

Reviews

MONIKA KIRLOSKAR-STEINBACH / GITA DHARAMPAL-FRICK / MINOU FRIELE (eds), *Die Interkulturalitätsdebatte – Leit- und Streitbegriffe / Intercultural Discourse – Key and Contested Concepts*. Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 2012. 364 pages, € 29.00. ISBN 978-3-495-48541-5

Issues of “intercultural” communication the contentious underlying concept of “culture” itself have been the subjects of quite extensive debates for some time. It may come as a surprise that a collection of articles on key concepts now sets out to contribute specifically philosophical, but also interdisciplinary perspectives. This undertaking raises a number of questions. How is “intercultural” to be understood precisely, and above all what about the concept of culture that informs such a discourse? Further, how do in particular concepts such as “civil society” or “neoliberalism” – which appear as headings of articles – relate to the implicit quest for “intercultural” exchange, understanding or communication? The 38 entries – some in English, others in German – are organised into the broad sections of Methodological Issues, Personal (Inter-)cultural Self-Understanding, Collective (Inter-)cultural Self-Understanding, Public Sphere I: Society, Public Sphere II: Politics and Economics and Current Political Debates. As one goes through these sections, one wonders whether the focus of the collection is not globalisation rather than intercultural communication. This applies in particular to topics such as “neoliberalism”, “civil society”, “terrorism” and “humanitarian intervention”. These include some of the most lucid and insightful contributions in the volume, but they raise doubts about how it is supposed to hold together. Unfortunately, in their curt introduction, the editors provide little information to guide readers.

There are also problems with the perspective underlying in particular many contributions by philosophers. Their point of departure is – as the editors put it in the introduction – “the methodological standards of the Western European tradition” (p. 14; the English version on p. 26 is a little softer, speaking of “western European scholarship”). The relevant entries hardly address the implications of this approach for “intercultural” communication. Rather, the relevant hermeneutics are fashioned along, among other things, the lines of Christian missionary activities in Asia (Ran Adhar Mall, p. 39), which is clearly a means of propagating Western ideas to the rest of the world. Again, where issues of “difference” are dealt with, these are reflected predominantly by reference to authors writing in German (Georg Stenger, pp. 45–55).

Another fundamental concern is a clear concept of “culture”, which is obviously a prerequisite for this undertaking. Certainly, individual authors are aware of current debates and critique a concept of cultures along a “model of

balls” that are closed to each other and consequently communicate merely by knocking against the next (Wolfgang Welsch, p. 151). We also find awareness of the great diversity that exists in “Buddhism” or in “African philosophy” (Nausikaa Schirilla, p. 81). However, many contributions do not engage such insights and construe “intercultural” processes as though we could conceive of “cultures” as distinct, even reified, entities that can then be identified by well-defined values and norms, common language, symbolism, heroes and conventionalised rituals (cf. Wolfgang Gieler, p. 227). Comments on these diverse positions, or better still some interaction between them, are regrettably lacking. As they stand, they themselves resemble the “ball model” of culture that Welsch so aptly critiques.

This is not to say that there are no “nuggets” among the contributions, for instance Jan Nederveen Pieterse’s lucid exposition of his concept of hybridity, Christoph Antweiler’s instructive pieces on the mutually complementing concepts of universalism and relativism, Pheng Cheah’s sceptical account of cosmopolitanism and Marlies Glasius’s insightful sketch of current debates on civil society. The contributions by Mark Gibney on migration control, Michael Newman on humanitarian intervention and Georg Meggle on terrorism provide useful critical perspectives on their respective subjects. Again, most of these highlights are at best only loosely related to issues of intercultural communication.

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CHARLES EBINGER, *Energy and Security in South Asia – Cooperation or Conflict?* Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2011. XXII, 224 pages, US\$ 26.95. ISBN 978-08157-0411-9

In the past years, studies dealing with India and particularly South Asia in general stood in the shadow of the uncountable number of works on China, and specialized monographs were especially scarce. This is finally beginning to change with the academic and analytical focus shifting more and more towards India and South Asia. Clearly, with South Asia’s population continuing on its projected growth trajectory, the region will host almost 2 billion people and be of crucial geostrategic relevance for all major powers. The book by Charles Ebinger therefore provides a welcome and much needed new addition to the field of specialized monographs.

The study deals with South Asia’s (i.e. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan) energy problems and their intricate relationship with various aspects of security in the region. In a way, the book can be read like a history of post-1947 South Asia from the perspective of “energy”. In eight chapters, the author firstly provides a wealth of information on the history of energy in the individual countries of South Asia and their handling of energy resources, pro-