

Cultural Transfers in Dispute: An Introduction

Jörg Feuchter

[...] there is no vantage outside the actuality of relationships among cultures, among unequal imperial and nonimperial powers, among us and others; no one has the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting the world free from the encumbering interests and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves. We are, so to speak, of the connections, not outside and beyond them.¹

Cultural Transfers in Dispute explores the role which representations of transfers play in the construction of cultural identities. Our conception of cultures and cultural change has altered dramatically in recent decades. In an era that describes itself as the »global« or »globalised« age,² no longer do we understand cultures as isolated units, but rather as hybrid formations constantly engaged in a multidirectional process of exchange and influence with other cultures.³ Edward W. Said sums this up in his 1993 classic *Culture and Imperialism*: »[...] the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowing.«⁴ This view is not only

1 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. 65.

2 For a critical analysis of this label and its appropriateness see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 91–112; Alex Demirovic, »Globalisierung und regionalistische Identität«, in: *Selbstbehauptungsdiskurse in Asien: China–Japan–Korea*, ed. by Ivo Amelung et al. (Munich: Iudicium, 2003), pp. 415–431, esp. pp. 419–426. Cf. also Knut Borchardt, »Globalisierung in historischer Perspektive«, in: *Weltgeschichte*, ed. by Jürgen Osterhammel (Basistexte Geschichte 4), (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008), pp. 217–238 (on periods of decreasing globalisation after globalised eras).

3 On hybridity see Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge & Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009).

4 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, op. cit. (note 1), p. 261. The context is Said's refutation of the argument that nationalism is a Western idea that was imported to newly independent peoples but is essentially »foreign« to them. The full quote is: »A confused and limiting notion of priority allows that only the original proponents of an idea can understand and use it. But the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings. Cultures are not impermeable; just as Western science borrowed from the Arabs, they had borrowed from India and Greece. Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures. This is a universal norm.«

applied to formerly colonised or otherwise dominated civilisations, but to all, including Europe/the »West«.⁵ Eurocentric views constructing a European singularity going back to antiquity and neglecting influences on Europe have long come under severe criticism, culminating in the allegation of a *Theft of History* (Jack Goody) from the rest of the world.⁶

As a result, research on transfers between cultures has become established as a comprehensive paradigm in the social sciences and humanities. Many recent trends in historiography like »world system theory«, »(new) global history«, »postcolonial studies«, »entangled history«, »connected histories«, »shared history«, »histoire croisée«, and »transcultural history« are marked by their primary concern with phenomena of cultural exchange.⁷ They define themselves by the place they grant to cultural interconnectedness as a factor of history. This perspective marks a strong difference to older »indigenist« views that privileged internal societal development and in which »external factors have generally been

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- 5 On the very fluent notion of »the West«/»Europe« see Fernando Coronil, »Beyond Occidentalism. Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories«, in: *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1996), pp. 51–87, esp. p. 53, and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2009), pp. 143–148. On the idea of Europe see also overview by Johannes Helmuth, »Christliches Europa?«, in: *Europa als kulturelle Idee. Symposium für Claudio Magris* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), pp. 47–69.
- 6 Jack Goody, *The Theft of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). In its attempt to deconstruct Europe's self-fashioning this book is at some points overzealous and flawed. See also the criticisms in the contributions of Tim Geelhaar and Friedhelm Hoffmann in the present volume.
- 7 On these trends see *The Global History Reader*, ed. by Bruce Mazlish & Akira Iriye (New York & London: Routledge, 2005); Shalini Randeria, »Entangled Histories of Uneven Modernities: Civil Society, Caste Solidarities and Legal Pluralism in Post-Colonial India«, in: *Unraveling Ties: From Social Cohesion to New Practices of Connectedness*, ed. by Yehuda Elkana et al. (Frankfurt on the Main & New York: Campus, 2002), pp. 284–311; Sebastian Conrad & Shalini Randeria, »Einleitung: Geteilte Geschichten – Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt«, in: *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. by id. (Frankfurt on the Main & New York: Campus, 2002), pp. 9–49; Margarete Grandner, Dietmar Rothermund & Wolfgang Schwentker (eds.), *Globalisierung und Globalgeschichte* (Globalgeschichte und Entwicklungspolitik 1), (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2005); Michael Werner & Bénédicte Zimmermann, »Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der »Histoire croisée« und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen«, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002), pp. 607–636; Sebastian Conrad & Andreas Eckert, »Globalgeschichte, Globalisierung, multiple Modernen: Zur Geschichtsschreibung der modernen Welt«, in: *Globalgeschichte. Theorien, Ansätze, Themen*, ed. by Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert & Ulrike Freitag (Globalgeschichte 1), (Frankfurt on the Main & New York: Campus, 2007), pp. 7–51; Wolfram Drews & Jenny Rahel Oesterle (eds.), *Transkulturelle Komparatistik. Beiträge zu einer Globalgeschichte der Vormoderne* (Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Geschichtsforschung 18,3–4), (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2008).

seen as contingent«. ⁸ Those focussing on transfer claim the opposite: That without taking into account cultural contacts one is not able to understand history.⁹

A milestone on the road from the indigenist to the externalist view was the publication in 1963 of William Hardy McNeill's *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* which very much focussed on cultural exchanges and their effects on societies and was to become a standard textbook in academic history teaching on *World Civilisation*.¹⁰ Almost fifty years on, transfers between cultures past and present have come to be regarded as the rule rather than the exception, to the extent that the idea of clearly separable cultures is dissolving. As Peter Burke poignantly stated in 2009, today »many of us are prepared to find hybridization almost everywhere in history« and accusations of cultural essentialism are rife.¹¹

Transfer is thus at the centre of current academic and intellectual discussions about culture(s). Yet the present volume does not seek to simply add more case studies to the plethora of publications on cultural transfer. Nor does it set out to argue against the study of transfer. Its *raison d'être* is situated on a different level. Our aim is to contribute to transfer studies by suggesting a critical reflection on how cultural transfer is represented. For transfer phenomena, of all things, are not something that is simply »revealed« or »found«. Instead

8 Christopher A. Bayly, »Archaic« and »Modern« Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, c. 1750–1850«, in: *Globalization in World History*, ed. by A. G. Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 47–73, quote p. 63. See also Michael Werner, »Zum theoretischen Rahmen und historischen Ort der Kulturtransferforschung«, in: *Kultureller Austausch. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Frühneuzeitforschung*, ed. by Michael North (Cologne, Weimar & Vienna: Böhlau, 2009), pp. 15–23, here p. 15.

9 See esp. Michel Espagne, »Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle«, in: *Genèses* 17 (1994), pp. 112–121. Espagne takes special cue from condemning the comparative approach in history. One of the most outspoken pleas against the dogma of »internal causation« and for cultural encounter as »the great mover of all history« has been made by the sociologist Friedrich H. Tenbruck, »Was war der Kulturvergleich, ehe es den Kulturvergleich gab?«, in: *Zwischen den Kulturen? Die Sozialwissenschaften vor dem Problem des Kulturvergleichs*, ed. by Joachim Matthes (Soziale Welt Sonderband 8), (Göttingen: Schwartz & Co, 1992), pp. 13–36, esp. p. 23: »So ist die Kulturbegegnung das wahre Feld und die große Triebkraft aller Geschichte.« See also the criticism of Tenbruck by Christiane Eisenberg, »Kulturtransfer als historischer Prozess. Ein Beitrag zur Komparatistik«, in: *Vergleich und Transfer. Komparatistik in den Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. by Hartmut Kaelble & Jürgen Schriewer (Campus: Frankfurt on the Main & New York, 2003), pp. 399–417, esp. p. 416.

10 William Hardy McNeill, *The Rise of the West. A History of the Human Community, with a Retrospective Essay* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). McNeill emphasises the receiving role of Europe in cultural borrowings before 1700 (see esp. p. 578). On the impact of the book see Jerry H. Bentley, »Shapes of World History in Twentieth-Century Scholarship«, in: *Agricultural and Pastoral Societies in Ancient and Classical History*, ed. by Michael Adas (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), pp. 3–35, esp. p. 17. I thank Ewgenija Lichten for letting me read her unpublished paper on McNeill's book.

11 Burke, *Hybridity*, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 1 and 9 (quote).

the production of knowledge about cultural transfer is, like all knowledge production, always itself subject to cultural, political and ideological conditions. These affect whether particular transfer phenomena are noticed at all, regarded positively or negatively, held to be more or less probable, completely denied or even invented from scratch. Nor are the consequences neutral: findings can be used to glorify or debase cultures, to accuse or exonerate, to mediate between different cultures or to divide them. Statements about cultural transfer figure prominently in discourses about »us« and »them« in many if not all cultures. They influence notions of cultural identity and are in turn informed by such notions. This is why the present volume proposes a critical enquiry into these statements as »representations of transfers«, referring to the concept of »representation« as suggested for historiographical use notably by the French protagonist of the »New Cultural History«, Roger Chartier, as a »base [...] for identifying and articulating the many relations that individuals or groups cultivate with the social world«. ¹² By introducing »representations«, Chartier explicitly rejected two older concepts: 1) »ideology« which (in a materialist view of history) views ideas as the direct expression of social conditions, thus implying the priority of social over cultural factors, and the direct dependency of culture from social facts, 2) »mentality« which (in a structuralist view of history) implies that in a given society or group (or individual) there is only one, unified, all-encompassing guiding mental framework. ¹³ Against these concepts he put forward an understanding of human ideas as »representations« which 1) at the same time describe and shape the cultural and social world humans live in, ¹⁴ and 2) exist always in plurality, contradiction and interdependency in a given society and even in a single individual's mind. This plurality leads to »conflicts (or negotiations) among groups as struggles among representations in which the stakes are always the ca-

12 Roger Chartier, »The Powers and Limits of Representation«, in: id., *On the Edge of the Cliff. History, Languages, and Practices* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 90–103 [translated from »Pouvoirs et limites de la représentation: Sur l'oeuvre de Louis Marin«, in: *Annales: histoire, sciences sociales* 49 (1994) 2, pp. 407–418], quotation pp. 94f. Chartier himself took inspiration from Louis Marin.

13 Roger Chartier, »Le monde comme représentation«, in: *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations* 44 (1989), pp. 1505–1520; id., »La »nouvelle histoire culturelle« existe-t-elle?«, in: *Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 33 (2006), pp. 1–11. See also Dominique Khalifa, »Représentations et pratiques«, in: *Historiographies. Concepts et débats, partie II: Notions, concepts*, ed. by Christian Delacroix et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), pp. 877–882.

14 It is however important to note that the use of the concept of representations by no means implies taking the relativist position that there is no social reality outside of representations, and that historical knowledge is just »one mode of fictional invention among others«. Chartier strongly emphasises that »the past history has taken as its object is a reality external to discourse, and that knowledge of it can be verified« (Roger Chartier, »Introduction«, in: id., *On the Edge of the Cliff*, op. cit. (note 12), pp. 1–10, quotes p. 8).

capacity of the groups or the individuals to ensure recognition of their identity». ¹⁵ In the present volume we understand disputes about transfers as such »struggles of representations« in which cultural identities are at stake. ¹⁶ Analysing concrete examples of controversial representations of cultural transfers from Asia, Europe, and the Arab world, we aim for a critical self-reflection on the intellectual practices that underpin our attempts to study and describe the relationships between our own and other cultures.

Cultural Transfers in Dispute is the first book to apply the concept of »representations« to cultural transfer. However the editors are by no means the first to ask for a reflection on the production of knowledge about transfer. There have already been recurring appeals for transfer historians to examine their concepts and their own role and calls have been made for a historical approach to transfer historiography itself. For instance, Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria are aware that their transnational perspective itself stands in the context of increasingly global relations and see the need for a historical approach to their own perspective of »entangled history«. ¹⁷ Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann argue for an approach of »Histoire croisée« that takes into account the work of the historian him- or herself. ¹⁸ Peter Burke points to the importance of considering »the language that we use to analyse cultural mix, hybridity or translation as itself part of cultural history«. ¹⁹ And Hartmut Kaelble notes the lack of disciplinary histories of comparative history or transfer history. ²⁰ Yet despite these calls surprisingly little work has been done in this direction. ²¹ The focus has been mainly on the terms chosen to name the very process of transfer: acculturation, appropriation, borrowing, circulation, diffusion, exchange, translation, translocation, crosspollinations etc. ²² The present volume does not claim to fill

15 Ibid., quote p. 4.

16 »luttons de représentation«, cf. Chartier, »Le monde comme représentation«, op. cit. (note 13), p. 1514.

17 Cf. Conrad & Randeria, »Einleitung: Geteilte Geschichten«, op. cit. (note 7), p. 42.

18 Cf. Werner & Zimmermann, »Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung«, op. cit. (note 7), p. 617.

19 Burke, *Hybridity*, op. cit. (note 3), p. 35.

20 Cf. Hartmut Kaelble, »Die Debatte über Vergleich und Transfer und was jetzt?«, in: *H-Soz-u-Kult* (08.02.2005), URL: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/id=574&type=diskussionen> (accessed on 21.04.2011). See also Werner, »Zum theoretischen Rahmen«, op. cit. (note 8), pp. 15–23, here p. 16 for a similar call.

21 Interesting approaches touching the role of Fernand Braudel as a neglected (and problematic) pioneer in transfer studies: Cornel Zwierlein, »Die Auswirkung von »Spatial Turn« und Kulturtransferheuristiken auf das Epochenkonzept »Frühe Neuzeit« (exemplifiziert anhand der Transfers des Versicherungsprinzips)«, in: *Kultureller Austausch*, op. cit. (note 8), pp. 43–67, esp. pp. 45–48, and Blaise Dufal, »Faire et défaire l'histoire des civilisations«, in: *Les Grecs, les Arabes et nous. Enquête sur l'islamophobie savante*, ed. by Irène Rosier-Catach et al. (Paris: Fayard, 2009), pp. 317–358.

22 Useful overviews and reflections on the terms are: Burke, *Hybridity*, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 34–