



Carol Gluck, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. 352 S. \$24.95 (library), ISBN 978-0-8223-4519-0; \$79.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-4536-7.



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Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (September, 2011)

C. Gluck u.a.: Words in Motion

After years of exploration of the tools, media and technologies that informed and enabled globalizing processes it was only a matter of time until historians of globalization turned towards the most elementary and yet most complex of those tools – words. The volume under review sets out to explore, with the words of the editors, the power of words to “make worlds”, to “do work in the world” as they “move across time and space” (p. 3). The fourteen chapters trace translingual, transcultural and transnational movements of words all over the globe and gauge the various impacts the words and their movements had on social and political action.

The short introductory chapters do not contain much of a theoretical roadmap to this endeavor, but the editors are outspoken about what they are not: “not linguists” and “not engaged in translation studies”. They offer “not much” in terms of etymology, genealogy or word-theory, nor does their research fit into the framework of *Begriffsgeschichte* or conceptual history (p. 4). Instead, their mode of investigation is rather vaguely characterized as “ethnographic”. This is a little disappointing for the theoretically-minded reader but leaves wide latitude

for the individual authors to pursue their own theoretical agendas. Shared by many authors is a generally refreshing but at times irritating style that presents the reader with all sorts of peculiar word behavior: meet a “parasitic” word that has “attached itself to nearly every scale of human activity” (p. 21), words that “surprise” us with “far-flung antics” (p. 40) and an “unprepossessing” one that moves “without calling undue attention to itself” (p. 83).

Irrespective of stylistic preferences, “Words in Motion” is a highly original and exciting exploration of the global movements, transformations and social impacts of words which I expect will be welcomed and expanded upon by scholars in the fields of global and area studies. It is a recommended read for anyone with an interest in global history, conceptual history or translation studies.

The volume’s 14 chapters were originally developed in workshops in four “experimental systems” looking for patterns of movement in specific areas. The first developed out of the question how words in global usage were translated into local languages in Southeast Asia. Here we find chapters on “Chumchon/Community” and

Thammarat/Good Governance in Thailand and on *Adat/Indigenous* in Indonesia.

The second experimental system explored interactions between the global and the regional scale in the adaption of words and focused on North Africa and the Middle East, featuring chapters on *Ada/Custom* in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, *Aqallia/Minority* in Egypt and *Illmaniyya, Laïcité, Sécularisme/Secularism* in Morocco.

The third system examined the most explicitly power-laden movements of words from North to South and contains chapters on British usages of *Injury* in India and China, *Terrorism* in India, *Segurança/Security* in the United States and Brazil, *Conjuraci3n/Conspiracy* in the Philippines and *Hijab/Headscarf* in France.

The fourth set focused on similar trajectories, but in countries which preserved their autonomy even while adapting to Western-style modernity. It offers chapters on *Sekin/Responsibility* and *Saburaimu/Sublime* in Japan and *Komisyon/Commission* and *Kurul/Board* in Turkey.

For publication, the chapters were rearranged and loosely grouped around themes such as *Words that Expand*, *Words that Cover* or *Words Unspoken*, but ultimately each set of word, movement and social impact represents a singular historical experience and thus stands on its own.

As it is impossible to do justice to all of the excellent contributions here, I will briefly discuss two chapters that illustrate the diversity of words, areas and approaches to be found in this volume. While all chapters are well conceived and thought-provoking, some remain more faithful to the project laid out in the introduction than others. Most authors attend closely to the historical movements and usages of the word at issue. Yet, a few superimpose their own *analytical* words on the *target* words, rendering the latter somewhat opaque.

An example for the second approach can be found in Alan Tansman's essay on *Saburaimu/Sublime* in Japan. The word, translated into Japanese as *saburaimu* from German and British Romanticism, was en vogue in some avant-garde literary circles around the 1890s, but as Tansman himself states, *soon after ceased circulating* (p. 130), a fact that does not stop him from tracing

the *experience* of the *saburaimu*, *the feeling of sublimity* or the *evocation of the sublime* (p. 129f.) from a literary work of the 1890s (Mori Œgai's *The Dancing girl*) through fascist political rhetoric of the 1930s to the 1950s and 1960s antimilitarism. For this, he relies on a particular understanding of sublimity, proposed by Neil Hertz, as not just aesthetic but also political in character, a device able to tie the individual to the community through emotion. Tansman presents an interesting argument, but conceptualizing *the sublime*, then looking for instances in Japanese history on the one hand and tracing movements and uses of the word *saburaimu* on the other are arguably separate matters and should, for the purpose of this book, have been kept apart more carefully.

To me, one of the most instructive and insightful contributions, and one that follows the approach of tracing words in motion rigorously, is the chapter on *Illmaniyya, Laïcité, Sécularisme/Secularism* in Morocco by Driss Maghraoui. Maghraoui examines the various relationships actors established between secularism and Islam over the last century. They struggled with questions such as whether the two were compatible and whether secularist ideas were per se tainted by their colonial background. Depending on their answer, they employed a wide range of vocabulary, and in some cases took care to avoid any overt reference, to frame debates on secularism. Maghraoui convincingly argues that secularist ideas did not enter Morocco through French colonial education programs, but in the wake of reform movements that swept through North Africa in the early 20th century. In contrast to other North African countries, Moroccan thinkers rejected European conceptions of secularism as pitted against religion and attempted to integrate secularist ideas with an Islam-based nationalism, maintaining that *science* or *reason* were already included in Islam.

In the light of recent developments in North Africa and the Middle East such as the so-called *Jasmine revolution* in Tunisia, it becomes apparent that analyses such as Maghraoui's are not just of historical or academic interest. Thorough investigations of words in motion are also valuable for adding some highly needed depth to current global debates, e.g. on the question of whether democracy is achievable in Muslim countries. It is for this reason, too, that I hope this book will find a wide audience.

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Citation: Michael Facius. Review of Gluck, Carol; Lowenhaupt Tsing, Anna, *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. September, 2011.

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