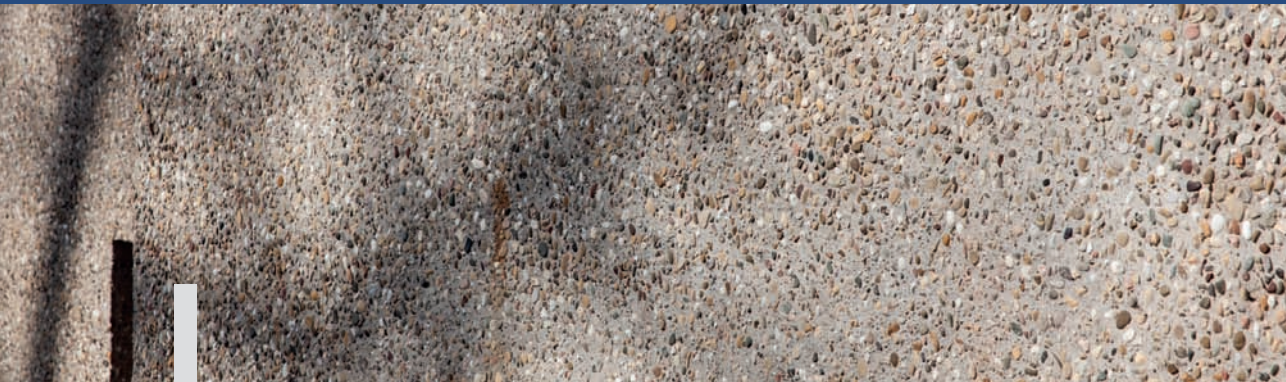


Ursula Lehmkuhl  
Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink  
Laurence McFalls (Eds.)

# Of 'Contact Zones' and 'Liminal Spaces'

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Mapping the Everyday Life of  
Cultural Translation



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Diversity

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# Spaces and Practices of Diversity: An Introduction

Ursula Lehmkuhl, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, Laurence McFalls

With this first volume of the newly established publication series “Diversity” we present selected contributions to the “Spring Lecture Series 2013” of the International Research Training Group (IRTG) “Diversity: Mediating Difference in Transcultural Spaces” ([www.irtg-diversity.com](http://www.irtg-diversity.com)).<sup>1</sup> The IRTG Diversity is an international cooperation in doctoral education bringing together two German and one Canadian university: The University of Trier, Saarland University and the Université de Montréal. The Spring Lecture Series entitled “Of Contact Zones and Liminal Spaces: Mapping the Everyday Life of Cultural Translation” addressed core concepts and research perspectives of our interdisciplinary research group. ‘Contact Zones’ (Pratt 1991) and ‘Liminal Spaces’ (Turner 1964; Turner 1998) were used as conceptual reference points for structuring the discussions about transcultural spaces and probing our own social constructivist understanding of space/place and diversity. According to Mary Louise Pratt contact zones are areas, which allow the intermingling of two or more cultures. They are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (Pratt 1991: 33). Liminality describes temporal or spatial zones – thresholds or “*passages*” – characterized by the dissolution of order and the creation of fluid, malleable situations that enable new institutions and customs to become established (Gennep 1909; Turner 1964, 1969; Turner 1998). During liminal periods of all kinds, social hierarchies may be reversed or temporarily dissolved, continuity of tradition may become uncertain, and future outcomes once taken for granted may be thrown into doubt (Horvath et al. 2015; Thomassen 2014).

Hence, both concepts, contact zones and liminality, address core elements of the spatial dimensions of diversity. Moreover, liminality, like transculturation, implies processes of ‘cultural translation’. In its cultural anthropological meaning, cultural translation stands for the many different practices of mediation between different cultures (Bachmann-Medick 2004). It is thus a category of social interaction encompassing the broad spectrum of daily social practices geared towards mediating difference and creating transcultural socio- and geo-spaces. Both categories – space and translation – are intricately interconnected. This volume deals with spaces and

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1 We would like to thank Lutz Schowalter (Academic Coordinator, IRTG Diversity), Anna Weinand and Stefan Dixius (Research Students, IRTG Diversity) for their support in preparing the manuscript for publication.

practices of diversity in different socio-spatial, socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural settings and sheds new light on processes mediating difference in multi-cultured societies in Europe and North America.

## Diversity

Diversity, denoting processes and states of cultural, religious, ethnic, and socio-economic differentiation, is not a new phenomenon. With European expansion and the establishment of settler colonies in the early modern period and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century of mass migration and imperial conquest, however, cultural pluralism and diversity became problematic for the self-representation of Western societies, which institutionalized and imagined themselves as “nation-states” (Anderson 1983). North American and European societies, long shaped by diversity and migration, have been theatres of lively and, at times, acrimonious debates on national identity, on the legitimacy of the state, and on the place of recent and older immigrant populations (and indigenous peoples) in these debates (Bade 1990, 1992, 2000, 2003; Noiriel 1988, 1991, 1996; Hoerder et al. 1993; Hoerder 2002, 2010; Panayi 2000; Fitz 2005; Van Rahden 2005; Thériault/Peter 2005; Oltmer/Bade 2002; Oltmer 2010). Immigrants, aborigines, and other groups constructed as “minorities” experienced exclusion through economic disadvantage, denial of rights, or discrimination. However, they also developed agency by often drastically changing the structure of communities and community life, reshaping the national economy, transforming cities and forcing the re-examination of social and cultural values. These tensions between heterogeneity and homogenization have shaped the shifting, porous, fluid, rigid, self-perpetuating, or self-effacing boundaries that define physical and symbolic spaces of diversity in modern and contemporary societies.

The use of the term diversity has in recent years exploded in academic as well as public debates about the constitution of modern societies. Yet, the meaning of diversity remains highly contested in both arenas. Today, after over three decades of official and officious policies of multiculturalism, politicians, pundits, and social scientists alike have participated in a “cultural-diversity skeptical turn” (Baumann 1999; Vertovec/Wessendorf 2010, 2005). Concepts of diversity, moreover, no longer concern only individual nations, but are increasingly discussed in the context of transnational processes of diversification and integration (Bissoondath 1994; Sassen 1996; Hannerz 1996; Akam 2002; Hoerder 2004; Faist 2004; Faist/Özveren 2004; Dupuis 2007; Elliott 2007; Pries 1999, 2008a, b; Kymlicka 2009; Vertovec 2004, 2009, 2010a, b; Vertovec/Wessendorf 2010; Hardwick 2010; Veronis 2010; Jay 2010; Grillo 2010; Lépinard 2010; Thériault/Bilge 2010). Research about societies understanding themselves as “diverse” in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, knowledge, gender,



and sexual orientation, etc. has increasingly raised questions about the history, the political as well as symbolic representation, and the cultural embeddedness of diversity, thus opening up a wide territory for explorations in which disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, history, political science, literature, media, cultural and gender studies intersect.

Diversity today is typically defined by a series of more or less essentialistic or objective criteria such as age (generation), sex (gender, sexual orientation), race (national or ethnic origin), place of birth, or place of origin or destination (migration experience), physical/mental ability (health status), language (linguistic capital), class (socio-economic status), space (urban versus rural, center versus periphery), and religion (cultural heritage) (for recent definitional debates see, *inter alia*: Bader 2003; Banks 2004; Deaux et al. 2006; Dijkstra et al. 2001; Elliott 2007; Griffith 2008; Hartmann/Gerteis 2005; Kymlicka 2009; Marzluf 2006; Modood et al. 2005; Parekh 2006; Rodriguez-García 2010; Vertovec 2010a; Van Rahden 2005; Vedder 2004). To be sure, such “variables” have almost always had their social relevance – but this relevance has varied across time and space. In the current “crisis of multiculturalism” in North Atlantic societies, for example, ethno-linguistic and especially religious differences have acquired greater salience than gender, not to mention class differences (Breton 2000; Garcea 2008; Kymlicka 2009, 2010; for the European discussion see: Vertovec/Wessendorf 2010; Weinstock 2007).

Empirical analysis and theorization of diversity began as early as the 1940s, driven by scholars in three many-cultured societies in the Americas. Canadian sociologists Everett Hughes and Helen MacGill Hughes (Hughes 1943a, b; Hughes/Hughes 1952), Brazilian sociologist and historian Gilberto Freyre (Freyre/Putnam 1946), Argentine anthropologist Néstor García Canclini (1990, 2004) and Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (Ortiz 1917; Ortiz/Barreal 1991, 1993) analyzed social interaction in terms of many cultures, of *métissage* and transculturation. However, their conceptual contributions did not have any paradigmatic impact on the Euro-U.S. core of knowledge production. Only recently, for example in the field of Latin American studies, has Fernando Ortiz’s concept of transculturation entered the scholarly debate. Fernando Ortiz defined transculturation as a transfer process from one culture to another, not leading to acculturation but implying a certain loss or rearrangement of a cultural configuration. Hence, “de-culturation” and “neo-culturation” are elements of transcultural processes, yielding the reinvention of a new common culture based on the meeting and the intermingling of different peoples and cultures (Ortiz/Santí 2002); (for a similar argument see Vertovec 2009; Welsch 1992, 2000; Ufer 2011; Dupuis 2008). Encompassing cognitive and discursive patterns as well as concrete social practices on the micro-, meso- and macro-level, the concept of transculturation necessitates a de-centering analysis of multi-polar movements between different cultures and of cultural contact zones where spaces, cultures, and identities

are subject to constant negotiation, mediation, and thus change and development (Hoerder 2004, 2002; Hoerder et al. 2003).

As an analytic concept, diversity tends to carry a strong normative charge as a social burden or benefit, a fatality or finality of the human experience. The constructivist and processual understanding of diversity introduced by Fernando Ortiz' concept of transculturation helps to avoid naturalizing, fetishizing, or essentializing diversity as an object or a concept. Indeed, diversity is not a static category, but a processual one; it is historically contingent. Depending on specific times and places, diversity expresses itself as a continuous process of mediation and translation whereby power relations and modes of social action construct potential differences into socially effective markers within specific socially, culturally, and politically constructed physical and symbolic spaces that change over time. In order to move beyond questionable dichotomies of the universal and the particular, of minority and majority, and of the religious and the secular the inherently contested, always open-ended meaning of diversity needs to be addressed and analytically captured.

### **Time and Space-related Discourses and Representations of Diversity**

This is where the research program of the International Research Training Group "Diversity" starts: Studying diversity in the multi-ethnic environments of post-migration, Western societies through the concepts of race, ethnicity, and identity is not our primary focus. These contexts are already well-explored. Instead, we are especially interested in a comparative and historically situated analysis of discourses and representations of diversity and cultural pluralism. These discourses and representations have marked North American and European societies during the past three centuries, creating overlapping zones of geographical and chronological reach that include transatlantic interactions and discursive projections.

These spatial zones are multi-layered, concrete as well as symbolic spatial configurations, not just local-regional-national-transnational or urban-rural, but also public-private, formal-informal, legitimate-illegitimate, actual-remembered-forgotten, etc. They create the complex spatial contexts in which micro- and macro-social processes are related and work together in a criss-crossing of temporal levels. Just as a current novel or film, or historical or sociological analysis might tell a story situated in the past but nonetheless immediately speak to the present, similar patterns of inter-temporality apply to *lieux de mémoire* and the politics of memory: memories of events can turn into constitutive narratives for certain groups in their struggle for identity and recognition (François/Schulze 2001; Nora 1984). Taking the interactive, open-ended character of spaces of diversity into account and drawing attention to moments of rupture that reconfigure spaces of diversity, five periods characterized

by specific ways of dealing with and articulating diversity and ethnic, cultural or religious pluralism can be distinguished:

- (1) In the *early modern era*, diversity (be it linguistic, religious, or ethno-racial) gave rise to polymorphic conflicts and long-term religious and/or ethnic wars. The often painful memories of violence and bloodshed primarily in areas under the control of emerging unitary states, however, coexisted with forms of negotiated pluralism and métissage in peripheral or local contexts that were not yet subject to political-legal regulations and pressures towards cultural/national homogenization by the political center.
- (2) The *age of emancipation*, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, characterized from the 1830s onward by a new level of voluntary and indentured global migrations, witnessed the emergence of both complementary and conflicting liberal individual and collective rights as serfs, slaves, religious minorities, and subjugated or “colonized” nations aspired to and acquired equality and recognition.
- (3) The *epoch of high modernity*, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup>, marked the apotheosis of the bureaucratized, homogenizing nation-state with its inclusionary expansion of citizenship rights and its exclusionary practices of migration laws, of eugenics, and of racism.
- (4) A *post-national interval* emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the nation-state and its integrative, assimilationist, and discriminatory strategies came under fire in intellectual and media discourses; claims to rights to be different gained legitimacy and even legal entrenchment; and new concepts of diversity, plural identities, cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, multi-lingualism and the like became the hallmarks of self-proclaimed post-national tolerant, pluralistic societies.
- (5) The current *time of transnational ambiguity* is characterized by scholarly and media efforts to de-essentialize culture and space and to rethink social and political configurations in light of social formations spanning borders, of multi-locality, of new transnational imaginaries, and of the fluidity of social institutions and everyday practices. At the same time, the contemporary period is marked by securitarian and exclusionary backlashes and processes of re-nationalization. These express themselves in violence against religious minorities and new immigrant communities as well as in a broad social/political debate and critical reassessment of the integrative capacities of Western societies.

These five rather distinct periods are characterized by specific discourses, representations, politics and practices of diversity, circumscribing a broad spectrum of empirical and conceptual research problems:

1. How and why do these different patterns of interpretation of diversity and multiculturalism emerge over time?
2. What are the historical contexts and the socio-geographical, socio-cultural and discursive configurations shaping the different representations of diversity and multiculturalism and how in turn do these representations and discourses of diversity shape social reality?
3. Which historical ruptures and changes in the interpretation of diversity and multiculturalism can be observed?
4. And why are certain patterns of interpretation so persistent and tenacious?

These and other questions need to be tackled in order to be able to react to recent calls from leading scholars, such as Steven Vertovec, that “further research and theory is required in order to understand better the relationships between how diversities (and the groups within a varied social array) are imagined, how they relate to social, economic and geographical characteristics, how such depictions reflect or influence social interactions, and how political systems of diversity governance themselves utilize or create depictions of diversity” (Vertovec 2010a).

The analysis of imaginaries, representations and discourses of diversity needs an interdisciplinary informed framework of analysis based on key concepts from the fields of sociology and anthropology, ethnic and migration studies, literary criticism (diversity, transculturation), human geography, history (space/place), and from the field of cultural and media studies (mediation, translation). The analytic quality of concepts like transculturation, space/place, mediation and translation is still the object of scholarly debates. With this volume, we will contribute to an empirically grounded operationalization and hence to the refinement of at least two these concepts: ‘space’ and ‘translation’. By focusing on social practices of diversity (mediation/translation), this volume contains empirical and conceptual research aiming at the formulation of processual categories reflecting the temporal nature of diversity as well as the historical contingency of institutional settings and geographical boundaries that are shaped by practices of diversity overtime.

## **Socio-Spatial Configurations and Practices of Diversity**

While “contact zones” and “liminality” served as a sounding board for our discussions of the individual contributions to the Spring Lecture Series, our own understanding of space/place is based on the arguments and premises put forward in the debate about transnational spaces. As Arjun Appadurai (1991, 1996), Linda Basch (2003), Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992), Homi Bhabha (2004), Ludger Pries (2008a) and Steffen Mau (2007, 2010) have argued, there is a plurality of competing

spatial frameworks at any given time. We recognize the constructed nature of space as well as the simultaneity and fluidity of various spatial frameworks (Brun 2001; Faist/Özveren 2004; Finnegan 2008; Low/Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Pries 2001; Soja 1989; Wilton/Cranford 2002). In what Werlen calls the “geography of daily regionalization”, spaces stand in reciprocal relation with the social actors who move with(in) them (Werlen 2009a, b; for a historical perspective see Hoerder 1998). Historical actors and historians, politicians and political scientists, social groups and sociologists all in their own way define and mediate spatial orders.

*Ludger Pries’* contribution to this volume addresses the problem of defining space/place in contexts that are no longer shaped by the territorial container concept of the nation-state. By discussing the construction of difference and diversity from a macro-sociological perspective in five countries – the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Germany and the United States – Pries’ paper shows how socially constructed difference creates mental and socio-spatial frames that both legitimize and petrify the unequal distribution of social status. Through his historical and comparative perspective, Pries demonstrates how discourses and representations of diversity and markers of difference create and institutionalize specific social and geographic spaces of belonging that change over time. The (historically) contingent and fluid character of these spaces has important repercussions for the socio-spatial concept of the nation-state and methodological nationalism, which still today dominate sociological migration studies as analytic approaches. In order to establish a new model for transnational migration studies, Ludger Pries develops a highly differentiated approach to space, using Georg Simmel’s concept of geo-space as a starting point. The analytical model that Pries suggests combines substantial and relational concepts of geographic and social spaces and offers conceptual tools to uncover and explain the ongoing reconfigurations of socio-geo-spaces and their inherent dynamics of collective belonging. Pries identifies three ideal-types of social spaces that are relevant for transnational studies: everyday life (e.g. linguistically distinct communication practices, traditional food consumption, or dress codes) on the micro-level; organizations as durable interaction-frameworks on the meso-level; and social institutions as frameworks of routines, rules, norms and mutual expectations on the macro-level. These ideal-types are characterized by specific social practices, symbol systems and artefacts, thus integrating practices of diversity and symbolic and material markers of difference and constituting localities of belonging with specific spatial reach: from the local, and micro-regional, to the national and macro-regional and finally the global.

A constructivist approach, such as presented by Pries, allows us to analyze the relation between space, place, culture, and diversity by concentrating on the cultural meaning attributed to space by various social actors through their practices, politics, and narratives over time. This meaning expresses itself in, among others, the

material cultures that mark the specificities of the localities in which mediation and translation processes take place.

Practices of diversity on the micro-level involving material culture like eating ethnic food is the starting point of *Phillip Rousseau's* analysis of present cultural-sensitive advertising practices in the United States. Rousseau observes a growing interest in culture by contemporary institutions in general and by advertising in particular. He argues that the adaptation to different cultural contexts is a "rational choice" of economic actors who react to recent demographic changes and the growing purchasing power of ethnic minorities. Advertising practices are quotidian practices of distinction, creating and stabilizing cultural difference. The diversity practices of the U.S. American capitalist consumer market produce paradoxes and tensions regarding cultural identity and belonging. Ethnic marketing, for example, affirms previously stigmatized ethnic labels, thereby often using over-simplified generalizations of minorities and ignoring regional or state differences, or the existence of a growing number of hyphenated Americans.

These and similar problems have encouraged the development of cross-cultural marketing practices that aim at finding commonalities within the different and often distinct cultural target groups. Addressing sameness and difference simultaneously creates and dissolves boundaries. To a certain extent, the practices of diversity described by Rousseau are based on and create similar effects as the diversity practices observed by Werner Schiffauer in the context of policies of tolerance. Read in the light of Ludger Pries' model for the study of transnational interaction processes, Rousseau's analysis demonstrates that the complex configuration of socio- and geospaces structuring processes of belonging and identity formation in the context of transnational migration also characterizes the field of marketing and advertising. In the latter case, the homogenizing imaginary of "the nation" co-exists and overlaps with imaginaries of multiple self-enclosed and confined cultures. In addition to this recognition of coequality, the cultural practices involved in advertising mediate and translate between the past (tradition) and the future (modernity/progress), thus exemplifying the temporal dimensions characterizing the complex social interactions producing distinct yet often overlapping localities of diversity as well as transcultural spaces.

As Rousseau's paper aptly demonstrates, an actor-based approach allows the analysis of coexisting and rival claims about the cultural meaning, construction and appropriation of spaces. Going beyond the empirical focus of Rousseau, we contend that the focus on specific localities conceived of as sites of resistance, in which cultural hybridity, transcultural practices, and overlapping identities potentially constitute counter-hegemonic practices and discourses, permits the deconstruction and the assessment of power relations that inform processes of mediation and the struggles that may result from them (Massey 1994; Ufer 2008, 2009). The inherent power