

## EXPLORING NEW BORDERLANDS: TRANSCULTURAL LEARNING IN GERMAN GEOGRAPHY TEXTBOOKS – INTRODUCING A NEW APPROACH TO TEACHING THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE US-MEXICAN BORDER

MICHAEL FINK

Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt, Eichstaett, Germany, Faculty of Geography, e-mail: Michael.Fink@ku-eichstaett.de

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### **ABSTRACT**

*While intercultural learning has gradually forced its way into German geography lessons, truly transnational and transcultural approaches that go beyond the very idea of the national paradigm are still widely ignored in German school geography. In an increasingly globalised world with both goods and people constantly on the move, national boundaries have, however, evolved into new hybrid transcultural contact zones of great heterogeneity. Correspondingly geography teachers, curriculum developers and textbook authors are now faced with the challenge of opening up school geography not only to previously neglected transnational/transcultural agendas but to indeed start teaching the spatial categories out of which the very ideas have originated. Within this understanding of transculturality, the US-Mexican border serves as a cutting edge example as one of the world's most distinctive borderlands in the contact zone between the so-called "first" and "third" world. It is therefore the example of this hybrid in-between space that this article is going to ask how and to what extent transcultural approaches can be successfully implemented in German secondary geography teaching. By means of a comparative analysis of German geography curricula and textbooks, I would like to not only point out both opportunities seized and missed, but ultimately try to provide for an outlook of how both transcultural ideas and localities can be fruitfully used for a contemporary classroom that dedicates itself to global education and the teaching of global issues.*

**Keywords:** *US-Mexican border, border studies, intercultural learning, transcultural learning, Germany*

## **OBSERVING THE WORLD FROM THE FRONTIER - INTRODUCTION**

When Marxist historian Pierre Vilar explained that “the history of the world is best observed from the frontier” (Vilar qtd. in Staudt, Spener, 1998, p. 3), he could not have guessed how significant this remark would eventually become for the interdisciplinary study of borders and borderlands at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whereas previously most social sciences tended to largely ignore border spaces, all the while focusing on the center instead of the periphery, the new millennium has witnessed a paradigmatical shift in the humanities, in which the study of borders and borderlands has found its way not only into the academic world, but gradually also into secondary school geography lessons. As hybrid contact zones positioned in the in-between places of an increasingly globalized world, borderlands such as the US-Mexican border, have in fact become important “staging ground[s] for economic, cultural, social and political forces that transcend the nation-state, and in so doing, call into question its continued relevance as a unit of analysis” (Staudt, Spener, 1998, p. 3). If formerly the perspective from the border was “that of looking from the margins of history back towards the center, now the border stands at the center and offers us a front-view of history’s drama unfolding.” (Staudt, Spener, 1998, p. 4).

While theories of modern language teaching and most prominently English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have already embraced this new transcultural turn, German school geography has not yet managed to successfully implement the very ideas of transculturality<sup>1</sup> yet, as will be shown by means of a comparative analysis of a sample of German geography curricula and school geography textbooks from Bavaria. It is at the case study of the US-Mexican border that the article is trying to point out both opportunities seized and missed in teaching the borderlands between the United States and Mexico as a distinctively transcultural contact zone, thereby making a call for a greater commitment towards the teaching of transcultural ideas and spaces in school geography.

The article is divided into three thematic segments. First, I discuss how in the context of the new millennium the study of borders and transcultural borderlands has become a subject of scholarly interest in the academic world. Secondly, I outline how on one hand the transcultural turn has triggered a fruitful debate among German EFL scholars and educators about the implementation of global issues into second language teaching, and why on the other hand school geography – despite of its inherent commitment to global learning – is still lagging behind in introducing the transcultural agenda as a new paradigm. Finally, I analyse to what extent transcultural learning has already been implemented in Bavarian geography

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<sup>1</sup> In the further course of the article, definitions of transculturality and the transcultural mainly derive from the concept of transculturality by the German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch, which we used to discuss the paradigmatical shift from intercultural learning to transcultural approaches in secondary EFL and geography teaching at German schools.

curricula and textbooks of *Gymnasium* and *Realschule*, considering the example of the US-Mexican borderlands.

## **BORDER STUDIES, THEORIES OF GLOBALIZATION AND THE NOTION OF HYBRIDITY INTERDISCIPLINARY ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES ON BORDERLANDS**

Within the humanities, the study of borders and borderlands has undergone a true renaissance during the last three decades. With borders being no longer the exclusive domain of geographers, achieving a concise understanding of contemporary borderland theory requires an interdisciplinary reading that combines both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Academic talk about borders is usually embedded within contemporary theories of globalization. While few localities have remained completely unaffected by the continuous encroachment of globalization, border areas have in fact become some of its foremost staging grounds. The very idea that globalization would eventually bring people, cultures, and places closer together, blurring borders and ultimately resulting in a deterritorialized and permeable world, is thereby reflected in contemporary discourses that focus on concepts such as borderless economies with unimpeded global flows of goods and services, eradicated cross-boundary trade tariffs, the rise of global cities and villages, and bi-nationalism and multiculturalism. While these agents of globalisation may indeed provide for the overarching framework of a globalising world, local practices, structures and processes, summoned by Doreen Massey as situated knowledge (Massey, 1999), in fact continue to produce manifold distinct relations and spatialities in the borderlands, thereby complementing the socio-spatial scales of the supranational and global with the national scale and other scales of locality. Despite the at first glance unifying, de-bordering processes of globalization, national paradigms, regional identities and local practices therefore in fact do continue to reinforce and re-border existing boundaries as hybrid contact zones that constantly re-create themselves within a given spatial context<sup>2</sup> It is exactly at this dichotomy between the phenomenon of globalization and glocalization that modern borderlands provide for an interesting subject of study as crossroads and condensation points where the ambiguous effects of globalization become especially visible<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the at first seemingly contradictory dualism between the de-bordering and bordering/re-bordering elements of globalization see the article by Morehouse, Pavlakovich-Kochi and Wastl-Walter (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Sociologist Roland Robertson is usually credited with popularizing the term glocalization that describes the tempering effects of local conditions on global pressures as a result of the co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies inherent in the process of globalization (Robertson, 1995).

In his survey of different research agendas in contemporary border studies, political geographer David Newman provides for a preliminary theory of borders, in which he identifies a set of themes within the bordering process that are common to all border scholars and practitioners, ranging from power relations to the ethics of the border (Newman, 2011). Whereas Newman still focuses predominantly on borders as “real” spaces, scholars from different social sciences have gradually started to go beyond seeing border areas as fixed spatial categories, approaching them as socially constructed imagined communities, whose dynamics cannot solely be understood in geographical terms (Anderson, 1983). It is within this rationale of borderlands as interstitial zones – both literal and conceptual – that cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo makes a call for the exploration of these imagined borderlands that appear at the intersections of race, gender, class or age (Rosaldo, 1989). As the scholarly work on both “real” and imagined borders and borderlands multiplies, establishing a single prototypical typology therefore has become increasingly difficult. By isolating a series of ideal types Wendl and Rösler arrive at a refined provisional basic typology of borderlands – both physical and imaginative – in which they distinguish between alienated borderlands, coexisting and interdependent borderlands, integrated borderlands and figurative multi-sited borderlands (Wendl, Rösler, 1999)<sup>4</sup>.

Among the most prominent key terms in contemporary border theory certainly are different notions of hybridity, which originated out of the metacontext of postcolonial theories. Border as a theoretical concept therefore no longer signifies a separating or excluding line, but has been turned into a transversal and hybrid cultural construct in which cultures are negotiated through cultural mediation, transcultural exchange and mutual cross-cultural influences<sup>5</sup>. In the following I will be referring to three postcolonial discourses which were of considerable significance to the study of borderlands: Mary Louise Pratt and the contact zone, James Clifford and the concept of traveling cultures and Homi K. Bhabha and his theory of cultural hybridity<sup>6</sup>. Based on her research on travel writing in postcolonial

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<sup>4</sup> According to Wendl and Rösner, alienated borderlands prevail between two countries where the border is functionally closed, whereas coexisting and interdependent borderlands feature permeable and open borders. Integrated borderlands are mostly to be found in allied countries of similar economies where there is virtually unrestricted exchange across the border. Unlike in coexisting and interdependent borderlands, the border experience of integrated borderlands has comparably little impact on discourses of identity formation and everyday life. In comparison to literal borderlands, figurative borderlands are not divided by physical boundaries. They are neither spatially bounded, nor do they have a particular location within national center-periphery frames.

<sup>5</sup> So far there is no single or correct concept of *hybridity*. Furthermore, post-colonial theory has introduced several other terms with sometimes synonymous or at least similar extensional and intentional relation such as (trans)difference, heterogeneity, heterotopy, alterality, metizaje, métissage, creolisation, syncretism, collage, bricolage, in-between, third space, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Pratt, M.L. (1992): *Travel Writing and Transculturation*; Clifford, J. (1992): *Traveling Cultures*; Bhabha, H. K. (1994): *The Location of Culture*.

settings, Mary Louise Pratt, in *Imperial Eyes*, introduced the notion of the *contact zone* to postcolonial studies as the “space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations [...] not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction” (Pratt, 1992, p. 6). Whereas Pratt’s emphasis is on the physical entity of the contact zone and its inherent process of transculturation, anthropologist James Clifford, in his essay *Traveling Cultures*, is more interested in how these acts of transculturation influence the individual as a cultural traveler within the contact zones (Clifford, 1992). The most concise theory of transcultural identity-making so far, however, has been provided for by the postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha. Whereas Pratt and Clifford emphasize the significance of respectively the contact zone or of the individuals along this hybrid space, Bhabha focuses on the acts of transcultural exchange per se and the multiple processes of transculturation that are happening along the contact zone. Bhabha’s notion of cultural hybridity with its creation of new forms of hybrid cultures along the in-between spaces of postcolonial borderlands has become one of the most frequently used concepts in contemporary border studies as a new paradigm of “conceptualizing an international [sic!] culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism [...] but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity [sic!]” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38).

In the very attempt of defining a theory of the borderlands, however, not only top-down approaches must be heard, as in fact crucial contribution came “from within the womb of the borderlands itself” (Alvarez, 1995, p. 459). With the publication of poet-scholar Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* in 1987, by a small feminist press, the subaltern voices of the women of the border finally broke new ground in borderland criticism. At the example of the Texas-US Southwest/Mexican border, Anzaldúa not only contests the marked boundaries of the nation state, but also challenges traditional notions of history, culture, gender and sexuality. In Anzaldúa’s borderlands cultures constantly meet and get transformed and are continuously reconstituted. By means of a complex collage of poetry, philosophical speculation, historical information and personal comment – constantly switching between English and Spanish linguistic codes – Anzaldúa explores the dialogic nature of the US-Mexican transfrontera zone, with its both destructive as well as regenerative and creative potential. For Anzaldúa, her new mestiza consciousness constantly has to re-negotiate and sustain different global, national, local and individual positionalities within a non-stable, non-essentialist transcultural contact zone:

*I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that tejas-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. [...] However, there have been compensations for this mestiza and certain joys. Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien element". There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being worked on. I have the sense that certain "faculties"*

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*- not just in me but in every border resident [...] are being activated, awakened. Strange huh? And yes, the "alien" element has become familiar – never comfortable [...] but home. (Anzaldua, 1987, Preface).*

## **FROM INTER TO TRANS – INTRODUCING TRANSCULTURALITY AS A NEW PARADIGM IN GERMAN SECONDARY EFL AND GEOGRAPHY TEACHING**

Within the last decades, the theories discussed in the previous chapter have had a significant influence on discourses on cultural contact and hybridity and are now widely used in a variety of contexts throughout the social sciences and the humanities. While the traditional borders we once drew have become outdated in a globalized world, in the classroom setting, however, essentialist notions of cultural spaces which originated out of traditional concepts of national cultures as separate entities are still widely taught, regardless of the fact that the very ideas have become contested, shifted and newly accommodated multiple times in an increasingly globalized world<sup>7</sup>. In the following, I would like to therefore provide for a brief comparative reading of how and to which extent transcultural learning has already been implemented in both EFL teaching and school geography in Germany.

In a recent article, sociolinguist Karen Risager offers a concise overview of how in foreign language teaching culture pedagogy has gradually moved from early concepts of *Landeskunde* (in the sense of the most basic knowledge of facts about a country's geography, history and society) through intercultural (communicative) competence and (multi)cultural awareness to transnational perspectives (Risager, 2012). Consequently it does not come as a surprise that global learning by means of topics such as peace, development, environmental and human rights education has gradually found its way into EFL lessons and textbooks, as very convincingly proven in a recent study by Julia Hammer in which she analyzes the implementation of globalization and global issues in 27 EFL textbooks in different types of schools within the German educational system (Hammer, 2012)<sup>8</sup>. Whereas Hammer's study focuses exclusively on grade 5-10 textbooks, a supplementary reading of the respective grade 11-12/13 EFL textbooks reveals that global issues such as climate change, international peacekeeping, supranational institutions, multiculturalism,

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<sup>7</sup> Even though traditional concepts such as the *Kulturerdteile* [culture areas] by Kolb and Newig have become somewhat contested today, they are still prominently used as guiding principles in most German geography curricula.

<sup>8</sup> Yet another illustrative example of how transcultural theories have been implemented in EFL teaching is the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Fremdsprachenforschung [German Society for Foreign (and Second) Language Research], in 2009 and 2011, which dedicated themselves to the guiding theme of border crossing as well as globalization and migration respectively.

international politics and the global financial crisis figure even more predominantly in advanced senior EFL teaching. With topics such as Samuel P. Huntington's clash of civilizations, migration along the US-Mexican border and a wide array of authors that feature global English as a lingua franca as well as myriad literary excerpts from American ethnic writers and the so-called New English literatures, present-day EFL textbooks indeed follow a distinctly transcultural agenda. At the same time, we can currently witness a very interesting scholarly debate in EFL teaching in which the very ideas of intercultural, multicultural and transcultural are being critically juxtaposed to each other, which has so far found surprisingly little attention and reception in scholarship on school geography and inter/transcultural learning in the geography classroom.

When, in 2002, Frank Schulze-Engler called for a paradigmatical shift from intercultural towards a more decidedly use of the prefix 'trans' to emphasize the existing links between EFL teaching and postcolonial studies and borderland criticism (Schulze-Engler, 2002), his call initiated a lively academic controversy that has been going on for almost a decade now and which ultimately resolves around Wolfgang Welsch's concept of transculturality (Welsch, 1999)<sup>9</sup>. While EFL methodologies throughout the 1980s and 1990s were still defined as intercultural by approach, Welsch and Schulze-Engler both refute notions of the intercultural which according to them still cherish an older paradigm where cultures are treated as self-enclosed, homogeneous entities. Within such a – what they perceive as essentialist – conception of cultures as monoliths, the very idea of interculturality necessarily leads to intercultural conflicts: "Cultures constituted as spheres or islands can, according with the logic of this conception, do nothing other than collide with one another" (Welsch, 1999, p. 195). Instead of truly analyzing the transnational processes that are undermining the implied separation between cultures, intercultural learning elaborates on culture clash. According to Welsch, however, this clash of cultures can "of course, not be solved on the basis of this conception. The recommendations of interculturality, albeit well-meant, are fruitless. The concept does not get to the root of the problem. It remains cosmetic" (Welsch, 1999, p. 195). Along the very same lines Welsch also refuses the concept of multiculturalism which, according to him, in an equally misleading way merely represents a middle position between the trans- and the intercultural, thereby focusing on the problems which different cultures have while living together within one society: "But therewith the concept basically remains in the duct of the traditional understanding of culture; it proceeds from the existence of clearly distinguished, in themselves homogeneous cultures – the only difference now being that these differences exist within one and the same state community" (Welsch, 1999,

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<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive coverage of the debate between intercultural and transcultural approaches in EFL teaching (including suggestions on how to possibly cross the gap between the very terms) see Delanoy W. (2012). *From "Inter" to "Trans"? Or: Quo Vadis Cultural Learning?* and Delanoy, W. (2006). *Transculturality and (Inter)-Cultural Learning in the EFL-Classroom*.

p. 195). In opposition to both the intercultural and the multicultural, the notion of transculturality rejects territorialized concepts of cultures by emphasizing the continuing and mutually intermingling interconnectedness of cultures in a global world.

Despite this vital and active discussion in the German EFL community, Hammer critically remarks that – even though proponents of global learning such as Kip Cates (2000) has suggested the implementation of four different competences (knowledge, attitude, skills and action) in global education (Cates, 2000) – globalization nevertheless is “seldom more than just a topic in German EFL teaching” (own translation based on Hammer, 2012, p. 60). This becomes even more obvious when you examine different German school curricula for the subject of English as a Foreign Language. Not only are global mindedness and interculturality quoted in the introductory chapters of literally each curriculum, but intercultural communicative competence also constitutes a main objective within the German National Standards for foreign language teaching. The actual implementation of global topics such as sustainable development, human rights, global citizenship, multiculturalism and global economy with its myriad transcultural flows, however, only rarely offers explicit references to the concept of global learning or theories of the intercultural and transcultural (Hammer, 2012). What it ultimately comes down to is that in Germany foreign language teaching still predominantly consists of teaching language use and communication. Nevertheless, Heinz Antor is optimistic when he casts a look into the distant future of not only global education, but of what he perceives as an explicitly transcultural approach to EFL teaching:

*On the whole [...] the present writer is fairly optimistic for the future, [...] The most recent early twenty-first century developments [= transcultural approaches in EFL teaching], for example, point towards a future in which universities can make important contribution towards a constructive development of the world by providing new concepts of transculturalism, which problematize the “container theory” of national cultures as separate entities (still inherent in terms like ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘interculturalism’) and rather emphasize the hybrid interlocking interdependence of cultures in the age of globalization, in which a new ethics of cosmopolitanism in a new humanist spirit can facilitate peaceful, productive and mutually enriching encounters between human beings from diverse backgrounds (Antor, 2010, pp. 11-12).*

Having outlined the framework within which transcultural learning is gradually finding its way into German EFL classrooms, I would now like to analyze – by means of a comparative reading of foreign language teaching and school geography in Germany- in what way transcultural agendas have been implemented in the geography classroom so far.

When in April 2006 *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geographie*/the German Geographical Society (DGfG) published the first version of its *Educational Standards in Geography for the Intermediate School Certificate*, the

development and implementation of national standards can be seen as a seminal moment for geographical education and school geography in Germany<sup>10</sup>. It is in the concluding paragraphs to the introductory chapter of the *Educational Standards*, in which geography's contribution to education is outlined, that geography as a school subject explicitly dedicates itself to the teaching of development policy, intercultural learning and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as well as to global learning in general:

*Education in development policy and intercultural learning are also particularly important aspects of geography teaching in schools. By considering natural, economic, political and social interrelations, students acquire important competences in these areas. Because of its contents and function, geography is particularly committed to education for sustainable development (see UN Decade, 2005-2014) as well as to Global Learning (German Geographical Society, 2012, p. 7).*

In addition to the introductory chapter, also chapter 3, in which the different general standards for the six areas of competence are described with more details, features several references to global education and the teaching of global issues in geography, even though neither interculturality, nor transculturality are being explicitly mentioned here<sup>11</sup>.

Besides the DGfG *Educational Standards*, there is a wide array of further national and supranational documents such as the *Bonn Declaration* (Bonn, 2009), the *Paris Declaration* (Paris, 2005) and the *Maastrichter Erklärung zum Globalen Lernen/European Strategy Framework for Improving and Increasing Global Education in Europe to the Year 2015* (Maastricht, 2002), which equally foster global education in the classroom. The so far most prominent and influential document along these lines, however, is the *Orientierungsrahmen für den Lernbereich Globale Entwicklung/Global Development Education – A Cross-Curricular Framework in the Context of Education for Sustainable Development*, which was published in 2007 as a joint initiative of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK). Its objective is to establish a cross-curricular global learning platform for both educators and

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<sup>10</sup> It was early in 2005 that the Association for Geographical Education in Germany (HGD) set up a working group to develop a draft version of the *Educational Standards* based on the *Klieme-Expertise* and previous geographical position papers, such as the International Charter of Education, the Curriculum 2000+ of the German Geographical Society, as well as the Basic Curriculum of the Association of German School Geographers (VDSG). In March 2006, the VDSG confirmed the final version which was then sent to the Permanent Conference of the Ministers for Education and the Arts of the federal states of Germany (KMK). By now, *the Educational Standards* have just been reprinted in their 7<sup>th</sup> edition in German and in their 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in English.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed analysis of how intercultural learning is implemented in the different standards of the competence areas "Spatial Orientation", "Evaluation" and "Communication", see Schrüfer (2009).

curriculum planners<sup>12</sup>. While the document explicitly commits itself to fostering development education, cultural diversity and global learning within the overarching context of ESD, in both primary education as well as secondary school subjects such as sciences, geography, history, political education, religion/ethics and economics, there is – similar to the *Educational Standards* – no direct reference neither to intercultural, nor to transcultural learning in a way comparable to the previously analyzed current EFL debates.

Even though school geography has generally been less involved in discussing inter- and transcultural learning, there are nevertheless several recent publications that focus exclusively on notions of the intercultural in geography teaching. Furthermore, there seems to be a general consent within German school geography that intercultural learning is to be seen as an offshoot of global learning (Kross, 2004, p. 14; Budke, 2008, p. 18; Schrüfer, 2010, p. 102; Uphues, 2007, p. 160). Still, Alexandra Budke, in the so far only German language monograph on intercultural learning in geography classes, only briefly mentions Wolfgang Welsch's concept of transculturality without further elaborating on its possible use and implementation for school geography (Budke, 2008, pp. 20-21). At the same time, Gabriele Schrüfer rightly observes that currently there is no such thing as an unequivocal model of intercultural learning for school geography. She therefore suggests the use of Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Cultural Sensitivity (DMIS) for school geography (Schrüfer, 2009, p. 158). With his "Bennett scale", Milton Bennett, a specialist in intercultural communication and sociology, has developed a framework that by means of six different stages (denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration) defines how individuals react to cultural differences. Among these, the first three stages are ethnocentric, thereby implying that one still sees his or her own culture as central to reality. Moving up the scale, the individual develops a more and more ethnorelative point of view. Even though Schrüfer provides for a critical reading of the applicability of DMIS to school geography, there is no further critique of the ultimately essentialist notion of culture in Bennett's model, which seems to be inherent to many other intercultural approaches as well. Even though Schrüfer has written extensively about global and intercultural learning, she – similarly to Budke – has not yet drawn any further references to transcultural learning.

From the examples discussed above, one may consequently conclude that despite the pronounced dedication that geography as a school subject has towards global learning and the teaching of global issues, there are – in comparison to recent developments in EFL teaching – currently only few concepts that truly focus on the dichotomy of the global, the intercultural, the multicultural, and the transcultural.

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<sup>12</sup> The *Orientierungsrahmen für den Lernbereich Globale Entwicklung* can be downloaded both in a German and in an English version from the following website: [http://www.ewik.de/coremedia/generator/ewik/de/08\\_\\_Service/Kultusministerkonferenz\\_20\\_28KMK\\_29.html](http://www.ewik.de/coremedia/generator/ewik/de/08__Service/Kultusministerkonferenz_20_28KMK_29.html).

In the following, I am now going to analyze by means of a comparative reading, how the US-Mexican border as a decisively transcultural border area is currently being depicted in the curricula and in geography textbooks of Bavarian secondary schools. My ultimate aim thereby is to provide for an outlook of how both transcultural ideas and localities can be successfully used for school geography.

## **TEACHING *LA FRONTERA* – TRANSCULTURAL LEARNING IN TEACHING THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE US-MEXICAN BORDER**

### *Case Study*

Within academic discourses about borders and borderlands, the US-Mexican border serves as the prototypical model of border studies and the borderlands genre throughout the world. No other border exhibits the inequality of power, economics and the human condition as does the 2000 mile demarcation line that runs through the American continent as a land border from San Diego/Tijuana to Brownsville/Matamoros. According to economic geographer Christian Berndt, it is in transcultural regional settings like the US-Mexican borderlands, where the global south and north are connected, that the challenges and opportunities of globalization are most clearly accentuated:

*This is obvious at the border between Mexico and the US, which has turned into the paradigmatic "borderland" of our global age and has transformed into a "space-in-between" no longer accessible with traditional geographical concepts. What gets obvious instead is the ambivalent realities of a "mobile world" confronting constellations defined by territorial stability (Berndt, 2007, p. 20).*

When Berndt discusses such ambiguities with the example of three transcultural/binational topologies – the maquiladora boom in the aftermath of NAFTA, the increasing border enforcement with the emergence of new forms of transnational migrant networks, and the transborder trade with Mexican agricultural goods on the US market – he only names some of the transcultural issues that are of interest for geographers studying cross-border processes within a globalized world<sup>13</sup>. In addition to these key tropes, we can therefore witness an array of creative transcultural scholarship along the US-Mexican border region that focuses on subjects as diverse as transborder environmental conservation, transfrontier urbanism

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<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the aforementioned topologies of transcultural interaction along the US-Mexican border, see Berndt, C. (2004): *Globalisierungs-Grenzen: Modernisierungssträume und Lebenswirklichkeiten in Nordmexiko*.

and urban regimes, transnational initiatives to fight crime and drugs as well as myriad processes of mutual inter/transcultural exchange. Studies like the one carried out by Berndt indeed represent model cases of how human geography today has gradually opened itself up towards the new transcultural turn in the humanities, thereby approaching concepts such as in-between spaces and places as key tropes and categories to complement, if not replace, former essentialist and static notions of territoriality<sup>14</sup>.

Consequently, it is indeed surprising that transculturality as a new paradigm and transcultural contact zones such as the US-Mexican border have not yet triggered more scholarly interest in school geography. In the following, the US-Mexican borderlands are therefore going to serve as a case study of – what I conceive as – a so far insufficient implementation of transculturality as a new paradigm for geography teaching at German schools. Ultimately, I will show by means of a comparative close reading of the representation of the US-Mexican borderlands in selected German geography curricula and textbooks how school geography is still lagging behind here in realizing the very potential that the transcultural turn holds.

### *Methods and Sample*

Due to its federal structure, each state in Germany is responsible for forming and implementing its own educational policies. For the scope of this article, the analysis exclusively focuses on Bavaria and the Bavarian educational system. When a child in Bavaria leaves primary school after fourth grade and is placed into secondary school, parents and children must decide between three different types of school: Mittelschule (general, vocationally oriented secondary school for non-university bound pupils), Realschule (professionally oriented secondary school) or Gymnasium (university-preparatory secondary school). While geography as a mandatory school subject is taught at each of these schools, the article deliberately only considers Realschule and Gymnasium in its sample. There are three main reasons behind this choice: Firstly, geography as an independent subject is only taught at Realschule and Gymnasium, while at Mittelschule geography is part of a conglomerate of different disciplines that in addition to geography also contains history and other social sciences. Secondly, while the United States of America are a mandatory subject in each of the three types of school, it is only in Realschule and Gymnasium that Latin America is being taught in addition to North America. Thirdly, due to their characteristic curricular architecture only Realschule and Gymnasium open up towards teaching the US-Mexican borderlands as a case study for transculturality and transcultural learning.

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<sup>14</sup> The newly gained openness of human geography and most prominently of the New Cultural Geography towards transcultural ideas is for instance vividly portrayed in the call for papers for the forthcoming *Deutscher Geographentag*/German Geographical Congress in Passau, in 2013, which features sessions on, for instance, the new geography of the border (FS3) as well as on borders, frontiers and ungoverned territories as exceptionalist spaces (FS63) (cf. <http://www.geographentag.uni-passau.de>).

In terms of methodology, the results as they are summed up in the further course of this article derived from a two-part approach, which first consisted of a curriculum analysis of the Bavarian geography curricula for Realschule and Gymnasium, which was then followed by a comparative analysis by means of a close reading of a sample of 11 textbooks from three different publishers from both Realschule and Gymnasium.

While textbooks are widely seen as a critical source for teaching and learning in high school geography classes, it was in fact necessary to first consider the curriculum architecture in both types of school, in order to understand in what way transculturality as a concept could be implemented in geography teaching within the official frameworks set by the Bavarian educational system.

The research methods for the subsequent textbook analysis were mostly drawn from the UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision (Pingel, 2010). Initially, we used both quantitative and qualitative analysis. After having identified segments either covering or connected to the US-Mexican borderlands with quantitative methods, a comparative text analysis was carried out within the guidelines of grounded theory, during which both continuous and non-continuous text elements – using the technique of in-vivo coding – were encompassed in a set of codes. In addition to continuous and non-continuous texts, tasks and exercises were also considered whenever this was possible. Subsequent theory building concluded the analysis which aims at answering the question to which degree transcultural learning has already been implemented in these textbooks.

In the following, first the results of the curriculum analysis will be outlined briefly as they represent basic groundwork for the subsequent comparative textbook analysis.

## **IMPLEMENTING TRANSCULTURALITY – CURRICULUM ANALYSIS**

As a professionally oriented secondary school, the Bavarian Realschule, which comprises grades 5-10, provides students with a more extensive general education at upper secondary level that leads to vocational or higher education entrance qualifications. It thereby aims at fostering both content-specific and skill-based knowledge. Chapter 1 (“Der Bildungs- und Erziehungsauftrag”) of the current curriculum for Realschule, outlines the general educational agenda of this type of school. In addition to key competences such as system thinking, ethical judgement, environmental education and human rights education, both cultural and intercultural learning are explicitly mentioned as major educational goals (Lehrplan für die sechsstufige Realschule, 2009). When chapter 2 (“Die Verwirklichung des Bildungs- und Erziehungsauftrags”) then elaborates on the actual implementation of the aforementioned ideas, the curriculum makes a direct

reference to the significance of transboundary cooperation and transculturality within a subchapter on human rights education:

*The major challenges of our time, as reflected in for instance the north-south divide, global environmental issues, tensions and wars, can only be solved through the cooperation of individuals and states that cross existing borders. Along these lines, instruction must teach basic knowledge and attitudes to students that enable them to critically approach these issues* (own translation based on *Lehrplan für die sechsstufige Realschule*, 2009, p. 36).

This outspoken commitment to transcultural learning is, however, refuted again in chapter 3 (“Fach-/Jahrgangsstufenlehrplan”), which actually depicts the syllabi for each grade and each subject, when the 8th grade geography curriculum suggests teaching Anglo America (Lehrplan Realschule, Ek 8.2) and Latin America (Lehrplan Realschule, Ek 8.3) as separate cultural spaces in order to display the intrinsic peculiarities of each cultural area separately.

Similar to Realschule also the Bavarian curriculum for Gymnasium dedicates itself to teaching globalisation and global education (Lehrplan für das Gymnasium in Bayern, 2004). While chapter 1 (“Das Gymnasium in Bayern”) provides for a brief descriptive survey of the Gymnasium as a school that – covering both lower and upper secondary level (grades 5-12) – offers in-depth general education aimed at the general higher education entrance qualification, chapter 2 (“Fachprofile”), which offers a concise survey of the different educational goals and paradigms of each subject, elaborates on the key competences that geography as a school subject wants to foster in detail. While both Realschule and Gymnasium put a pronounced focus on teaching globalisation and global education, intercultural learning, as a curricular goal, is attributed considerably less significance at Gymnasium than at Realschule and it is only marginally represented within the context of interdisciplinary learning (Lehrplan für das Gymnasium in Bayern, 2004, Fachprofil Geographie). Furthermore, unlike at Realschule, Latin America and North America are not taught in the same grade, with Latin America (subsequently divided into Central America, South America and the Caribbean) being part of the 8th grade (Lehrplan Gymnasium, Geo 8.2.3), while North America is covered in the 10th grade in a separate chapter that is entitled “The USA – A Global Economic Power” (Lehrplan Gymnasium, Geo 10.3). Considering the fact that there is no explicit call to take into account the transcultural character of the US-Mexican border and/or the borderlands, one can consequently remark that the two Americas are not only spatially separated from each other, but that the rupture between the 8th grade and the 10th grade at Gymnasium also creates a pronounced temporal distance, which considerably hinders any further transcultural approach.

Even though both Realschule and Gymnasium teach Latin America and North America (respectively Anglo America) as separate cultural entities, both curricula aspire to a decidedly transcultural objective, when at

the end of the term the interconnectedness of the global north and the global south is finally being addressed as a separate topic in its own right. In *Realschule*, this happens with the example of the north-south divide at the end of the 8th grade that is incorporated into a concluding unit that focuses predominantly on revision and skill development (Lehrplan *Realschule*, Ek 8.6). Also the curriculum for *Gymnasium* features similar units both at the end of the 8th grade and of the 10th grade, which, on one hand, focus on the global economic ties that bind countries in the developing world with Europe (Lehrplan *Gymnasium*, Geo 8.3) and, on the other hand, on global challenges in general (Lehrplan *Gymnasium*, Geo 10.5). In addition to that, topics such as globalization, differences in development, demographics and urbanization in an increasingly interconnected globalized world resurface in *Gymnasium* once again in the 12th grade, in a very elaborate chapter that focuses on the different structural interconnections and networks within a globalised world (Lehrplan *Gymnasium*, Geo 12.1).

## IMPLEMENTING TRANSCULTURALITY – TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

Following the juxtaposition of the institutional and educational frameworks set by the Bavarian geography curricula for *Gymnasium* and *Realschule*, the results of the subsequent textbook analysis will now be outlined consecutively in four different subchapters. Each subchapter thereby focuses on one main aspect that originated out of the comparative close readings of the sample of 11 different textbooks both for *Realschule* (three 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks: Diercke, Seydlitz, Terra) and *Gymnasium* (three 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks: Diercke, Seydlitz, Terra; three 10<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks: Diercke, Seydlitz, Terra; two 12<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks: Diercke/Seydlitz and Terra): 1) notions of spatiality and metaphors of bordering, 2) economic issues and transboundary economic cooperations, 3) migration and other demographic aspects and 4) constructions and deconstructions of the north-south divide<sup>15</sup>.

### *Notions of Spatiality and Metaphors of Bordering*

Within the framework set by the curricula for *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*, it is not surprising that the two Americas are treated in separate chapters in

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<sup>15</sup> As the analysis aims at a comparative reading of textbooks by publishing houses that produce editions for both *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*, my sample only considers the most recent Terra, Seydlitz and Diercke editions by the German publishers Klett, Schroedel and Westermann. Teachers at *Realschule* may, however, alternatively also use the geography textbooks by Oldenbourg and Cornelsen. Likewise there is an 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade edition produced by Cornelsen for *Gymnasium*, which is equally not considered here, as the publisher does not offer any textbooks for grades 5-10.

literally each textbook in the sample. Whereas the three textbooks for *Realschule* first teach Anglo-America as a distinct cultural area and then Latin America, the structural outline in *Gymnasium* follows a reverse outline with Latin America in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, while North America is postponed into the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The very fact that the two Americas are treated as separate cultural entities can be easily explained by the ongoing commitment of curriculum planers and textbook authors to the theory of the *Kulturerdteile* by Kolb and Newig, which at least partially resembles the model of the cultural worlds by Spencer and Thomas in the English speaking world<sup>16</sup>. In the wake of Samuel P. Huntington's controversial clash of cultures, it would, however, be desirable to substitute by now contested classifications of the world into clearly defined distinct cultural areas by a more decidedly holistic perspective. For the two Americas, this would consequently mean the application of both transcultural and inter-American theories.

A close reading of the topographic introductory pages to the respective units about the two Americas, however, provides for ample evidence that, in fact, none of the nine grade 8-10 textbooks actually bears any explicit reference to the decidedly transcultural materiality of the US-Mexican border and the very existence of a *transfrontera* region that transcends former notions of the border as merely a demarcation line. This neglect of the US-Mexican borderlands as a cultural contact zone, however, is not only restricted to continuous texts, but there are several incidents where it is also reflected in the respective topographic maps, when the Diercke textbook for *Realschule*, for instance, as it introduces Anglo America as a cultural area uses a map ("Übungskarte Angloamerika") that only displays the United States of America and Canada, thereby literally erasing everything south of the US-Mexican border from the globe (Diercke 8 *Realschule*, 2011, p. 7). Later on, the same textbook provides for yet another cartographic inconsistency, when the subsequent introductory map of Latin America ("Übungskarte Lateinamerika") is incomplete as it neither shows the US-Mexican border, nor those Mexican states north of Mexico City (D.F.) (Diercke 8 *Realschule*, 2011, p. 37).

After having demarcated the two Americas topographically, most textbooks at least briefly refer to the settlement history of the two Americas. However, only the Terra textbooks for *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* pursue a truly transcultural approach in doing so by means of a historical map that not only mirrors the colonial occupation of the two Americas, but that clearly shows that the Viceroyalty of Spain did not only encompass most of the present-day states in South and Central America, but also a considerable part of Florida, Texas, the US Southwest and other regions of what nowadays are the United States of America (Terra 8 *Realschule*, 2011, p. 39, Terra 10 *Gymnasium*, 2006, p. 105)<sup>17</sup>. Unfortunately, the continuous texts that

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<sup>16</sup> For an excellent discussion of the system of the *Kulturerdteile* and its use in German school geography and textbooks, see Stöber, G. (2011): *Kulturraumkonzepte in Curricula, Schulbüchern und Unterricht*.

<sup>17</sup> A similar historical map is in the Seydlitz 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook for *Gymnasium*. However, it commits the very same mistake as the Diercke textbook for *Realschule* before, by not

accompany the maps do not really elaborate further on the inherently inter-American history of the two Americas. The very fact that vast areas were not part of the United States before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, however, represents important historical background knowledge that would enable students to better understand the transcultural character of the present-day US-Mexican borderlands.

A comparative reading of the different assignments in the introductory chapters to both Americas reveals that, in most cases, students are either expected to draw rough sketches of the respective cultural areas or alternatively have to name concrete localities such as nation states, mountain ranges, rivers or major cities. Once more, one may notice that – because the two Americas are taught separately – these assignments only seldom transcend well-established boundaries between the two continents. From a transcultural perspective, however, asking students to draw a rough sketch of not just North or Latin America, but of both Americas from the start, which could then for instance be consecutively completed with different topics of hemispheric relevance, would help students to visualize how the Americas are indeed interconnected to each other by means of myriad geographical transcultural processes that transcend well-established borders between north and south.

#### *Economic Issues and Transboundary Economic Cooperation*

In both textbooks for *Realschule* and for *Gymnasium*, economy and economic geography figure predominantly in the analysis of the two Americas.

Within the context of the American Dream, which can culturally be traced back to early notions of the Protestant Work Ethic and to the idea of the American success story from rags to riches, textbooks follow an almost identical scheme in the way they cover both past changes and present-day developments in the major branches of US economy. Consequently, all textbooks address the following economic key topics: the legacy of the American Dream, America as an economic superpower, past and present-day developments in US agriculture from family farm to agribusiness, changes in the traditional belt concept with the creation of new economic centres, recent developments in US service industries, as well as a survey of different environmental issues caused by these economic activities.

Compared to the USA, the treatment of economic aspects in the textbook units about Latin America is less extensive, however it once again displays an almost identical outline for both *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*. Key topics thereby are agricultural colonisation and the exploitation of the tropical rainforest, plantation agriculture, terms of trade and agricultural

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displaying the complete US-Mexican border and the Mexican and US border states (Seydlitz 8 *Gymnasium*, 2006, p. 133). In addition to that, also the Seydlitz 10<sup>th</sup> grade textbook for *Gymnasium* features a similar historical map which is incorporated into the revision pages at the end of the unit (Seydlitz 10 *Gymnasium*, 2008, p. 126).

exports, fair trade as well as global tourism, the latter of which, however, is only taught in *Gymnasium*.

Due to the actual amount of space that both curricula and textbooks assign to economic issues, it comes as a surprise that there is no reference to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in any of the Bavarian geography textbooks. While in textbooks, the two Americas are not only depicted as separate spatial entities, but also as quasi-autonomous economic systems, the implementation of NAFTA in 1994 has in fact resulted in different kinds of formal transborder cooperation in the US-Mexican borderlands that indeed transcend international and cultural boundaries. What NAFTA did was to facilitate commercial and financial flows between the USA, Canada and Mexico, thereby creating one of the largest free trade areas in the world. According to Javier Revilla Diez, the "North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is the first economic arrangement to unite a sovereign developing country with developed countries in an integration scheme of this kind" (Diez, 1997, p. 694).

Considering the fact that NAFTA's free trade zone is comparable in size with the European Union, it is more than surprising that it has not yet found its way into any of the Bavarian geography textbooks in this sample, as a testing ground for transcultural learning. Indeed, present-day economic processes in the US manufacturing industry, such as outsourcing and the relocation of jobs, will only be fully accessible to students once they are aware of the post-NAFTA boom of the *maquiladoras* on the Mexican side of the border. Likewise, structural changes in the American belt system and US service industries can only be fully explained by means of a decidedly transnational perspective. As free trade has opened gates for Mexican agricultural products, thereby offering Mexican producers access to northern food markets, the agreement has, however, not only significantly affected the secondary and tertiary sector of both the American and the Mexican economy, but, at the same time, it influenced substantially agriculture and transborder trade with agricultural goods in both countries.

While NAFTA and its economic and spatial consequences are not mentioned, there are teaching units about Latin American plantations and the global trade with cash crops in both the textbooks for *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*, which I would like to use in order to illustrate how geography education could indeed be complemented by teaching NAFTA and the transborder trade of agricultural goods between Mexico and the US. A comparative reading of the six different textbooks for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade reveals that the topic of globally traded bananas is so far usually taught from a decidedly trans-Atlantic perspective that stresses German consumer behaviour – "Bananas are among the Germans' most fancied fresh fruits" (own translation of Diercke 10 *Gymnasium*, 2006, p. 106) – which is juxtaposed with narrative texts that portray the perspective of Latin American workers and/or the foreign plantation owners or managers. In this context, teaching the complexities of NAFTA at the example of the transboundary agricultural trade between Mexico and the USA would indeed be very enlightening, as it could add a more decidedly dialogical transcultural

and inter-American perspective to the previously primarily transatlantic approach of teaching global trade and geographies of marketization.

At the same time, a close reading of the textbook tasks that accompany the different economic topics reveals that textbook authors and educators alike have to draft more specifically transcultural assignments and tasks, such as concept mapping or mysteries, which would enable students to decipher the individual elements within an increasingly transcultural global economy.

### *Migration and other Demographic Aspects*

Teaching the US-Mexican borderlands, however, ultimately may not only restrict itself to teaching (economic) processes, but it also has to consider the role of the different actors in the process of transculturation. A close reading of the respective textbook chapters about intensive farming in the California Central Valley reveals that most textbooks actually consider the fact that America's agricultural structures can only be sustained with the help of Mexican and other Latin American migrant workers:

*"Immigrants from Latin America (Hispanics) are often used as cheap labour in California's agriculture"* (own translation based on Seydlitz 10 *Gymnasium*, 2008, p. 100). *"The harvest is carried out by cheap Mexican seasonal workers"* (Seydlitz 10 *Gymnasium*, 2008, p. 100). *"In order to be able to practice a sort of intensive form of farming, California is dependent on the numerous, mostly illegal Mexican seasonal workers that are used as cheap labour during the harvest"* (Diercke 10 *Gymnasium*, 2008, p. 100). *"As cheap labour for California's agriculture usually immigrants from Latin America are employed, especially once manual labour is involved, such as in the example of the harvest of citrus fruits"* (Seydlitz 8 *Realschule*, 2011, p. 33).

Considering the significance that migrant workers and immigrants from the south have for American economy in general, it is surprising how little attention is actually dedicated to these groups in different Bavarian geography textbooks. Even though there are – as the quotes above reveal – at least brief references to the very existence of (illegal) immigrants in the respective chapters about US agriculture and demographics, it is surprising that no more attention is given to the issue of immigration and that it is not treated at greater length in any of the Bavarian textbooks<sup>18</sup>.

Along these lines, it is interesting to note that, with the exception of the Diercke textbook for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade for *Realschule*, there are no references to international migration from the global south to the north in

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<sup>18</sup> So far, Diercke textbook for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, for *Realschule*, is the only textbook that dedicates two pages to a more comprehensive analysis of immigration in the US-Mexican borderlands (Diercke 8 *Realschule*, 2011, pp. 116-117), which are going to be discussed in detail in the following subchapter of this paper.

any of the textbook units about Latin America. Despite the fact that the “2000-mile border between Mexico and the United States has been transformed into the biggest migration corridor in the world” (Berndt, 2009, p. 26), the textbooks for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade for *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* depict migration flows in Latin America as confined by national boundaries, as all the books only focus on domestic migratory patterns from rural areas to the cities, while at the same times emigration to the US is totally neglected. This, however, is in stark contrast to recent studies that are calling for a new geography of migration with the emergence of new types of transmigrants, who differ from both the traditional immigrant and the traditional remigrant (guest worker) and who have gradually replaced – based on the idea of complex migratory networks – the traditional push-and-pull concept. In the context of the two Americas, one can therefore identify fundamental changes of the traditional migratory practices in the post-NAFTA era, which have fundamentally altered former notions of sending and receiving regions. Unlike in the past, most migrants today come from the south of Mexico and instead of migrating to Mexico City – as it is usually implied in textbooks – a first stop-over on the way north would more likely be the centres of the Mexican *maquiladora* industry, in one of the border towns south of the US-Mexican border.

Even though the Diercke textbook for *Realschule* does not contain any references to transmigration either, it is nevertheless the only textbook in the sample that combines domestic and international migration, when 14-year-old Mario reveals, in a narrative text, not only his family’s story of migration from his rural home to Lima, but also the departure of his older brother to America and his ultimate hope of finding a job there to be able to send remittances home (Diercke 10 *Realschule*, 2011, p. 51). A task that accompanies the first-person account tries to put further emphasis on the aforementioned departure of the brother and encourages students to develop different endings to the story of Mario’s brother. Even though from a transcultural perspective this approach is to be endorsed, teaching transmigration along the US-Mexican border in its actual complexity needs not only a better implementation of knowledge about the process of transmigration, but also more sophisticated assignments that enable students, for instance, by means of role plays or other simulation games, to experience not only the different stages in the migratory process, but also the myriad decisions that migrants have to take on their journey north.

For North America, studies have witnessed a sharp increase in absolute numbers of immigrants, a changing geography of both sending countries and receiving areas and a rapidly growing share of undocumented immigrants (Parnreiter, 2008). A close reading of the textbooks, however, reveals that neither the different editions for *Realschule*, nor for *Gymnasium* actually cover these issues in a sufficient way. Along these lines, one must conclude that in the different textbooks there are hardly more than a few random references to Hispanics being among the largest and the most disadvantaged immigrant group:

“Today Hispanics and Asians are the largest immigrant groups in the USA” (own translation based on Diercke *Realschule* 8, 2011, p. 28).

*"Among the Hispanics, immigrants from Central and South America, the poverty rate is three times higher than the national average" (Seydlitz Realschule 8, 2001, p. 17).*

Especially the approach of the Terra textbook for *Realschule* has to be criticised, when under the heading "Anglo America – a melting pot?" several brief statements of teenagers from different ethnic groups are presented (cf. Terra 8 *Realschule*, 2001, pp. 26-27). Hispanic Americans are thereby represented by a young man named José: "I am from Mexico. Two years ago I crossed the border illegally, because I wanted to earn more money here." Not only is this statement a blatant oversimplification of the actual social realities, but it also runs the risk that pre-existing negative stereotypes that students may have about the issue of immigration are only further confirmed. This may generally be true for the discussion of multiculturalism as it is carried out in most of the textbooks. Instead of using a decidedly transcultural perspective, the textbooks substitute the old image of the 'melting pot' with the concept of the 'salad bowl', which by now has become equally outdated and contested and has nowadays been replaced by more contemporary tropes such as the previously described theory of the new *mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa. Along these lines, also the accompanying tasks are not very efficient, in which students are encouraged to discuss whether the idea of the US melting pot is still true. In the aftermath of 9/11, which has not only resulted in stricter immigration control and the military fortification of the border with the help of intelligent surveillance technologies, but it has also resulted in a pairing of discourses on immigration with discourses on terrorism. Such a discussion can only take place during classes once students have enough background knowledge to go beyond stereotypes and assumptions.

Consequently, a more decidedly transcultural approach that focuses on the US-Mexican borderlands as a corridor that connects the global south with the north through processes of transmigration would not only enable educators to teach the different stages in the migration process in greater detail, but it would fundamentally help students overcome many outdated and wrong ideas about the politics of migration and identity along the US-Mexican border.

#### *Constructions and Deconstructions of the North-South Divide*

Whereas so far Latin America and North America (respectively Anglo America in *Realschule*) were taught in separate units, the consecutive approach of covering different cultural areas one at a time is eventually given up in the very last chapter of each of the grades 8-10 textbooks in favour of a more inclusive and holistic approach. Along these lines, the concluding chapters of the textbooks for *Realschule* and for *Gymnasium* alike aim at a final revision of the topics covered so far by providing different case studies that go beyond the scope of the previously separately covered cultural areas. In the following, I would therefore like to analyse

how ideas of transculturality and transcultural learning have been implemented in these chapters.

In the final chapter of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks for *Realschule*, life in the industrialized world is compared to the social realities in developing countries within the larger scheme of the north-south divide. This is done with the help of a wide array of case studies ranging from the USA, Ethiopia, India and Kenya (Seydlitz 8 *Realschule*, 2011), through Germany, Malaysia, Peru, Bolivia, Kenya, Nepal, Japan, China and Pakistan (Terra 8 *Realschule*, 2011) to the US-Mexican borderlands and Thailand (Diercke 8 *Realschule*, 2011). A comparative reading of the different case studies thereby clearly reveals that only the Diercke textbook uses case studies that exclusively originate out of the cultural areas covered before in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade – respectively North America, Latin America and Asia – while the other two textbooks in fact mostly rely on examples from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, during which Sub-Saharan Africa, the Orient and Russia were being taught. At the same time, it is interesting to note that, while the other textbooks are merely juxtaposing different case studies from the so-called first and third world, only the Diercke textbook uses a decidedly transcultural approach by focusing on the US-Mexican borderlands to teach the north-south divide.

Even though the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 10<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks for *Gymnasium* follow a similar structural outline, the focus of the respective final chapters (the 8<sup>th</sup> grade: north-south divide, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade: global challenges) is less on regional examples, but on geographical theories and concepts ranging from development indicators and development aid through global trade and the global division of labour to issues such as global childhood, globalisation, global warming as well as sustainable development<sup>19</sup>. Most of these topics and concepts are then covered once more with even greater sophistication in *Gymnasium* in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, which again focuses on the north-south divide, development, and globalisation. A comparative reading of the different regional examples in the 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks for *Gymnasium* again reveals that there is a pronounced focus on examples and case studies from the African continent. Once more, there is only one textbook that specifically uses the US-Mexican borderlands in order to teach the north-south divide (Terra 12 *Gymnasium*, 2010, p. 48).

In the following, I would now like to provide for a close reading of the respective passages on the US-Mexican borderlands in the Diercke textbook for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, for *Realschule* (Diercke 8 *Realschule*, 2011, pp. 116-117), and the Terra 12<sup>th</sup> grade edition for *Gymnasium* (Terra 12 *Gymnasium*, 2010, p. 48).

When the Diercke textbook for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade introduces the US-Mexican border by means of the headline “Mexico/USA – A border between two worlds”, the very title seems to support an essentialist reading of the US-Mexican border as a divide, which is further reinforced by an

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<sup>19</sup> The only exception here is the Klett textbook for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade that features an elaborate case study on Rwanda (cf. Klett 8 *Gymnasium*, 2006, pp. 146-149).

accompanying aerial photograph that shows the stark contrast along the border between Mexicali/Baja California and Calexico/California. This impression, however, is both supported and refuted again, when a second snapshot depicts a group of illegal immigrants climbing over the border fence, which constructs and deconstructs the very idea of the US-Mexican border as an impermeable demarcation line between America and Mexico at the same time. When the continuous text that covers two textbook pages outlines not only the different push- and pull-factors that make people migrate from the south to the north, but also elaborates on the living conditions and social realities that both illegal and legal immigrants encounter in the USA, the border is in fact gradually transformed from a mere dividing line into the hybrid in-between space of the borderlands. The continuous text thereby consists of two segments. While the first part actually outlines general background knowledge about immigration between the two Americas by focusing on the different reasons for migrants to go north, the demographics of both legal and illegal Hispanic immigrants, the increasing fortification of the US-Mexican border and the life-threatening consequences on those that try to cross the border illegally, as well as on the different employment opportunities for both aliens and legal immigrants, the second part introduces the life story of Emilio Rodriguez by means of a narrative text in which Emilio presents himself as “an illegal whose life story, however, comes very close to the ideal of the American Dream” (Diercke 8 *Realschule*, 2011, p. 117).

A close reading of both the background as well as of the narrative text clearly reveals how the textbook authors have carefully tried to intertwine fact and fiction here. After the death of his father, 11 years old Emilio Rodriguez, who was born in a small village in Chihuahua, crosses the border to Arizona illegally with his two brothers and his mother after hiring a coyote. Once in America, the family is welcomed by an uncle who has been living in Phoenix since 1975 as a naturalized American and who then takes the family to Iowa, where the two older brothers instantly find work in the stockyards, while the mother works as a kitchen hand. Emilio attends high school and grows up bilingual and now works as a manager of a pizza restaurant. Married to a wife that originally comes from Venezuela, he has two children that, having been born in the America, are US citizens. Despite the fact that Emilio and his family, who represent the prototypical assimilation story of the melting pot, seem to have realized what the textbook calls the *American Dream/sueno Americano*, Emilio, who still is an illegal, expresses concerns for the future when he talks about the new immigrant laws in Arizona and what he perceives as an increase of xenophobic resentments towards Hispanics in the context of rising unemployment rates among native residents in the aftermath of the financial crisis, the increasing amount of drugs being trafficked via Mexico to the USA and present-day Census figures which illustrate an increasing

Hispanic presence, which Samuel Huntington has called the Hispanic challenge (Huntington, 2004)<sup>20</sup>.

In comparison to the other textbooks, the editors do not only attribute much more space for a more comprehensive coverage of the issue of Hispanic immigration, but also include contemporary and up-to-date information by referring to, for instance, issues like human trafficking and coyotes, the increasing fortification of the US-Mexican border and the rise of vigilante groups, the existence of immigrant networks and a decidedly more detailed coverage of the social realities of both illegal and legal immigrants. At the same time, especially the story of Emilio offers several instances of transculturality that enable educators to teach migration to America in a way that goes beyond former dichotomies of Mexican vs. American.

Despite this at first glance seemingly successful implementation of a transcultural perspective there are, nevertheless, several instances where the Diercke textbook still cannot live up to the very idea that it aspires to. Even though the background text refers to the sad truth that there are about 300 deaths each year among migrants trying to cross the border and despite the concerns that Emilio mentions when he looks ahead, the entire case study seems to be too tightly bound to the overarching master narrative of the American Dream, which is presented to the reader as the ultimate goal that every immigrant aspires to and yearns for. Along these lines, the textbook authors fall back to former essentialist notions of assimilation and acculturation and thereby neglect the very existence of multiple hybrid and transcultural identities that exist in the contemporary US-Mexican borderlands and which Gloria Anzaldúa praised as the new mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987). Taking Emilio to Iowa may have been a deliberate decision by the textbook editors in order to show that Hispanic immigration and immigrant networks are in no way restricted to the borderlands, however, the very manner in which Emilio's successful assimilation to life in the American heartland unfolds indicates that it is to be read less like a real life story, but as an allegory of the American Dream. This could have been overcome, however, by situating Emilio's story closer to the border and within the complex transcultural web of the US-Mexican borderlands.

Therein, however, lies yet another failure. Migration, according to the Diercke textbook, is not only presented as a straightforward success story of Americanization, but it is also spatially bound to a linear scheme in which the migrants move from the south towards the north. This, however, is in stark contrast to modern research about transmigration in the US-Mexican borderlands, in which migrants frequently and consistently cross existing borders thereby erasing established notions of sending and receiving

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<sup>20</sup> According to the Diercke textbook, "there are about 30 million Hispanics that currently live in America, with more than half of them from Mexico. According to rough estimates, 60 per cent live in the US without any permit of residence" (own translation of Diercke 8 *Realschule*, 2011, p. 117). The information in the continuous text is further supported by a pie chart that shows the countries of origin of the different illegal immigrants by using percentage numbers.

countries. Generally speaking, we can therefore assess that the way the Diercke textbooks depicts the process of migration is far too simple. In a more recent story, Emilio probably would have been from the south of Mexico and his first stop-over on the way north would have been most likely in one of the maquiladoras, located in the border towns south of the US-Mexican border. In addition to that, Emilio might as well be Emilia, as indicated in the photograph in the Diercke textbook that shows a young Mexican female assembly line worker that is mounting the steering wheel to a vehicle. Even though the Diercke textbook does not provide for any spatial context to this picture, recent developments in the post-NAFTA borderlands suggest that this photograph was taken south of the border. Despite the fact that the Diercke textbook follows a more contemporary agenda than the other textbooks by, for instance, referring to the new immigrant laws in Arizona, its coverage of the US-Mexican borderlands is still one-sidedly incomplete.

Furthermore, it is primarily descriptive, which is reflected in the different tasks that accompany both the continuous text and the non-continuous texts. Even though there are some assignments that encourage critical thinking by asking students to, for instance, explain the concept of the American Dream from a Mexican point of view (assignment 1) or to discuss the fears that many US residents have concerning immigration (assignment 3), most of these tasks actually do not go beyond a mere reproduction of the facts that are outlined in the continuous text. Interestingly enough, most tasks do not require students to make use of the non-continuous texts that are featured in this unit, despite the fact that the different media (the aerial photograph, the snapshot from the border, the picture of the Mexican maquiladora worker and the pie chart) would have offered myriad ways to not only teach the actual border between Mexico and America, but in fact to analyse in detail how the very idea of a divide between the north and the south has become increasingly blurred today.

Unlike the Diercke textbook for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, for *Realschule*, which assigns two pages to the US-Mexican border, the 12<sup>th</sup> grade Terra textbook for *Gymnasium* dedicates considerably less space to borderlands. By featuring immigration to California as only one case study, which they then compare to recent immigration practices within the European Union and the new concept of environmental refugees, the textbook authors try to juxtapose different effects of international migration. Whereas one may assume that a 12<sup>th</sup> grade textbook would be able to better teach the complexities of transmigration within a more decidedly transcultural framework, the depiction of the US-Mexican borderlands in the Terra textbook, however, mirrors the same problems as the 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook before. As California is depicted as a hub of international immigration, the Terra textbook distinguishes between high-skilled foreign workers for the IT and electronics industries and Latin American illegal immigrants that mostly find employment in the low-paid US agricultural sector, in constructions, as well as in domestic jobs. Even though the Terra textbook critically remarks the inherent ambiguity in US immigration policies that arises out of the very fact that California is trying to prevent new immigrants from coming by a

significant increase of border-area militarization, while US companies are at the same time benefiting from cheap immigrant labour, its actual depiction of Hispanic immigration and the US-Mexican borderlands is once again rather formulaic and lacks detail.

Similar to the Diercke textbook before, also the different assignments that accompany the case study focus almost exclusively on reproduction as students are expected to merely find the different push and pull-factors in the text (assignment 2). In addition to the continuous text, the 12<sup>th</sup> grade textbook features two visuals which, on one hand, depict a highway street sign that warns drivers of the fact that immigrants may be crossing the road and which, on the other hand, show two illegal Hispanic immigrants that have cut a hole into the border fence. The very iconography of the photograph, however, makes it very hard for students to really get the gist of the scene that is depicted there (assignment 1), as it remains unclear whether the border patrol agent that is also shown in the visual has actually arrested them or whether he, in fact, is helping them to cross the border, which would provide for an alternative subplot that was probably not intended by the textbook authors.

## **THE TRANSCULTURAL TURN IN GEOGRAPHY TEACHING – CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Ultimately we can therefore conclude that, despite the fact that within the larger context of the transcultural turn the study of borders and borderlands has experienced a true renaissance in the social sciences and the humanities, school geography is still lagging behind in truly implementing the very ideas as a new paradigm. By means of a comparative analysis of a sample of German geography curricula and textbooks for *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*, I showed that, despite the subject's inherent dedication to global education and to the teaching of global issues, geography, as it is currently being taught in Bavarian schools, is still bound by former essentialist notions of borders and nation states, thereby examining them from a rather fixed point of view as clearly defined entities, instead of embarking from the notion that, in a globalized and increasingly transcultural world, national and cultural borders have become open and permissive to a very high degree. Within the context of modern cultural studies and postcolonial theories, borders have in fact evolved into hybrid interstitial contact zones that constantly re-create themselves within a given spatial context. As the comparative reading of both the Bavarian curricula and textbooks has revealed, this post-modern understanding of borders as both literal and figurative borderlands has, however, not yet found its way into Bavarian geography curricula and geography textbooks.

At the same time, however, the depiction of the US-Mexican border in the concluding chapter to the Diercke 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook for *Realschule* – and to a minor degree also the Terra 12<sup>th</sup> grade textbook for *Gymnasium*,

as well as segments of the other textbooks in the sample – has provided for a starting point from which transcultural ideas could be fruitfully employed for a more comprehensive study of borders as borderlands. In doing so, school geography, however, has to transcend established disciplinary boundaries and make better use of notions of transnational awareness and transnational competence as they have already been applied to EFL teaching in Germany. In order to teach transnational issues, they need to be understood as expansions and further developments of already existing concepts which they do not replace, but rather complement. Thus, a transnational approach can be considered an expanded and broadened perspective form of intercultural learning in the geography classroom within the overarching paradigm of global education. Along these lines, school geography could also contribute significantly to EFL teaching by implementing topics such as Education for Sustainable Development/ESD and global learning in a way that goes beyond merely fostering transcultural and intercultural awareness and communicative competence.

Equipped with new theories of the transcultural, curriculum developers, textbook authors and geography teachers are now faced with the challenge of opening up curricula, textbooks and other teaching aids to these new ideas and to indeed start teaching the spatial categories out of which the very ideas have originated. Along these lines, the US-Mexican border, as one of the world's most distinctive borderlands situated in the contact zone between the so-called "first" and "third" world, could indeed serve as a testing ground to truly implement transcultural learning to a greater degree in geography teaching.

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