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From Hybridity to Translation

Reflections on Travelling Concepts*

1 The (Transnational) Study of Culture as a "Study of Transportation?"

"Once again: in the crystallized world system, everything is subject to the compulsion of movement. Wherever one looks in the great comfort structure, one finds each and every inhabitant being urged to constant mobilization," writes the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk in his book *In the World Interior of Capital*; yet – as he continues – "none of what changes and moves still has the quality of 'history'" (Sloterdijk 2013: 249). How can the study of culture contribute to a re-entry of history into this global circulation? For instance, how can awareness of contexts, local relations, and uneven developments, and, hence, the capacity for acting and intervening be maintained?

Globalized circumstances demand the development of new, transnational positions for the study of culture, its concepts and theories. The field is complex. On the one hand, concepts used in an intercultural study of culture set their sights on the power of global circulations. On the other hand, such concepts themselves cannot be taken out of these spheres of circulation. In particular, this applies to so-called 'travelling concepts,' which can all too easily be considered as global passageways of knowledge since, in their circulation, "they don't bring with them the field of production of which they are a product" (Bourdieu 1999: 221). But what does the metaphor of 'travelling concepts' actually mean, as it has been developed, above all, by Edward Said, Mieke Bal, and James Clifford (cf. Said 1983; Bal 2002; Clifford 1989, 1997)?

If, traditionally, key concepts and theories were predominantly 'at home' in western academia, they are being sent on a journey in the face of transnational challenges. They are being appropriated, reinterpreted, and altered in other, often non-European, places. Does this lead to a critical 'displacement' of west-

ern European theory or, even, to its "provincializing," as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it (cf. Chakrabarty 2000)? This is questionable, at least so long as the concept of 'travelling concepts' itself remains imprisoned in the tradition of a European history of travel, discovery, and expansion. This tradition has long been associated with concepts of mobility, flexibility, conquest, and expansionist ambition, which are not only eurocentric but also construed as middle-class and male dominated.[1]

This association even comes across in Goethe's talk of an "intellectual commerce" or "free spiritual trade" ("freier geistiger Handelsverkehr") in the early nineteenth century as a precondition for the development of an emerging World Literature. Certainly, with its supposition of an autonomously productive cosmopolitan individual, this concept might be considered as hardly suitable for times of global mass migrations. In such times as ours, the migration of concepts and theories also seems to run more along the lines of the commodity circulation of goods that is not "geistig" any more. To ask a provocative question, are concepts in the study of culture commensurate with consumer brands produced in the West (such as Coca-Cola or McDonalds)? After all, even these brands increase their rate of global circulation by making concessions to local circumstances – as can be seen in the appearance of a Ramadan-Burger and Barbie Dolls in saris in India. These marketing analogies cannot be overlooked, especially when one accepts – with Peter Sloterdijk – the "process of modernity as a project in transportation" (Sloterdijk 2013: 62). Accepting this could possibly lead to an understanding of the study of culture in general as a "study of transportation" ("Verkehrswissenschaft"), following globalization's increased demands for mobility. Anthropologist James Clifford's talk of new "ways of looking at culture (along with tradition and identity) in terms of travel relations" also resonates here (Clifford 1997: 25). Clifford, however, connects this to a critical approach: He maintains that concepts such as culture, tradition, and identity should not be fixed in national structures of transmission, but rather be developed in their contexts of intercultural contact.

At this point, going down the mobility route and following the paths of an intensified "nomadic criticism" (Braidotti 2011) would seem the obvious choice. But precisely here would be the place to stop and call the competence of inter/disciplinary as well as regional studies to mind. In this way, the rather free-floating key terms of cultural mobility (transit, travel, transfer) could be anchored more regionally and historically to avoid letting 'travelling concepts'

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1 Cf. Wolff 1993: 224, 230; for a critique of the travel metaphor in favor of 'displacement' as a more adequate category to analyze mass migration, cf. Kaplan 1996: 3.

become seamlessly inserted into the "ungrounded movement" (Wolff 1993: 235) of the global sphere of circulation. And here a second dimension of 'travelling concepts' comes into play: Concepts and theories are *only* generated through travel. They are rounded out, take detours, overlap with other concepts, and even experience breaks. This does not happen in a vacuum, but in the field of relations between one's own and other regional academic traditions, with their different social conditions of origin.

The magic word 'mobility' is, thus, powerless unless the theories and concepts we work with become 'localized.' Area studies, with its certain mode of cultural and social 'groundedness,' seems particularly suited to this task of localization. What is meant here is its regional competence, which openly takes up the mode of systematic questioning practiced by a transnational or comparative study of culture, whilst at the same time being able to 'ground' this empirically. Is the study of culture, thus, not rather a 'study of translation' precisely because it dislocates transit, travel, and transfer from the well-worn tradition of western travel and, instead, strengthens categories of rupture such as translation and transformation; because it incorporates detours, displacements, breaks, obstacles; and because it shows how concepts only blaze their trails through these very distortions and hybrid overlapping by way of translations as transformations? Therefore, instead of transportation studies, I advocate a (transnational) study of culture as translation studies, which perhaps provides new impulses for the analysis of travelling concepts.

2 The Unbearable Lightness of the Concept 'Travelling Concepts'

In earlier times, concepts were treated as luggage to be stowed away. Today they have themselves become travelers. But what has happened to their carriers, intermediaries, and brokers? At the same time, talk of their cosmopolitan circulation seems to render them seemingly harmless. At what point does their active role in producing inequalities of power and asymmetries of knowledge become visible? Such questions are raised by the very concept of 'travelling concepts.' It is remarkable to what extent this concept itself has already become a kind of theory on the move, becoming more and more depersonalized over time, separated from people and occurrences of mediation.

Edward Said, in his famous essay "Traveling Theory" (1983), started from an understanding of theory explicitly connected to people. He sketched out how Georg Lukács' Marxist theories of reification and revolutionary class conscious-

ness has been passed on by different people and through various places: starting in Hungary in 1919, travelling via Paris after World War II through Lukács' pupil Lucien Goldmann, and moving on to England with the help of Raymond Williams in Birmingham. In the process, however, the rebellious, critical content of the original theory was – as Said maintains – "during its peregrinations [...] reduced, codified, and institutionalized" (1983: 339). Above all, it became depoliticized, moderated, and "tamed" (Said 1983: 238). According to Said, this shows how essential it is to always link a theory with the specific social and historical circumstances of its space of production and reception (cf. 1983: 278). Theory alone cannot do this. One also needs critical consciousness in order to apply theory with an awareness of its political location and context as well as possible "resistances to theory," and one needs "to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests" (Said 1983: 242): "we distinguish theory from critical consciousness by saying that the latter is a sort of spatial sense. A sort of measuring faculty for locating or situating theory" (Said 1983: 241, see also the revision of his own originally too linear perception of travelling theories, Said 1994).

Locating theories and the investigation of their respective spatial, historical relations, therefore, seem to be essential.[2] It seems surprising in this context how light-heartedly the journey of the concept of 'travelling theory' or 'travelling concepts' itself has proceeded through the hands of Homi Bhabha, Mieke Bal, James Clifford and others, on a journey appearing to be virtually placeless and barrier free. How has this been possible? As Clifford noted in a distancing and somewhat cynical form of critique vis-à-vis Said, theory does not have to travel in an "immigrant boat" anymore; it is transmitted, rather, in a non-linear mode of production, circulation, and reception: It "takes the plane, sometimes with round-trip tickets" (Clifford 1989). Against this figurative explanation, I would like to argue that the concept has become ubiquitous because the metaphor of 'travelling theory' has fallen into the clutches of a worn-out concept of 'hybridity.' The concept of hybridity, as it has entered the mainstream of theory discussions worldwide, celebrates perhaps all too quickly both the blending and borderlessness of global relations, and the eclectic exchangeability of theoretical positions.[3] Perhaps we should investigate the routes travelled by the

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2 As a convincing example for a location of theory in the specific case of Australian cultural studies, cf. Christa Knellwolf King's contribution to this volume.

3 For a critical reconsideration of the concept and the patterns of hybridity, the contemporary "hybridity talk" and the "anti-hybridity backlash," cf. Pieterse 2001.

category of hybridity itself with a more critical eye – and hereby reach a point at which the importance of the category of 'translation' becomes apparent.

3 Routes of 'Hybridity'

As is well-known, hybridity has many faces: On the one hand, it is a specific concept (a synonym for complex systems and for a negotiation – not a fixing – of differences in a 'third space'). On the other hand, hybridity is also a mode of a concept's movement itself, and, moreover, stands for a transnational form of blending communication in a globalized world. Today's understanding of hybridity, however, represents just one particular stage in a surprisingly long journey – from nineteenth-century biology right up to post-colonial and postmodern cultural theory, with the following stages:

The 'origin' of this concept (if it makes sense at all to speak of 'origins' in matters of hybridity) lies in the racist discourse of nineteenth century biology. Here, hybridity asserted miscegenation and became a term of racial discrimination (cf. Young 1995). However, already in the field of biology, as it evolved at the time, a turnaround to a positive revaluation of impurity was taking place – due to the theory of evolution and the discovery of Mendel's laws. Hybrid breeds and gene combinations were recognized as sources of innovation. Thus, it stood to reason for literary studies and the humanities to also answer the question of how novelty is generated by pointing to the mixing of, and even the tensions between, differences.

On its journey through linguistic fields, hybridity was also taken up as a positive term, above all by Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay "Discourse in the Novel" from the mid-1930s (1981: 259–422). Here, important foundations were laid for the development of the concept in postmodernism and postcolonialism later on. "What is a hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter […] between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor" (Bakhtin 1981: 358). What is meant here is not a harmonious *mélange*. The reference is rather to a dialogic confrontation or "collision between differing points of views on the world," which "consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance" (Bakhtin 1981: 360). Bakhtin's battlefield is the novel in its polyphony. The unified, canonical language of a national culture, the hegemonic standard language with all the power of its traditions can be shattered – precisely through hybridization, that is to say, through exposure to "social heteroglossia […] where the dialogue of voices arises directly out

of a social dialogue of 'languages'" (Bakhtin 1981: 284–285). The baroque novel, for example, uses irony, parody, and satire to relativize the dominating standard language as well as heroic poetic genres. These are provided with a "polemic counterpoint" through the incursion of everyday genres such as the letter, the diary, the ego-document and conversation and, above all, a variety of social languages into the world of the novel. Through this kind of "tension-filled interaction" (Bakhtin 1981: 279), which produces collisions instead of mere mixings, the novel deliberately refers back to the capacity of social groups to articulate themselves and their differences. Linguistic hybridization, thus, shifts the power of articulation to a certain extent, aiming to empower marginalized groups and subjects to articulate their own forms of cultural self-expression.

Leading on from Bakhtin's questioning of the authority of dominant discourses, hybridity has been pushed by Edward Said and Homi Bhabha into a new field of enquiry, by being developed as the key concept for a postcolonial theory of culture (cf. Beecroft 2001: 217). They have questioned the discourse of a one-sided authority of colonialism, seeing the colonial constellation itself as hybridized – as an ambivalent, two-way interaction between the colonizer and the colonized. More can be read about the journey of the hybridity concept itself in Robert Young's study on *Postcolonialism* (Young 2001). In the following, however, I will emphasize and criticize a dominant, reductionist aspect: the epistemologization and, with it, the de-politicization and de-historization of this concept.

It is true that the postcolonial career of the hybridity concept may well have begun with historical-political impulses arising from the 'original scene' of hybridized colonial relations with their unequal power structures. But, increasingly, hybridity's horizon has been narrowed down to the level of mere representations, leading to shifts in the dominant regime of signs. Even culture in general has, in this way, come to be seen as fundamentally hybrid, internally contradictory and multi-layered, whereby the center and peripheries overlap and mix in dynamic tension.

This nowadays well-known insight has methodological consequences, not least for a trans/national study of culture. It suggests the need to de-essentialize key terms such as race, nation, modernity, identity, etc. and to critically pry them open as generalizations. A polyphonic identity is no longer at issue, as was still the case with Bakhtin. Rather, there is a complete departure from the notion of 'identity' itself. The focus has shifted to multiple codings and the scope for change in occupying an 'in-between' position: Only an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" – according to Homi Bhabha – "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 1994: 4). And yet this kind of produc-

tive 'in-between' space is still not conceptualized enough in terms of spatiality; instead, it is conceived as an epistemological dimension. Historical subjects come too little into focus as actors. They are figured, instead, as "junctions or crossing points in languages, orders, discourses and systems" (Bronfen and Marius 1997: 4).

Restricted to the level of signs and representations, the hybridity concept currently seems to be losing itself ever more in a de-spatialized and de-historicized sphere of theory. Although Homi Bhabha developed his understanding of hybridity in the context of migration, he has neglected the concrete conditions of migration, which are accompanied by a large degree of suffering. In contrast, he overestimates the creativity and power of innovation that he ascribes to the hybrid overlapping of different affiliations. The destabilization of fixed categories, which is Bhabha's critical aim, is thus robbed of its historical grounding. As Edward Said in his critique of 'orientalism,' Bhabha also uses the concept of hybridity to counter dichotomies (the self and the other, colonizer and colonized, Europe and Orient). At this junction on its journey into the transnational study of culture, the concept of hybridity has definitely met the path of western deconstructive theory: A travelling back to the West has taken place – in spite of the postcolonial signposts put up by Said and Bhabha.

Why has the concept of hybridity at all been so successful in the West? To be sure, it fits more easily into world-capitalist mobility flows because of its placelessness. It is not only the Ford car company's ad-slogan, "Feel the difference" – one of many other difference-celebrating advertisements – that shows how hybridity has found its way into the world-capitalist marketing strategies of a transglobal consumer culture. Here the 'different' has become a kind of 'selling concept' within a market of the conformist mainstream.[4] What remains of subversion and critique – one has to ask – in this permanent, neoliberal assertion of flexibility? Has everything really become hybrid? Has the concept of hybridity, too, become so boundless that even theory formation itself has been hybridized – as, for example, one can see in the overlapping between different cultural turns (cf. Bachmann-Medick 2014)?

What needs to be done to lead hybridity's journey through different contexts out of its flattened, epistemological dead-end? Travelling theories – I would suggest – need to be explicitly followed up along their journey through processes of cultural translation: "Traveling theories, in other words, have to go through translation" (Mignolo 2000: 210). It is no coincidence that this quote

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4 For a massive critique of 'hybridity' as a dominant phenomenon of cultural industry in the context of capitalist commodification cf. Ha 2005.

comes from a scholar of Latin American studies, Walter Mignolo, who draws our attention to the Latin American transformation of 'hybridity.' To me, this seems to offer a particularly strong impetus for further historical-political development of the concept.

The hybridity concept's Latin American journey has taken place on extremely winding and manifold paths. One of these paths has been opened up by the reception of Bakhtin in Brazil in the 1970s. This interesting incursion, to date, has largely been ignored in favor of the US-American reception of Bakhtin with its celebration of 'polyphony.' Above all, in Brazil, the so-called "anthropophagy movement," which can be traced back to the 1920s, has called not merely for hybrid mixings, but also explicitly for an irreverent, cannibalistic assimilation of European traditions and hegemonies from a local perspective of resistance (cf. Oswald de Andrade's "Cannibalist Manifesto" of 1928). Translation is understood here as appropriative and all-consuming. In this tradition, Bakhtin's notion of the "carnivalesque" has adopted a new costume. This occurs precisely through a decentering of accustomed notions of Europe and Latin America, center and periphery, and original and translation. It has taken place prominently in the sphere of Latin American concrete poetry and in practices of willful plagiarism and parody. But, beyond this, it has been developed as a more general 'cannibalistic' cultural style that can also be found in contemporary fields of social critique and sociologically relevant organizational appropriations in Brazil (cf. Islam 2012). In this context, Brazilian organizational studies – as the article "Can the Subaltern Eat?" illustrates – have considered an "anthropophagous model of cultural portability" explicitly as a self-conscious and creative practice of the implementation of managerial techniques from the U.S. and Europe (Islam 2012: 172).

Another path towards establishing a socially effective elaboration of the 'hybrid' leads to the Argentinian cultural theorist Néstor García Canclini living in Mexico. He writes not of hybridity in general, but rather of the dynamics of hybridization, based on the conflict-ridden processes of transformation of a whole nation or network of nations, peoples, and social groups in their everyday relationships:

> One also encounters economic and symbolic reconversion strategies in the popular sectors: rural migrants who adapt their knowledges in order to work and consume in the city, or who connect their traditional craftwork with modern uses in order to interest urban buyers; workers who reformulate their culture on the job in the face of new technologies of production; indigenous movements that renovate their demands in transnational politics or in an ecological discourse and learn to communicate these demands via radio, television, and the Internet. For reasons such as these, I maintain that the object of study is not hybridity but the processes of hybridization. (Canclini 1995: xxvii)

In contrast to Bhabha, concrete social and economic problem-fields, skills, and practices are studied here, above all in the context of urbanization. Canclini's own work is based on rural migrants who, in the cities, have to adapt their traditional knowledge and handicraft know-how to modern, urban technologies of production and the mass media.

The key point here is that these occurrences of hybridity in the context of urbanization are not conceived of as mixings but rather as translations, since they involve strategies in which exclusions also occur. The question of "what is left out of the fusion" (Canclini 1995: xxvii) arises when one is confronted with the resistant, contradictory, or conflictual.[5] These challenges emerge when traditional patterns of behavior assert themselves in areas of advanced technology and postmodern social processes under conditions of globalization. When there is talk of Hispano-Americanization in relation to the ownership of banks, airlines and telecommunications, then the concept of hybridity has clearly left the field of mere cultural and textual representation.

Hybridity moves on to become a main category of empirical sociological and historical analysis – merging at this point with the more precise category of translation. Spelled out as hybridization, it becomes a "comparative concept" in a wider context of "comparative cultural studies" (Clifford 1997: 18), which seems to be an important approach for any transnational study of culture. Precisely in the sense of a "translation term" (Clifford 1997: 11, esp. 39),[6] the concept could be used to critically question the notion of a pure, authentic identity: "These diverse, ongoing processes of hybridization lead to a relativizing of the notion of identity" (Canclini 1995: xxviii). Under the sign of 'translation,' this cultural-theoretical kind of questioning shows how hybridization and self-hybridization are actively carried out, in particular in the fields of social integration and migration (cf. Renn 2006; Fuchs 2009). But also, to mark the space of a transnational circulation of theory itself, processes of translation can become

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5 For Canclini, hybridization means explicitly a process of uncovering conflicts instead of describing mere fusions. It "rather can be helpful in accounting for particular forms of conflict generated in recent cross-cultural contact and in the context of the decline of national modernization projects in Latin America" (Canclini 1995: xxiv).

6 "I consider it attractive to treat hybridization as a translation term along with syncretism, fusion, and other words employed to designate particular kinds of mixing. Perhaps the decisive issue is not how to come to an agreement about which of those concepts is most inclusive and fertile but how to continue constructing theoretical principles and methodological procedures that can help us make the world more translatable, which is to say more cohabitable in the midst of differences, and to accept at the same time what each of us gains and loses through hybridization" (Canclini 1995: xliii).

eye-openers for the different receptions and transformations of the model of hybridity in various knowledge traditions and intellectual cultures.[7]

4 Translation and the Reclamation of Historical Contexts

But which understanding of translation is actually at work here? Certainly, this understanding has also travelled far: from its uses in the philological-linguistic sphere through the perspective of cultural translation as a dimension of every cultural encounter to the field of social conflicts and processes of negotiation. Jürgen Habermas, for example, recently called on religious communities in post-secular societies to "translate" their religious language into a publicly accessible secular language (cf. Habermas 2006). The sociologist Joachim Renn bases an entire conception of sociology on "relations of translation" – especially concerning a new approach to processes of integration (cf. Renn 2006). Migration, too, has recently been reinterpreted in terms of translational action and the necessity for active self-translation in situations of multiple cultural belongings.[8] In more obviously textual terms, the Translation Studies scholar Susan Bassnett talks about "Translating Terror" (Bassnett 2005) and Sherry Simon deals with *Cities in Translation* (Simon 2012). Countless other examples – such as Robert Stam and Ella Shohat's *Race in Translation* (2012) – demonstrate the huge range of areas of inquiry within the study of culture, which currently make use of the category of translation.

Many of these specific uses assume that there is more to the translation category than just the use of 'translation' as a mere metaphor – as, for example, in the general talk of migration as translation, or culture as translation. Such inflationary metaphorical uses need to be broken down into the investigation of interaction scenarios in their concrete steps of translational activities, transmissions, negotiations, and mediations. In this sense, travelling concepts can also be grounded historically, by following their trails in specific empirical case studies (see, for example, Matthias Middell's contribution in this volume). They can be connected not only to the mediating practices of subjects but also to the

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7 On the specific "transfer" and transformation of the model of hybridity within German theoretical discourse, cf. Standke 2008.

8 Cf. the debate on "Translation and Migration" in the Forum of the journal *Translation Studies* 5.3 (2012), 6.1 (2013), 6.3 (2013).

whole chain of translations via institutions, instruments, and technical conditions that have long been ignored in their active mediating function: Travelling concepts are, thus, constituted in a translational "collective" – in terms of Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (also discussed in Andreas Langenohl's contribution in this volume).[9] Only by elaborating such multidimensional findings into a dissecting approach can 'translation' serve as a new analytical category and a category of action itself – two important steps towards the emerging interdisciplinary "translational turn" in the humanities and social sciences (Bachmann-Medick 2009; 2014).

In such elaborated and concretized new understandings of 'translation,' a change from a deeply flawed concept of hybridity to translation can be located. On the one hand, this change is affirmed by increasingly complex global lifeworlds themselves. On the other hand, it marks an important conceptual shift in the field of the study of culture: It may turn out to be more productive to look at travelling concepts not through the model of hybridization but through the model of translation. Why? An understanding of travelling concepts along the model of hybridity has the disadvantage that it often lacks precise contextualizations und historicizations and leaves universalizing assumptions unreflected. Thus, for example, western feminism has regarded women in the countries outside Europe and the U.S. as a homogenous, monolithic, oppressed group. This happened with a western lens still part of the colonial discourse "Under Western Eyes," as Chandra Talpade Mohanty has critically phrased it in her famous and influential essay of 1988 (Mohanty 2003: 17–42, 255–257) and in her revisited version of 2003 (Mohanty 2003: 221–251, 270–273).[10] The focus of her critique reaches beyond a questionable extrapolation of universalist lines, based on the assumption of shared, hybridized concepts under the guise of "solidarity" with these groups. It exposes a still dominating research practice that operates in the mode of "the global hegemony of Western scholarship –

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9 In the volume Czarniawska and Sevón (2005), numerous examples for a detailed analysis of singular steps and phases in translation processes can be found. Though elaborated in the field of management studies, this specific method of a detailed translational analysis can be applied to other phenomena in the study of culture.

10 Mohanty's revision of her classic article entitled "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles" can really be considered a translational research practice of its own. Working towards a "comparative feminist studies model" (Mohanty 2003: 238), Mohanty translates the insights of her former article into the changed political and economic global framework at the beginning of the new millennium: "Perhaps it is no longer simply an issue of Western eyes, but rather how the West is inside and continually reconfigures globally, racially, and in terms of gender" (Mohanty 2003: 236).

that is, the production, publication, distribution, and consumption of information and ideas" (Mohanty 2003: 21).

This mode has been countered by explicitly differentiating concepts that call for a "politics of location" (Rich 1986: 210, 215), "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988), and "situated theories" (Hoving 2001: 198). On the corresponding levels of political activism, new light has been shed on different forms and self-representations of feminism in specific world regions (cf. Basu 2010). Such insights into the workings of localized concepts and local practices could be deepened further through the investigation of localizing processes of translation. Hereby, a focus on local or regional reinterpretations of universalistic umbrella terms – for instance, human rights – could be seen as a productive strategy. It has already been pointed out that universal corridors of translation can enable marginalized groups or societies to make strategic and, at the same time, practically useful claims for their rights: environmental, general human as well as civil political rights (cf. Tsing 1997; Bachmann-Medick 2013).

This ambivalence between universalism, on the one hand, and "situated theories" and their application, on the other, surely has to do with historical rupture and "displacement" caused by colonialism: "what happens when theories travel through the colonial difference?" (Mignolo 2000: 173). In this case – as Walter Mignolo has maintained – 'travelling theories' can easily be turned into catalysts for new forms of intellectual colonialism. Mignolo's critical counter-question is: "Where are theories produced? Where do they come from?" [...] What is the ratio between geohistorical location and knowledge production?" (Mignolo 2000: 173). Where and in what context does the theory in question arise and what role does it play in its place of origin, and at its destination? Translation becomes a crucial practice for connecting (universalizing) concepts back to historical life-worlds and "local histories." This means that people enter the stage as cultural brokers and insert themselves into theories' travels. By their actions, connections, renunciations, fears, and self-assertions they open up spaces for intervention, not least for accentuating gender-oriented dimensions in theories' travels.

With reference to this dimension of agents, actions, and interactions, the concept of 'travelling concepts' gains even wider practical and historical relevance by including "travelling objects/facts" (Howlett and Morgan 2011; Czarniawska and Sevón 2005) and especially by turning towards different "travelling traditions" (Pannewick 2010), such as storytelling, and focusing on "travelling debates" (Stam and Shohat 2005), such as debates on multiculturalism, postcolonialism, race (Stam and Shohat 2012), and diversity (Lammert and Sarkowsky 2010). This brings another question to the fore: How are travelling concepts passed on in concrete terms? Here we should look more carefully at

the differences between cultural semantics, knowledge traditions, and knowledge gaps. But we should also concentrate on the smaller units of social interactions, on misunderstandings, or even battles over interpretation. Ultimately, travelling concepts are actively in motion: They are appropriated, gain ground, or are turned away; they are made to stay or get thrown out. Sweeping statements about (automatic) circulation, distribution, diffusion, and mixing in an information-networked world do not help us here. They have to give way to precise contextualizing analyses and new insights into the ruptures or resistances involved in local appropriations.

Only in this way will it become at all possible to dislodge western theories, so to speak, with the help of these theories themselves. Research should aim for intersections that could serve as new locations for the production of theory in transnational constellations and co-operations. 'Travelling concepts,' which have strong links to the practical sphere, do indeed constitute such intersections. I am thinking of the concept of 'empowerment' here, which has increasingly been moving away from its beginnings as a critical grass-roots concept of environmental movements and farmers' protests in India, towards becoming a mainstream term utilized by official UN-development programs. But this happened with the consequence that what was originally self-empowerment has then come to stand for a paternalistic bestowal of rights. 'Sustainability' has also travelled in a similar way. It is no longer merely a normative principle of critical environmental policy. It has found its way into the mission statements of multinational companies, the business models of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, and their annual "sustainability reports" as – for example – with the German detergent company Henkel. If in the social sciences the current suggestion is for "translating sustainability into the principles of ecological justice" (Leist 2007), one should critically ask: What does this translation really amount to?

In this context of intersections and connectivities, it seems especially urgent to follow the translational transformations by which the travelling of the concept of human rights is characterized today. Human rights are western in origin, as they imply individualization and secularization. Beyond this, one should imagine human rights as a multi-vocal, diverse, and unsettled field of contending ideas. They can only be considered as basic rights in a transnational world when they are localized and regionalized outside Europe and developed out of transnational constellations of translation (cf. Merry 2006; for a wider reflection on human rights as a problem of translation, cf. Bachmann-Medick 2013). For example: The conflicts surrounding the building of the Narmada dam in India have shown how questions of human rights can be connected to concrete, local disputes about eco-social justice. This dam destroyed the means of

existence of thousands of small-scale farmers and, in the process, it gave rise to a powerful protest movement in which human rights came to be reformulated as environmental rights (cf. Linkenbach 2014).

Concepts can, therefore, be translated into real life contexts through both their localization and historicization. The actual appropriation of 'travelling concepts' takes place on a social and political level (creating debates or even conflicts), not just on the level of discourse in the academic community. It seems to be essential, therefore, for a transnational study of culture to open to worldwide demands for acknowledging different traditions of knowledge and research and their pragmatic impact. In this process, one not only encounters other theories but also, perhaps, wholly other conceptions of what theory even means. This becomes visible only when spaces of theory are not separated off as spaces of reflection but are 'translated' into social fields of appropriation. It is in this respect that we come, finally, to a third meaning of 'travelling concepts': The key task in transnational times is not to send concepts on a journey but, instead, to develop them at productive intersections 'between' disciplines and cultural formations in the first place. The various conceptual 'cultural turns,' for example, can be considered as embodiments of translational procedures. From this point of view, they can be associated with culturally different ideas of "epistemic spaces" and are, therefore, particularly suited to a transnational study of culture, assuming, however, that they can be re-localized within disciplines and regions.

Within this perspective, one could finally try to find an alternative to the hybridized understanding of 'travelling concepts' that has dominated the discussion so far. An approach that takes us further in this direction is that of the multilingual book series in the field of cultural theory, *Traces,* which gives attention to the global production of theory in all its disparate sites and places of production at once – that is, to "global traces in the theoretical knowledge produced in specific locations and [...] constituted in, and transformed by, practical social relations at diverse sites" (Sakai and Solomon 2006: v; see also de Bary 2010). Following this trail might lead to a new, geopolitically reflected, comparative and multilingual cultural theory constituted 'in translation,' as well as to new insights into the co-existences, constellations, and networks of theories. This approach is directed against the colonial, or neo-colonial, one-way streets of travelling theories (which too often travel from the U.S. to Europe or other parts of the world).[11]

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11 "Since its inception, *Traces* has explicitly sought to provide readers with the elements for a strategic intervention into the neo-colonial distribution of theory and data [...] By proposing to

To sum up: Instead of 'travelling concepts,' it might perhaps be better to speak of 'concepts in translation' in order to call for more historical grounding and contextualization. This would allow for a more detailed exploration of exactly which social practices and social relations lie behind the specific concepts at issue, which intermediaries are active, and what obstacles and local resistances arise. Will 'cross-categorical translations' become inevitable (because the transnational field exploits and lives off the power of its monopolies on terms and categories)? Partaking in this power are, above all, the research terms and concepts elaborated and used in the western humanities: religion, god, society, state, work, etc. Yet, to what extent are these terms and categories really universally valid? Should not these terms of analysis themselves be explored with more critical regard to their inter-cultural translatability – thus, working toward a "global lexicon" of travelling/translational concepts (cf. first significant approaches in Gluck and Tsing 2009)? To what extent is a "categorical mobility" (Greenblatt et al. 2010: 11) on the level of structures, definitions, and codes really feasible – or, more precisely, can they arrive at what Dipesh Chakrabarty has fruitfully called "cross-categorical translation" (not only cross-cultural translation), as already mentioned in the introduction to this volume (Chakrabarty 2000: 83–86)? And why are 'hybridity/hybridization' and, above all, 'translation,' so important for our line of questioning in this regard? The fact seems crucial that each of these two categories not only represents a specific concept in the study of culture but also a significant mode by which concepts travel (and not only concepts but also people, religious groups, and different forms of cultural articulation). The question, thus, remains: Do we perceive travelling concepts in their convergences and 'immigrations' as hybrid or translated? Do concepts only travel because they are 'translated' by people and intermediaries? Could translation in the sense of trans-location not also mean becoming, at least temporarily, 'settled' in concrete historical and regional surroundings? Follow-up questions like these could pave the way for a "growing two-way traffic" (Sloterdijk 2013: 142), as opposed to just moving along the worn-out western tracks of a transnational transportation network of concepts.

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provide [...] the same content at the same time to readers in several different language markets, the performative synchronicity created by *Traces* directly intervenes in the field of 'linear progress' and 'developmental stages' invariably favored by the powerful historical narratives of colonial modernity" (Sakai and Solomon 2006: 1).

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