a 'lot in life'.[10] Embodying such ripples of time, the *Mahābārata* employs an 'extraordinarily roundabout approach to storytelling' with a labyrinthine story-within-story structure, in which 'two versions of a part of the story are told in immediate succession'.[11]

Dharma also changes due to external circumstances. Noting that the *Mahābhārata* takes up thirty-nine chapters to expound on '*dharma* in times of trouble', Smith observes that the *Mahābhārata* allows a Brahmin to follow the *dharma* of a Ksatriya or Vaisya, although not a Shudra.[12] *Dharma* gives logic as well as a breath of life to the many narratives within the *Mahābhārata*. Without *dharma*, one cannot possibly understand why Salwa rejects Amba after she goes back to him still a virgin; why Bhishma vows to be celibate for the rest of his life; why Pandu cannot have sex with his wives; why Amba must reincarnate as Shikhandi, and, especially, why Yudhishthira keeps playing the game of dice with Shakuni until he loses himself and even Draupadi, the wife he shares with his brothers. Ultimately, *dharma* points towards what Hiltebeitel calls 'the cosmic time complex', in which reincarnation becomes a necessary temporal step to complete the human life cycle. Time, in Hindu cosmology, as exemplified in the *Mahābhārata*, is revealed as quintessentially cyclical.

The Amba-Shikandi reincarnation demonstrated the way *dharma* functions in this cyclical nature of time and can be construed as a significant event that takes place within the *Mahābhārata*. Bhisma, the son of Shantanu and an unparalleled warrior, takes away Amba, the eldest daughter of the king of Kashi. He initially abducted her to be wedded to Vichitravirya, his stepbrother and king of Hastinapur. Yet Amba reveals she had formally promised to marry King Salwa; Bhishma identifies this as being Amba's *dharma*, and sends her to Salwa to fulfil her destiny.

Yet, in another turn of events, Salwa rejects Amba out of shame and rage in losing her to Bhishma. Although Amba goes back to Bhishma and asks him to marry her, he has no other choice but to reject her, as well; he has already vowed to be celibate for eternity, until he gives up his immortality and chooses to die. Enraged, Amba vows to devote her life to seeking ways of breaking Bhishma's immortality, thereby accepting the notion of retribution as her new *dharma*. She becomes reincarnated into Shikandini, who still follows her previous life's *dharma* and transforms into Shikandin, a man, to play a crucial part in the slaying of Bhishma in the Kurukshetra War.[13] Upon seeing Shikandini in the battleground, Bhishma immediately recognizes that the young warrior has been reincarnated from Amba.

As this demonstrates, *dharma* resonates through countless cycles of life, eternally manifesting itself until one reaches *mokṣa* ('release' from the cycle of death and rebirth). Furthermore, *dharma* proves vital

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for understanding, underlying the *Mahābhārata* in that it defines and visualizes one's identity beyond physical attributes. As will be discussed subsequently, *dharma* also becomes pivotal in construing the logic of cultural appropriation in Brook's problematic production.

The Lure of Epistemic Violence

In *The Modernity of Sanskrit*, Simona Sawhney questions how an ancient text can be read in current times: 'For what ends is a particular reading pursued at a particular time and which premises are reinstated by doing so?'[14] On the one hand, this question reinstates the significance of the *Mahābhārata* as a living ancient text, as demonstrated by the author's prior discussion of M. K. Gandhi's allegorical treatment of the text to support his political campaign during the nationalist movements in India.[15] On the other hand, it points toward the reader's motive in using the *Mahābhārata* as a tool to buttress an aim or a motive.

Whether it is as a political commentary, a scholarly investigation, or an intercultural artwork framed as research, the person in search of knowledge needs to address the possible allegation that he or she may be harbouring an ulterior motive – self-interest. While engaging with a particular ancient text outside one's cultural, politico-social, religious and geographical context, the Western scholar, in particular, should always identify and acknowledge the possibility of perpetuating what Spivak calls 'epistemic violence' in such transcultural reading. As a case study, take note of Georg Hegel's review of Wilhelm von Humboldt's lectures on the *Bhagavad Gītā* in 1827, in which he discusses Arjuna's moment of physical and psychological enervation shortly before the Kurukshetra War:

> Whether this doubt [regarding fratricide] involves a moral quality, as it seems to do at first, must be dependent on the nature of that value which in the Indian Arjuna's mentality is attached to family ties. To the moral understanding of the European, the sense of this tie is the moral in itself so that the love for one's family is as such the completion, and morality consists only in the fact that all friendship, as well as actions and duties related to family relationship, have that love as their foundation and as a self-sufficient starting point. We see, however, that it is not this moral sentiment which in the hero causes the reluctance to lead his relatives to the slaughter. . . . Great importance is attached to the conversion of this tie into a superstitious context, into an immoral belief in the dependence of the soul's fate after death and water libations of the relatives, that is to say of those who have remained true to the caste distinctions.[16]

Hegel, who demonstrates an acute awareness of his European perspective as he demarcates between Europe and India, articulates his critical observation of the *Gītā* in his dissertation on Hinduism at the Berlin Academy in 1826.[17] Hegel renders the *Gītā* with an exotic specimen that represents Hinduism ('Indian religion'), all the more so because of its wide reception and publicity.

In fact, the publication of his lengthy dissertation, *Über die unter dem Namen Bhagavad Gītā bekannte Episode des Mahābhārata* ('On the episode of the *Mahābhārata* known by the name *Bhagavad Gītā*'), prefigured a widespread translation of the *Gītā* into various European languages throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unfortunately, Hegel's reading of the *Gītā* is based on an epistemic misreading that bifurcates 'European' and 'Indian' values of morality. By identifying Arjuna's decision to participate in the fratricidal Kurukshetra War as a retrogressive conversion of familial ties into 'superstitious context' and an 'immoral belief' (that is, *dharma*-reincarnation-*mokṣa*), Hegel reinstates the supremacy of the European sense of morality over that of 'Hinduism'.

It is from this Eurocentric value system that Spivak identifies the mechanics of imperialism in the West's 'desire for S/subjecivity'; the West becomes the Subject, the one who speaks, while the non-West becomes the object, the one who is spoken of. Hegel, the Subject, studies and speaks of both the West (Christianity) and the non-West (Hinduism as religion, represented by *Gītā*).[18] In doing so, he underscores the premise of his study that neither the text under scrutiny nor the people that pertain to the *Mahābhārata* can 'speak for themselves'.

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In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak takes up Edward Said's claim that the 'possibility that the intellectual [West] is complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow'.[19] Following Said, she argues that the knowledge of the non-West cannot exist without the political and economic interests of the West. Thus, the Western Self talks about the non-Western Other to itself in its own language, harvests from the non-West not only its natural resources and commodities but also its culture, and caters with such acquisitions to Western audiences. Holding out research and knowledge as prime justifications for pillaging other cultures, then, the Western scholar presents himself/herself, as well as his/her produced knowledge on the 'Other' culture as objective, scientific, and ethical. The colonial discourse thus surreptitiously maintains itself while the West sustains its Subject status.

Can the perpetration of such epistemic violence in Brook and Carrière's universalistic reframing of the *Mahābhārata* be identified?

Translation, Adaptation, Appropriation

In 1975, Peter Brook and Jean-Claude Carrière encountered the *Mahābhārata* as it was narrated to them by a professor of Sanskrit, Philippe Lavastine. From his notes during this narration, Carrière started writing the first draft of *Mahabharata: a Play* in 1976. For the next eight years, Brook and Carrière embarked on a project to adapt the *Mahābhārata* into a play for a 'cosmopolitan audience'; they read translations of the *Mahābārata* and they travelled to India to investigate the 'images of dance, film, marionette theatre, village celebrations, and plays'.[20] In 1985, the *Mahabharata* opened at the Avignon Festival.

They claim to have drawn from a French translation of a written Sanskrit version of the *Mahābhārata* as the basis of their adaptation. Two translations involving three languages have taken place for the production, one from Sanskrit to French (translator undisclosed), and another from French to English (Brook). Carrière identified his source material as the written verse of the *Mahābhārata* in French translation, while Brook claimed to have translated Carrière's play 'as faithful[ly] as possible'.[21] Carrière's text falls between translation and adaptation – it remains unknown whether Carrière referred back to a Sanskrit source text in the process of writing. Once he finished the play, Brook took over to undertake two more intersemiotic adaptations: from text to theatre production, then from theatre production to film.

But what does each step involved in such complex processes of translation and adaptation 'do'? For instance, Walter Benjamin believed that translation always takes place in the afterlife of the original work as the task of the translator was 'to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work'.[22] The translator, then, must release 'pure language' from its sepulchre. In other words, the translator has a *noblesse oblige* to pick up what the author of the source text has left behind, and complete the greater vision of linguistic concord.[23]

In *Siting Translation*, Tejaswini Niranjana demonstrates that the Benjaminian notion of translation in 1923 has itself been 'translated', during which process the initial signified meaning of the word 'translate' ('to turn from one language into another') has turned into that of connoting 'to read and interpret; to render'.[24] The focus, then, no longer lies within the transposition or transcription of meanings between two languages; instead, the performative act of translating itself has become a mode of framing that allows other well-argued discourses to assert their significance.

Translation thus becomes a metatextual device to underscore or undermine what the translator chooses to defend or criticize. Jacques Derrida has especially generated the notion that translation can never logically *be* derivative of the original, since the original presents itself as always in flux. Thus its authority becomes but a spectre of illusion that cannot be physically substantiated. Such a self-destabilizing attribute becomes more problematic when the translator *claims fidelity* to the original text, for this act renders the

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translation dangerously liminal, between the original and the hybrid, and a transitional product that exists as neither complete nor incomplete.

Unlike the original that can be either complete or forever incomplete, translation can never be as neatly bifurcated, for it is a process as well as the final product, a noun and a verb, always in transit and *in medias res*. The resulting difficulty in defining 'translation' is analogous to the difficulty of defining 'adaptation', as discussed by Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Adaptation*. Adaptations, she argues, are simultaneously a process and a product, and are so frequent and prevalent at the current time that they almost seem 'natural'.[25] Pointing out that both translation studies and adaptation studies have 'suffered from domination by normative and source-oriented approaches', Hutcheon revisits the Benjaminian notion of translation:

> Although this seems commonsensical enough, the source text is granted an axiomatic primacy and authority, and the rhetoric of comparison has most often been that of faithfulness and equivalence. Walter Benjamin did alter this frame of reference when he argued, in 'The Task of the Translator', that translation is not a rendering of some fixed nontextual meaning to be copied or paraphrased or reproduced; rather, it is an engagement with the original text that makes us see that text in different ways. Recent translation theory argues that translation involves a transaction between texts and between languages and is thus 'an act of both inter-cultural and inter-temporal communication'.[26]

According to Hutcheon, then, the liminality of translation no longer poses a problem for it differentiates the translation from the original – that is, the 'inter-ness' caused by a transaction between the source and its translation. Furthermore, she defines adaptation as 'specific translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system to another'; it is a translation 'but in a very specific sense: as transmutation or transcoding, that is, as necessarily a recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs'.[27]

Such framing of adaptation as a particular form of translation proves a critical tool in my discussion of Brook and Carrière's *The Mahabharata*, since it alludes to the danger of intersemiotic translation turning transgressive in the particularity of transcultural adaptation. Hutcheon emphasizes that the adaptation can stand 'as adaptation' only when it involves a 'kind of intertextuality *if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text*', for we must treat the adaptation as 'an ongoing dialogical process, as Mikhail Bakhtin would have said', via which the audience automatically compares the adapted work with a work that we already know.[28]

In Hutcheon's terms, it is perhaps inevitable that some Western audiences align Brook and Carrière's *Mahabharata* with Homer's *Iliad* in the process of their accepting the *Mahabharata* 'as adaptation of' an unfamiliar source text, that is, the *Mahābhārata*. Since such (mis)alignment presents itself as part of acknowledging adaptation 'as' adaptation, Hutcheon points towards the primary responsibility of Brook and Carrière 'as' adapters – that is, to reclaim their source text from such misalignment and reinstate its significance. Failure to fulfil this difficult task may render the project close to an appropriation – a term frequently associated with 'having taken possession of a thing another's to one's own use'.[29] This definition uncannily foregrounds Brook and Carrière's unapologetically framed mission as adapters, as noted in the introduction to *The Mahabharata: a Play*: 'We would find a way of bringing this material into our world and sharing these stories with an audience in the West.'[30]

Epistemic Violence in *The Mahabharata*

In his Foreword to the published text of *The Mahabharata*, Brook writes that he and Carrière

> returned from India knowing that our work was not to imitate but to suggest. Jean-Claude then began the vast undertaking of turning all these experiences into a text. . . . Then we decided to make an English version and I set out to prepare a translation that would be as faithful as possible to Jean-Claude's gigantic achievement. In the performance, whether in English or French, we are not attempting a reconstruction of Dravidian and Aryan India of three thousand years ago. We are not presuming to present the symbolism of Hindu philosophy. In the music, in the costumes, in the movements, we have tried to suggest the flavour

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of India without pretending to be what we are not. On the contrary, the many nationalities who have gathered together are trying to reflect *The Mahabharata* by bringing to it something of their own. In this way, we are trying to celebrate a work which only India could have created but which carries echoes for all mankind.[31]

The translator/adapter's intention establishes a stance towards the source material while taking a decisive first step towards proclaiming independence from it.[32] For *The Mahabharata*, Peter Brook in his Foreword and Jean-Claude Carrière in his Introduction, delineate their respective intentions and objectives as interpreters. Whereas Brook proclaims that his main aim is fidelity to Carrière's text, he inadvertently emphasizes Carrière's objective to create a text that simultaneously draws from (is 'based upon') the source material but stands autonomous ('not to imitate but to suggest') from it. Nevertheless, Brook and Carrière's adaptation does not 'echo' its original, nor does it stand autonomous from it; somewhere along the process of adaptation, the *Mahābhārata* disappeared. The problem may be viewed through Benjamin:

> Translation is a mode. To comprehend it as mode one must go back to the original, for that contains the law governing the translation: its translatability. The question of whether a work is translatable has a dual meaning. Either: will an adequate translator ever be found among the totality of its readers? Or, more pertinently: does its nature lend itself to translation and, therefore, in view of the significance of the mode, call for it?[33]

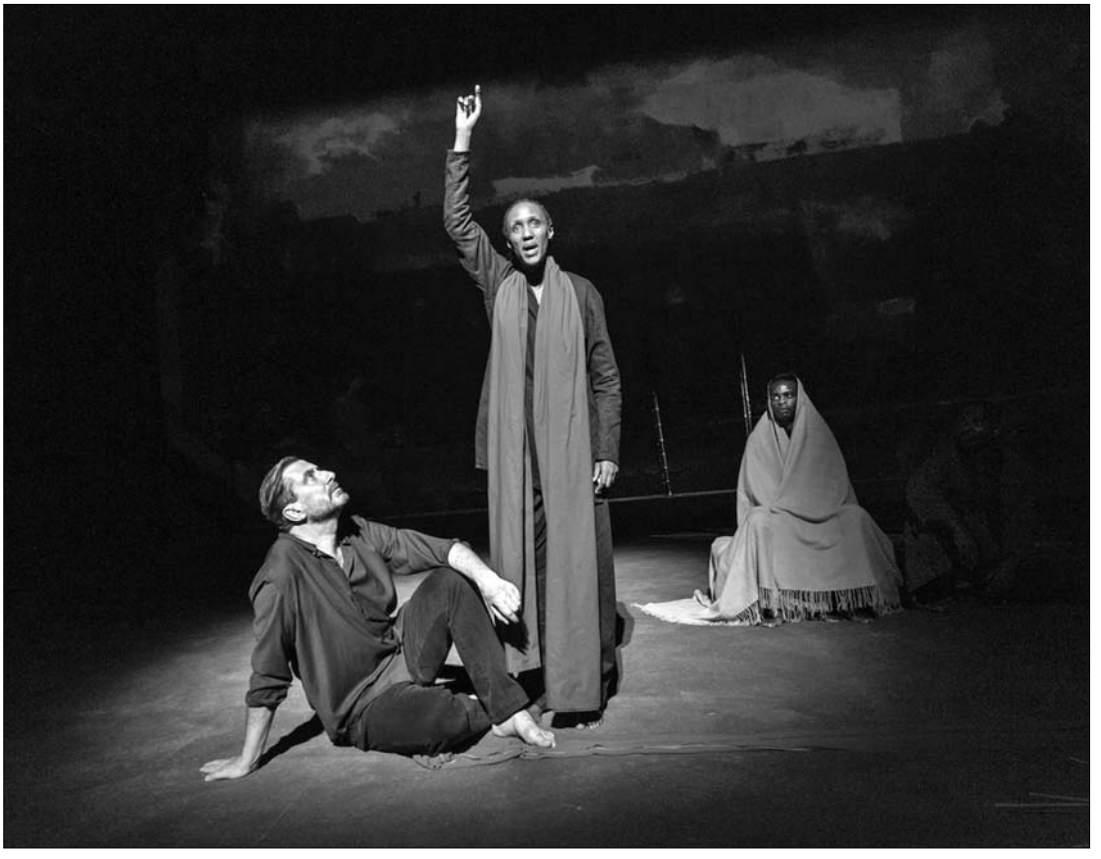
Seeing translation as a mode or a frame may seem, at first glance, to underscore the virtuosic dexterity required of the translator. However, the two questions Benjamin asks reinforce the conventionalized authority of the original text, to which translation always becomes secondary, derivative, and ontologically subsidiary. To take Benjamin literally, the 'adequate translator' of the *Mahābhārata* should be thoroughly knowledgeable in Sanskrit, both Classical and Vedic. S/he should also be equally knowledgeable in the language translated into, as is evident in the fact that a handful of translations are currently available in English, both abridged and 'unabridged'. Yet Benjamin's 'more pertinent' question underscores the fact that we may never achieve a definitive version of the *Mahābhārata*, nor does the text 'by its nature' call for a definitive version. Hence, as a source text, the *Mahābhārata* always remains unstable.

Hutcheon, on the other hand, points towards the origin in order to shift the focus back to the translation. According to her theory of adaptation, the *Mahābhārata* falls close to an untranslatable text not because it is by nature unstable but because Carrière purposefully mystifies his translation process. As stated by Carrière himself in his Introduction and iterated by M. L. Varadpande in his discussion of the Brook-Carrière production, in 1975 Brook and Carrière 'started listening to the Mahabharata story as narrated to them by a professor of Sanskrit, Philippe Lavastine, and the script started taking shape. In 1984 the play was ready and rehearsals started.'[34]

In Carrière's words, the story 'completely enchanted' them: 'For five years we met regularly, Peter and I listening to the poem without reading it. I took notes, and in 1976 I started a first version of the play.'[35] Only after he started writing the play did he read the *Mahābhārata* in French translation and Brook in English, 'comparing translations with the help of Marie-Hélène Estienne'. While Carrière does not disclose which French translation he read nor provide any statement regarding his adaptation process, he further mystifies his role as adapter by recounting the difficulty of finding equivalents for certain Sanskrit words. Especially he points towards the 'untranslatability' of *dharma* that, as will be discussed later, presents itself as 'untranslated into', or absent in, his adaptation. In this sense, the origin is rendered 'untranslatable' precisely because its 'translator' claims it as such.

On a deeper level, Carrière does not engage in what Hutcheon defines as transcultural adaptation, or the 'transaction between texts and languages as inter-cultural and inter-temporal communication'. For instance, note how he identifies the *Mahābhārata* in the first place:

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From the 2016 production of *Battlefield* at the Young Vic, directed by Peter Brook.

Commentators point out that all the pages that maintain the superiority of the Brahman caste – and there are a great number of them – were added in much more recent time. We didn't pay a great deal of attention to any of these comments, however interesting they might be. As far as we were concerned, this immense poem, which flows with the majesty of a great river, carries an inexhaustible richness which defies all structural, thematic, historic or psychological analysis. . . . Layers of ramifications, sometimes contradictory, follow upon one another and are interwoven without losing the central theme. That theme is a threat: we live in a time of destruction – everything points in the same direction. Can this destruction be avoided?[36]

After asserting that the *Mahābhārata* carries an 'inexhaustible richness which defies all structural, thematic, historic or psychological analysis', Carrière proceeds to pin down its theme as 'a threat' that 'we live in a time of destruction'. Although the sheer enormity of the *Mahābhārata* certainly calls for a comprehensive dramaturgy for the spatio-temporally limited stage, Carrière's explanation for prioritizing more 'pertinent' narratives than others fails to convince, especially since Brook explained to Richard Schechner in *TDR* that most of their effort seems to have been spent in 'sifting' a 'central' story out of 'hundreds of digressions'.[37]

This, Hutcheon points out, illuminates the difficult but inevitable task of the adapter: 'usually adaptations, especially from long novels, mean that the adapter's job is one of subtraction or contraction; this is called a "surgical art" for a good reason'.[38] She also points out that context can modify meaning 'no matter where or when', especially when it comes to transcultural adaptation: 'In the name of relevance, adapters seek the "right" resetting or recontextualizing.'[39]

Nevertheless, Carrière problematically justifies his adaptation process by claiming that the *Mahābhārata* is an 'Indian' narrative that can be relevant to 'all other cultures'

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outside of India, and can therefore be read as 'universal'. His Introduction, as well as Brook's Foreword, recount the long and arduous years that were spent to achieve this universalism. In fact, their effort is quite visible in the play in the reductive manner in which Carrière has restructured the source text. Going back to Smith: the *Mahābhārata* demonstrates as central to its narratives an 'extreme inclusiveness . . . that has resulted in so many narrative overlaps and backtracks, when two versions of a part of the story are told in immediate succession'.[40]

Such complex formal aspects of the *Mahābhārata*, then, may well embody the very notion of *itihāsa*. Yet Carrière's adaptation features a chronologically linear structure consisting of a designated narrator (Vyasa), a designated listener (The Boy), and the narrative featuring the characters as narration concurrently unfolds. This reduces the multiple narrators of the source text (the Ugrasravas, Vaiśampāyana, Suta Samjaya, Dhritarāshtra) to a single storyteller, Vyasa. In creating a 'universal' narrative, Carrière virtually effaces most pre-existent narratives with their respective narrators that collectively compose the *Mahābhārata*. Furthermore, Brook does not wish to treat the source text as a genealogy, history, culture, religion, and myth of the particular geographical region to which it pertains. Such contexts are 'unnecessary' to his enforcement of universalism:

> To go from one little psychological thing of a person being jealous of someone else, to the whole cycle of creation and destruction, this is all in *The Mahabharata*. While each one of those themes found its form in a Hindu culture in India, at a certain moment in history, you can see just at this very moment in talking about them that not one of those themes belong to a culture. Does the theme of the creation and the destruction of the universe belong to a culture? Does that belong to a period of history? Does the theme of hatred within one family belong more to one culture or to one period of history? No. What belongs to one culture and one period of history is the story – the way that those great themes are turned into a story, like the story of the young man going out to save the girl and having to find five people to help him.[41]

Rustom Bharucha lambasted Brook's actions as 'decontexualization' in his 1988 article, 'Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*: a View from India'. Alf Hiltebeitel aligns his position with Bharucha, addressing the main problem as 'decontextualization' from which the misidentification and mistreatment of the *Mahābhārata* occurred:

> As Bharucha has observed, Brook and Carrière clearly made a choice: to render a *Mahabharata* that had something to do with Westerners' lives, it would be necessary to eliminate wherever possible any reference to reincarnation and caste.[42]

If decontextualization poses a methodological problem in Brook and Carrière's translation and adaptation processes, I would also push for a more predatory underlying motive. Brook does not simply dismiss the context of 'Hindu culture' in the *Mahābhārata* for its 'unnecessariness', but more actively rejects it since it proves inimical to establishing his status as a Western researcher. After 'extracting' the *Mahābhārata* from its origin, the researchers of Brook's International Centre for Theatre Research celebrated their acquisition on their home front to an 'epic' reception. Margaret Croyden of the *New York Times* writes:

> Imagine staging a nine-hour production based on an ancient Hindu poem combining strains of the Wars of the Roses and *Götterdammerung* into the cosmic grandeur of an Indian epic. Stir in a clash of two great dynasties in the hands of the gods, opposing armies locked in battle and the moral struggle of ideal heroes representing divine forces arrayed against demonic ones. All this, set against a background of primordial forests and sumptuous palaces, is encompassed in the monumental saga, *The Mahabharata*. . . . Although parts of *The Mahabharata* have been used in Indian dance, song, and the ritual Kathakali drama, this is the first time the whole epic has been adapted for the theatre. . . . Revered in India but little known in the West, *The Mahabharata* is to South Asians what the Bible along with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are to us.[43]

Brook's primary intended audience was not, as he articulated, 'all mankind': it was the cosmopolitan theatregoers in Avignon in 1985, followed by those in Zurich, Los Angeles, New York City, Perth, Adelaide, Copenhagen, Glasgow, and Tokyo during the world tour that ran from 26 July 1987 until 22 July 1988. Were these audiences, lured by the

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sensationalist plaudits of the media and thrilled to taste 'a flavour of India', aware that Brook was the first person to stage *The Mahabharata*, not the *Mahābhārata*? Could the audiences outside South Asia have recognized Brook's production to be but one of many different iterations of the *Mahābhārata*, rather than mistake the production as a faithful representation of the original?

Rather than an adaptation, *The Mahabharata* is closer to Hutcheon's definition of appropriation – 'taking possession of another's story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one's own sensibility, interests, and talents'.[44] Theoretically, Hutcheon asserts, all adaptations are 'creative *and* interpretive acts of appropriation/salvaging'.[45] The complexity of the adapter's task is to navigate through the negative nuances of 'appropriation' and 'salvaging' to make a work that opens up an 'extended intertextual engagement' with its source text. Upon first introduction to the material, how are adapters to treat the adaptation as something discretely separate from its source text? Given the sensationalism surrounding its premiere, with headlines dubbing the play an 'Indian *Iliad*', could not the production be taken for a 'faithful' representation of the original play, or worse, replace it altogether?

> It was the British who first made us aware in India of economic appropriation on a global scale. They took our raw materials from us, transported them to factories in Manchester and Lancashire, where they transformed them into commodities, which were then forcibly sold to us in India. Brook deals in a different kind of appropriation: he does not merely take our commodities and textiles and transform them into costumes and props. He has taken one of our most significant texts and decontextualized it from its history in order to 'sell' it to audiences in the West.[46]

Although Bharucha clearly identifies the colonialist nuances of Brook's enterprise, he still refrains from branding it as epistemic violence. Unless one systematically demystifies the ethical limitations involved in the transcultural adaptation process, criticizing the adapter for 'decontextualization' fails to capture fully the complexity of imperialist logic. In effect, Bharucha's polemic vindicates his fury but does not reason beyond its own diatribe.

One should note that *The Mahabharata* does not qualify as an adaptation precisely because it appropriates the source text and, in so doing, misrepresents it. Brook and Carrière knowingly reject the central notions of their source text because it is *itihāsa* of the non-Western Other, that is, a narrative with no copyright or authorship.

The problem at hand lies deeper than the methodological decontextualization Brook and Carrière perform. It lies within their inherent epistemic violence of treating the *Mahābhārata* as a natural resource that can be uprooted and processed to cater to the West.

Race in *The Mahabharata* (1989)

As Linda Hutcheon points out:

> Performance media present the greatest challenge for adaptations across cultures and not only because of the presence of paying audiences – on site and ready to respond with incomprehension or anger. Adapting across cultures is not simply a matter of translating words. For audiences experiencing an adaptation in the showing or interacting modes of engagement, cultural and social meaning has to be conveyed and adapted to a new environment through what Patrice Pavis calls the 'language-body'. The intercultural, he says, is the 'intergestural': the visual is as important as the aural. In transfers from a telling to a performance mode, differences of philosophy, religion, national culture, gender, or race can create gaps that need filling by dramaturgical considerations that are as likely to be kinetic and physical as linguistic.[47]

Thus, performance media adaptations across cultures are complex on a variety of levels. Dramaturgical process itself is a matter of 'filing in the gaps' between differences, not only in philosophical, religious, and cultural dimensions but also the more visibly and audibly evident ones of gender and race.

The closest audiovisual resource to the 1985–87 stage productions of *The Mahabharata* is the eponymous 1989 TV mini-series directed by Brook.[48] Although significant shifts in specific roles do occur (Andrzej Seweryn played Duryodhana in the 1985 stage production but he plays Yudhishthira in the mini-

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series), most of the credited cast are the same in both productions.[49]

In the play, Pandu directly converses with Kunti regarding the Gazelle's curse and his inability to make love to a woman lest he should die. In the filmed version, however, Vyasa narrates the entire scene off-screen as Pandu, Kunti, and Madri perform the action. We hear him say: 'Kunti and Madri knew how deeply Pandu longed for children. But they knew also that if he ever made love to one of his wives, he would die. Sadly, he accepted the inevitable. This, he thought, was his destiny.'[50]

Yet without the frame of *dharma*, Pandu's acceptance of destiny cannot be understood within the logic of reason. Pandu accepts his destiny precisely as it is his *dharma*, or the moral law that he lives by to fulfil his lot in life. Instead, reframing Pandu's acceptance of *dharma* as 'sad', Brook and Carrière portray Pandu as unfortunate, if not pitiful. By doing this and appealing to the emotions of their cosmopolitan audiences without mentioning *dharma*, they consequentially misrepresent *dharma* as a mere 'curse' for which, coincidentally, Kunti had a solution.

More importantly, in choosing not to pay any attention to the 'great number of pages' that maintain the 'superiority of the Brahman caste', Brook and Carrière present each character and his/her *dharma* as though they are wilfully making radical 'choices' or succumbing to 'fate'.[51] Interpreting the caste system as having a strictly religious connotation, or thinking that caste can be separated from politico-social meaning, they fail to recognize the inherent cosmological connections among different aspects that comprise Hinduism. Without the frames of *dharma*, caste, and reincarnation, which interconnectedly allow the story to flow cyclically, the Kurukshetra War itself can be mistaken as a disaster caused by a series of unwise decisions.

By choosing not to include what Carrière dubs the 'superiority of the Brahman caste', he thus ends up portraying his characters as passively succumbing to fate as they make one illogical decision after another. Without *dharma* undergirding each character's place, how are we to interpret Bhishma's vow of lifelong celibacy, Pandu's inability to have sex with his wives, or Yudhishthira's continued game of dice, despite losing his four brothers and himself to Shakuni?

Yet another sequence poses a similar problem. We are taken to the Himalayas for the birth of the Pandava princes, represented by the bare sky and earth with no sight of trees. It is pitch-black night. Kunti tells Pandu that she possesses a magic power ('mantra') that allows her 'to call down a god at will . . . and have a child by him'. Pandu tells her to say the mantra, to which she answers with a question: 'Which god should I evoke first?' Pandu tells her, 'Evoke *Dharma*. Beyond him, all thoughts must stop.' Kunti closes her eyes while Madri and Pandu watch, their faces lit by the intensity of the bonfire in the darkness of the night.

When Kunti slowly opens her eyes and gazes into the distance, non-diegetic buzzing sounds grow louder as the camera zooms into a round, coal-like object ablaze with fire. The object, in the middle of darkness, grows larger until it fills the entire frame with its flame. As it partially dissolves, a figure of a man dissolves on to the screen as if he 'appears' from this mysterious fire. Soon the flame completely dissolves and the previously superimposed man now stands in clear focus, medium-shot in centre frame. Kunti announces: 'This is Yudhishthira, our firstborn, son of *Dharma*, born to be king.'

At 'born to be king', we are back in the bonfire scene with the three characters. Kunti bows to Yudhishthira, gazing 'beyond' the camera on to an offscreen space but clearly seeing the prince we are not seeing, followed by Pandu and Madri in awe, paying their respect. Kunti then conjures Vayu, 'god of the wind', to conceive Bhima, followed by Indra, 'king of gods', to conceive Arjuna. Each time, the round burning object looms before us, accompanied by sounds and superimposed with elemental symbols before Bhima emerges, in conjunction with symbols of thunder and a blue pillar of light before Arjuna appears.

Throughout the sequence, Brook employs the abstract qualty of the round flaming object

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to stand in for the gods instead of portraying them in anthropomorphic forms as they often appear in Vedic legends. With the exception of Ganesha, who later puts his elephant mask down to reveal Krishna, all gods in the film are delineated via images and sounds of fire, wind, earth, water, and the planets. In a way, this method effectively portrays both materiality and the mystical quality of deities without directly showing them. It also plays into the notion of make-believe by emphasizing the 'presence' of the absent gods and revealing the people 'seeing' them concealed.

Nevertheless, in terms of Pavis's notion of the 'intergestural' in intercultural adaptations, using nature-object imagery to represent different deities effaces the plurality of the socio-political, cultural, and religious significations that inhabit the *Mahābhārata*. Furthermore, it transgresses the Hindu mythology that the adapter refuses to adapt, and instead, warps it; the audience might mistakenly equate Hinduism with animism, or, even worse, disconnect the Hindu gods from the notion of holiness altogether.

Instead of 'penetrating the layers of culture' by presenting the Hindu gods according to *dharma*, Brook offers a personal idea of them, crafted and stylized by his own aesthetic choices. Hiltebeitel points out the further 'intergestural' problem of the representation of race:

> The term 'race' occurs repeatedly and inappropriately in places where 'dynasty', 'dynastic line', 'family', or 'lineage' would be fitting. The 'race' involved would presumably be 'Aryan', which raises some disturbing questions. In any case, it is misleading. It is a discourse about the 'saving of a race', which is paradoxical since, while it has nothing to do with precolonial India, it is presented through a *Mahabharata* with a multiracial cast. In typical colonialist terms, race stands in for caste as a means of rendering Indian social and historical dynamics intelligible. No doubt Brook is trying to say that all men are brothers, and that the race saved is the human race. But the message gets tangled up by the distortions of the Indian terms.[52]

Although his concern primarily starts from semiotics, Hiltebeitel points towards the extreme discomfort of 'seeing' and 'hearing' race in *The Mahabharata*. Precisely because the film attempts to neutralize the term, race is reiterated and, ultimately, amplified. Bharucha pillories the cast of the stage production including actors from England, France, Turkey, Japan, Iran, Poland, Italy, South Africa, Senegal, Indonesia, and India as a 'United Nations of Theatre', the variety of nationalities not much different from the cast in the subsequent film production.[53] Despite it all, nations and continents become essentially transparent in *The Mahabharata*. The audience takes in the visual and auditory information of apparent skin colour and accent, never the subtextual knowledge of nationality.

It is only significant, then, that Yudhishthira, Arjuna, Krishna, Dhritarashtra, Vyasa, and characters that are associated with wisdom, knowledge, divinity, or intellect 'seem white', while Bhishma, Bhima, Karna, Ghatotkacha, the Gazelle, and characters associated with physical strength, heathen, or 'demon' (Hidimbi) 'seem black'. Drona, the guru of military arts, 'seems East Asian', while all women characters 'seem South Asian'.

This broad generalization swallows up the flat-screen of plain character dimensions, for race actually has nothing to do with the age or the integrity of a character; whereas young Abhimanyu, played by the Irish actor Nolan Hemmings, 'seems white', the Boy, played by the French-Indian actor Antonin Stahly-Viswanadhan, 'seems South Asian'. Duryodhana, who is cunning and deceptive, 'seems white'; Shakuni, one of the 'villains' in the *Mahābhārata*, extremely intelligent yet devious, and played by the Turkish actor Tuncel Kurtiz, also 'seems white'. In this sense, the problem is not that Brook's cast is international, but that it is multiracial, stereotyped and compartmentalized according to a colonialist directorial agenda.

Nevertheless, Bharucha's diatribe on the casting as Eurocentrism under the guise of internationalism has a point, especially when it comes to casting a Turkish actor as Shakuni. Turkey embodies an ethnological limen standing right on the border between the Occident and the Orient. Casting such a liminal entity into a position where the audi-

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ence may take in what they see and may even 'see white', betrays a particularly imperialist assumption. In this elaborate scenario, 'seeming white' functions as a vehicle of privilege that allows the non-Western to enter the West.

When it comes to the subtextual episteme of nationalities, Brook's directorial agenda can be read as a sinister reinforcement of Eurocentrism in which Bharucha's note on the cast not including a single American actor becomes indeed crucial. The American embodies another liminal entity, albeit different from the Turk, in that its very definition as nationality actively destabilizes any particular notion of race. Such liminality, for Brook, must signify danger since it disrupts his Eurocentric subtext precisely by not falling neatly into the categories of the visual code of representation. An American may 'seem' all races to no set rules, and hence creates a rupture in Brook's colonialist visual discourse.

The Ethics of Transcultural Adaptation

By now we are well aware of the hegemonic bifurcation of the world into West and non-Western Other, especially in the discursive tradition of the former talking about the latter to itself in its own language. As Spivak has demonstrated, culture – like other commodities or natural resources – can just as well be 'extracted' in the non-West and taken back to the West to cater to the Western audience. Holding out episteme as his justification, the Western scholar may then discursively present himself and his produced knowledge as objective, scientific, and ethical. This surreptitiously maintains the imperialist discourse as the West reinstates its Subject status through the logic of epistemic violence.

In the series of debates in the 1986 to 1992 issues of *The Drama Review*, as well as contemporaneous issues of *Asian Theatre Journal*, *Journal of Performance and Art*, and *Theater*, theatre scholars negotiated the ethical lines of performance-making. Bharucha, in particular, pilloried Brook's imperialist motives in the *Mahabharata*. Without fully addressing the ethical limitations involved in the transcultural adaptation process, however, criticizing the adapter merely for decontextualizing the source text does not amount to a solid allegation. The problem lies deep within the inherent epistemic violence of treating the *Mahābhārata* as a natural resource that can be uprooted and processed for the West, offered – as the adapters put it – as a 'flavour of India', as if an exoticized food product. By failing to inscribe Brook's enterprise as a case of epistemic violence, Bharucha's polemic vindicated his fury but failed to reason beyond its own diatribe.

Although in our age of globalization and transnational capital flow, where the binarism between West and non-West has become almost proverbial, then, I have re-examined the case of *The Mahabharata* with a sustained urgency to demonstrate why we cannot pretend to have moved beyond colonialism. Hegemony continues to channel its way by intercultural and intracultural means through the ducts and pipes of neoliberal capitalism and transnationalism. Transcultural adaptation can only exist as 'a transaction between texts and languages as inter-cultural and inter-temporal communication'.[54] Because context can modify meaning at any moment at all times, every intention and principle guiding the surgical procedure of adaptation demands continuous negotiation and scrutiny.

After all, transcultural adaptation is never neutral; no adaptation exists outside the interest of the adapter. In privileging the written text over other forms of the *Mahābhārata*, Brook and Carrière inadvertently reinstate the colonizer's textual authority over the non-textual source material. By eschewing *dharma* and misrepresenting Hindu mythology by way of arbitrary interpretation, they perpetuate the 'possibility of unconscious colonization by way of vocabulary'.[55] Universalizing the narrative, they disavow the epistemic categories of the *Mahābhārata* and frame the world as an extension of Europe. The resulting production carries a particularized and Othered notion of India, a distant and fantastic place where epic tales exist as they do in the West.

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Notes and References

1. To differentiate the source text from Brook's eponymous production, I use diacritics only on the ancient text.

2. Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 3.

3. Ibid., p. vi.

4. John D. Smith, trans., *The Mahābhārata* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. lxv.

5. Juluri, Vamsee. 'Hinduism and its Culture Wars', *The India Site*, 19 May 2013 <www.theindiasite.com/hinduism-and-its-culture-wars>, accessed 23 September 2016.

6. John D. Smith, *The Mahābhārata*, p. lxv.

7. 'Early Hindu literature, comprising legends, myths, poems, etc., associated with epics and purānas (especially the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas), which is then later called the fifth Veda. More generally the great epics (*Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyana*) are termed itihāsa.' John Bowker, 'Itihāsa', in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* <www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192800947.001.0001/acref-9780192800947-e-3534>, accessed 27 October 2016.

8. John D. Smith, *The Mahābhārata*, p. lxv–lxvi.

9. Ibid., p. xiii.

10. Ibid., p. xix.

11. Ibid., pp. l–li.

12. Ibid., p. xx.

13. Based on Chakravarti Rajagopalachari's abridged retelling of the *Mahābhārata* in English in 1951. See Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, *Mahābhārata* (Ottawa: Laurier Books, 2002).

14. The activist reader 'is less interested in exposing the injustices of the past or in turning people away from their ignorant reverence of the past than in turning the past into his ally. He therefore tries to gather from it an authoritative resource in order to radically question the habits and desires of the present.' See Simona Sawhney, *The Modernity of Sanskrit* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 91.

15. Sawhney discusses how the *Bhagavad Gītā* of the *Mahābhārata* was recontextualized for political use during the nationalist movements in India. She recounts how the *Gītā* gave rise to 'a sort of nationalist seminar, providing a frame for wide-ranging debates about violence, resistance, duty, caste, and indeed the very activity of reading traditional religious texts' (*The Modernity of Sanskrit*, p. 87). To demonstrate how allegorical readings are usually a 'risky and dangerous affair', Sawhney notes how *Gītā* has often been 'practised' and 'used as an inspiration by Hindu nationalists', and recalls how the text was recited several days before the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992, at the conclusion of which 'leaders of Hindu nationalist parties announced that the battle of Kurukshetra was about to begin' (ibid., p. 123). However, she stresses that M. K. Gandhi's allegorical treatment of the *Mahābhārata* 'worked' as a shield of his political movement since it fundamentally 'reoriented the ancient text in the name of preserving its authority . . . committed not to a historically or even philosophically accurate reading but to the interests of the present' (ibid., p. 88). In contrast to Subhas Chandra Bose or B. R. Ambedkar, Sawhney argues that Gandhi's allegorical/activist reading successfully made use of the *Gītā*'s authority to meet his political and ethical ('religious') aims by suturing it to the needs of contemporary times.

16. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *On the Episode of the Mahābhārata known by the name of Bhagavad-Gītā by Wilhelm von Humboldt, Berlin 1826*, ed. and trans. Herbert Herring (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1995), p. 16–19. Wendy Doniger, in 'Bhagavadgita' (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. <www.britannica.com/EBechecked/topic/63871/Bhagavadgita>, accessed 27 August 2016), elucidates:

Bhagavad Gītā, or *Bhagavadgita* (in Sanskrit, 'Song of the Lord') is an episode recorded in the great Sanskrit poem of the Hindus, the *Mahabharata*. It occupies Chapters 23 to 40 of Book 6 of the *Mahabharata* and is in the form of a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Krishna, an incarnation or avatar of the god Vishnu. Composed perhaps in the first or second century CE, it is commonly known as the *Gita*. On the brink of a great battle between warring branches of the same family, Arjuna is suddenly overwhelmed with misgivings about the justice of killing so many people, some of whom are his friends and relatives, and expresses his qualms to Krishna, his charioteer – a combination of bodyguard and court historian. Krishna's reply expresses the central themes of the *Gita*. He persuades Arjuna to do his duty as a man born into the class of warriors, which is to fight, and the battle takes place. Krishna's argument incorporates many of the basic teachings of the Upanishads, speculative texts compiled between 1000 and 600 BCE, as well as of the philosophy of Samkhaya Yoga, which stresses the dualism between soul and matter. He argues that one can kill only the body; the soul is immortal and transmigrates into another body at death or, for those who have understood the true teachings, achieves release (*moksha*) or extinction (*nirvana*), freedom from the wheel of rebirth (reincarnation). Krishna also resolves the tension between the Vedic injunction to meditate and amass knowlegde (*jnana*).

17. Sawhney points out that Hegel 'remains conscious – all too conscious perhaps – of the differences separating European and Indian sensibility', the separation which she identifies 'may be necessary for the Hegelian system'. See Simona Sawhney, *The Modernity of Sanskrit*, p. 98.

18. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 271–313.

19. Ibid., p. 280.

20. Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata*, p. vii.

21. Ibid., p. xvi.

22. Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator: an Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana/Collins, 1970), p. 80.

23. Benjamin's ideal translator does not assemble or reproduce what the author ('poet') has already written in the original text. Instead, he strives to 'lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification' so that the translation and the original, hand in hand, accomplish the great philosophical concept of 'pure language'; a language that 'no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages' (Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 78–80). Lawrence Venuti describes this utopian notion as the state in which a plurality of 'mutually exclusive' languages 'coexists

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with complementary intentions to communicate and refer to'. See Lawrence Venuti, '1900s–1930s' in *The Translation Studies Reader*, 3rd edn (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 11.

24. Niranjana uses Benjamin's essay to assert that the 'critical drawback' in the theories of Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida is apparent in their refusal to read the Benjaminian notion of translation as a trope for 'configuration of history'. See Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

25. 'An adaptation is likely to be greeted as minor and subsidiary and certainly never as good as the "original". This critical abuse is one of the provocations of this study. . . . Adaptations seem so common, so "natural", so obvious – but are they?' Linda Hutcheon, 'Preface to the First Edition', in *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2013), p. xiv.

26. Ibid., p. 16.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 21; Hutcheon's emphasis.

29. 'Appropriation, n.', *OED Online*, last modified September 2013 <www.oed.com/view/Entry/9877?redirectedFrom=appropriation>, accessed 23 October 2013.

30. Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata*, p. xiv.

31. Ibid., p. xv–xvi.

32. In a Benjaminian framework, the translator's intention may provide guidance to the 'pure language' the translator sought to achieve; in an anthology of literature, it frequently serves as a commentary; in Marxist and poststructuralist discourses, it may become metacommentary to different ends.

33. Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 70.

34. Manohar Laxman Varadpande, 'The Brook Experiment', in *Mahabharata in Performance* (New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1990), p. 123.

35. Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata*, p. vii.

36. Ibid., p. viii–ix.

37. Brook explains, 'The play represents many years of work with Jean-Claude Carrière. In truth, ten years. We finished the first version seven years ago, and we've been working every day for the past three. With this text, there's no other possible method. If we had been sloppy or clumsy, the result would have been sloppy as well. The selection we made was not intellectual or theoretical. The only basic method we used was what I call "sifting". . . . With the *Mahabharata* the first choice we made was simple: that is, the central story – the fratricidal war within a family (which leads to hundreds of digressions) was the main thread. Then we sifted. For example, two out of the twelve volumes in the *Mahabharata* consist wholly of Bhishma's deathbed speech, a purely theoretical discourse on the essence of life. You need five or six days to read just this text. We kept this character in, but in our play he tells a very simple story within a two-minute span.' Richard Schechner *et al*., 'Talking with Peter Brook', *The Drama Review*, XXX, No. 1 (Spring 1986), p. 64.

38. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 19.

39. Ibid., p. 146.

40. Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata*, p. l–li.

41. Dale Moffit, ed., *Between Two Silences: Talking with Peter Brook* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1999), p. 146–7.

42. Alf Hiltebeitel, 'Transmitting "Mahabharatas": Another Look at Peter Brook', p. 151.

43. Margaret Croyden, 'Peter Brook Transforms an Indian Epic for the Stage', in *New York Times*, 25 August 1985 <www.nytimes.com/1985/08/25/arts/peter-rook-transforms-an-indian-epic-for-the-stage.html>, accessed 27 October 2016.

44. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 18.

45. Ibid., p. 8.

46. Rustom Bharucha, 'Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*: a View from India', in *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 68.

47. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 149–50.

48. 'Regrettably, barring unforeseen revivals, the nine-hour drama will not be an option again for American audiences. The published script of the drama, as translated by Brook, will be all that remains of it' (Hiltebeitel, 'Transmitting "Mahabharata"', p. 149).

49. 'Le Mahabharata, Théâtre 1985,' in *Peter Brook Site Officiel* <www.newspeterbrook.com/1985/07/07/le-mahabharata-theatre-1985>, accessed 10 November 2016.

50. Ibid.

51. Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata*, p. viii–ix.

52. Hiltebeitel, 'Transmitting "Mahabharatas"', p. 151.

53. Bharucha, 'Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*', p. 80. Note the polemical tone of using the term 'caste' instead of 'cast' in the original article in *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXIII, No. 32 (August 1988), p. 1645–6.

54. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 16.

55. Jean-Claude Carrière, 'Chercher le Coeur Profond', *Alternatives Theâtrales*, No. 24 (1985), p. 14.

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