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## 7 Epilogue. Reflections on Personhood and the Theory of Mind

### Personhood. A look back

What is a person? The anthropological perspective on personhood focuses on how different cultures conceptualise being human within a given society and all over the world. What actually defines a person? Does he/she have an inner life? What are the relationships with others like? How are these constituted in the perspective of the personal self? Is a person able to grasp feelings and thoughts of others, is the person I am facing therefore “transparent”? Or would this violate the person’s privacy?

The idea of an individual, unique self is dominant in the Western intellectual history, it is the basic pattern other definitions follow, and anthropological studies also use this model. Alan MacFarlane (1978: 5) in *The Origins of English Individualism* takes

... the view that society is constituted of autonomous, equal units, namely separate individuals and that such individuals are more important, ultimately, than any larger constituent group. It is reflected in the concept of individual private property, in the political and legal liberty of the individual, in the idea of the individual’s direct communication with God.

In an anthropological landmark study, Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer (1990) distinguish between a Western autonomous individual, determined by kinship or bloodline (the “Mendelian model”) and a concept prevalent in Pacific societies, where the boundaries between individual and society are less defined and where place and practice are far more important than blood (“Lamarckian model”). But is the Western autarkic individual not also a construct with little connection to how reality is lived?

LiPuma writes about the ideology of individualism (1998: 75; cf. Hess 2006: 285) and states: “In all cultures, I will argue, there exist both individual and dividual modalities or aspects of personhood ... The foregrounding and hence transparency of individual and dividual aspects of personhood will vary across contexts for action within cultures” (LiPuma 1998: 56, 60). According to Jean and John Comaroff, the modern autonomous, self-reflecting, rational person is “... a Eurocentric idea” (2002: 67) which is too frequently contrasted with the pre-modern, relational or dividual idea. And it is profoundly parochial, particularistic. It is a “European chimera” (Köpping 2002: 48) since

... (this is) a modernist fantasy about society and selfhood according to which everyone is, potentially, in control of his or her destiny in a world made by the actions of autonomous ‘agents’. It is this fantasy that leads historians to seek social causes in individual action and social action in individual causes ... (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 26)

This idea of an autonomous individual within the universe does not necessarily apply to other cultures. Ethnopsychologies are cultural ways of understanding personal identity, actions, and experiences. From this point of view, the Western interpretations, academic or folk theory, are only one of the possible ethnopsychologies. Yet already early on, anthropologists also constructed counter-models. The person is positioned at the intersection of the subject and the social sphere: Both of them have an influence, which is most of all not predefined but culturally determined. The juxtaposition of the Western (assumed) autonomous individual and the (imagined) relational or sociocentric person in the Pacific region developed gradually (A.Th. von Poser and Wassmann 2012).

An early thought about person and society can be found in Emile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, written in 1915. Durkheim (1964: 270) states that “... the notion of person is the product of two sorts of factors. One of these is ... the spiritual principle serving as the soul of the group.” This is the very substance of individual souls. In addition, Durkheim mentions the aspect that individualises a person within the society, the body. As bodies are distinct from each other, and as they occupy different points in space and time, each of them forms a special centre about which the collective representations reflect and colour themselves differently. Durkheim localises the person somewhere

between the socially determined community soul and an individualising body.

In the following generations, Durkheim's nephew, Marcel Mauss, further developed this concept. According to Mauss, the concept of personhood is much more clearly embedded in a social network. Although he assessed, that each culture has a word and a concept for "I", and that man is generally aware of his intellectual and physical individuality (Mauss 1986: 3), he adds to this thesis a complete embeddedness of "I" in a social context. Mauss saw this from a historical perspective: Our (Western) development from the social "personage" to the psychological "person" and further on to the conscious and autonomous unit, the "individual". Let us leave the temporal aspect aside. "Personage" consisted of a set of characteristics represented by the mask, which means by a role. Starting from data of the Pueblo Indians, Mauss regarded a person's role in society as a social agent. From this set the person developed with more individuality, which existed also besides the role. The person had a body and a status, consisting of rights and obligations within a network of relations. Then a moral status was awarded to the person, together with independence, freedom, and responsibility, irrespective of rights and obligations. Finally, awareness was added to this moral being. Its place was the self, the "moi".

The term person must not be understood as an individual unit, but may be more like a knot within a social network of relations. This depiction of a Pacific person, or, to be more precise, a Melanesian person comes from Maurice Leenhardt (1947): "The relational concept of a person" (Pereira de Queiroz 1984: 9). Leenhardt was a missionary and an anthropologist, who, from 1902 on, studied the Kanak people of New Caledonia for twenty-five years. His idea of personhood contained a revolutionary element: the total connectedness of a person (cf. A.T. von Poser and Wassmann 2012). He dismissed the (Western) concept of a private autonomous individual in favour of a person in relation, which can only be localised as the centre of its relations (Leenhardt 1984: 203-205).

As of the 1980s, Leenhardt's early connective approach was reintroduced in many anthropological studies where the attempt was made to record the diverse conceptualisations of personhood in Pacific cultures. Anthropologists such as Geoffrey White, Catherine Lutz, Michelle Rosaldo, Eleanor Ruth Gerber, Marilyn Strathern or Andrew J. Strathern refer to selected Pacific ethnopsychologies. In the analysis of the person

and in the tradition of Leenhardt, these were the most important concepts: the “dividual” (M. Strathern 1988, who adopted an idea by Marriott 1976: 111; for a critic see Jolly 1992, Hess 2006, 2009), the “fractal” (Wagner 1991: 163), and the one of the “relational” person (Stewart and A.J. Strathern 2000: 17). This clearly was a model demonstrating an alternative to Western psychology, which had been far too Eurocentric, and still remains so today.

Grace Harris (1989: 600-604) introduced a distinction that is important for anthropologists and influential to this very day. Harris differentiates between individual, self and the person. Now, what does this mean? The individual comes from the biological perspective. A human being as such is defined, but socially undifferentiated. It is a “single member of the human kind”. This concerns the human body, though not alone: A body’s borders can be differently localised. Language is important, so that the individual can act socially. The self stems from the psychological perspective; it is the centre of inner and outer experiences. Self-awareness is a part of it, the feeling to be something special, differentiated from the others. Finally, the person is considered from a social point of view: Man as a social being, who acts and is an “agent in society”. In summary, the sociological person, the psychological self, and the biological individual are culturally defined, and here the person very often is of prime importance.

According to the definition by Harris (1989), a person is a human being acting within cultural norms. This person does not necessarily have to be a human being, but it can be an ancestor or an animal, the actions of which influence people’s lives. The other way around, a human being without social abilities can be considered a less important person, or even a non-person. In her Melanesian example, the Baining, Jane Fajans (1985) describes the development of personhood as a continuing acquisition of social characteristics all the way to the “food-giver” (and not only to the “food-receiver”) and his/her disintegration with age. As a newborn baby, the infant is considered to belong to the realm of nature and not the one of culture, because it has not yet developed any linguistic and social behaviour: The baby is not considered a person. At the end of his or her life, an old person is de-socialised, because he or she is, once again, dependent on food from others. However, in other conceptions old age is considered very prestigious, among men as well as among women, who, after the menopause and the loss of their ability to reproduce, may become more and more “male”, or men as well as women can generally

become more “human”. The accumulated knowledge, though, is passed on to the next generation, and for this reason, old people do not lose their reputation until their death, though they lose their vital force (Keck and Wassmann 2010). Yet, due to recent global processes, old people now may lose their prestige, because their knowledge is less and less appreciated and needed. Admittedly, the linear-biological time (of aging) is only of secondary importance in comparison to the social one (as a succession of social positions).

All these presented attempts to comprehend non-Western concepts of personhood have one insight in common, that even essential elements, so far considered universal, can be fundamentally different. Mauss already expressed doubts about the universality of the concepts, and Leenhardt provided the basis for the new definitions of personhood, used by later anthropologists. Lately, new perspectives were contributed, for instance a person’s age and aging, perceptions of space and time where the person positions himself, and his relations to the surrounding topography and to certain places; and finally the question about the individual human being’s transparency or rather his opacity for others and his empathy vis-à-vis other people.

## Opacity and empathy

In Western traditions the self is often very important (Carrithers et al. 1985; Kirkpatrick and White 1985; Lutz 1988; B. Morris 1994; Mageo 1998; M.W. Morris et al. 2001; cf. Wassmann and Keck 2007: 1-18). This inner self can partially be visible on the outside. Imputing intentions (as well as a will of one’s own, cf. Murphy and Throop 2010) to other selves is widespread among us. In the theory of mind (ToM) the human being and his/her possible relationships to others is the focus of attention, the inner life and its transparency for others. Is this an essential mind ability, existing in all cultures, starting at the age of four (as in the West), since it is so important for a functioning social life? However, in non-Western cultures, the reverse can be true. Träuble et al. (in Chapter 1) already have addressed the findings (cf. Robbins and Rumsey 2008) that in many Pacific cultures, a strong emphasis on secrecy, concealment and privacy seems to be related to the notion of “opaque minds” and that therefore it is almost impossible to know anything about others’ mental states. Reflecting on other people’s thoughts may be seen as morally offensive or it may be a case of “... sensitivity about not presuming to

impinge on each other's self-determination" (Stasch 2008: 443). Empathy is thus a quality that is not always appreciated because it may violate the other person's privacy. Different from what psychology postulated for the Western world, children do not always show their own self or their own mental states to other children at an early age because it is culturally not desirable – even though it would cognitively be feasible. The kind of education plays a decisive role in this, the interaction between mother and child (Enfield and Levinson 2006). This has already been mentioned in the introductory Chapter 1 by Träuble et al. At the same time, opacity is not limited to the Pacific region, but is a worldwide phenomenon (A.J. Strathern 1976; Astington and Baird 2005; Danziger 2006, 2010).

Joel Robbins and Alan Rumsey (2008: 408) recommend that we have to

... rethink some fairly settled approaches to topics such as the nature of theories of mind, the role of intention in linguistic communication and social interaction ... and the importance of empathy in human encounters.

In our opinion, mainly psychologists and anthropological linguists participated in the discussion. In the process, they did not establish a connection with the old ethnopsychological studies, and they also did not establish a connection with each other. We also have to much more strongly rethink this discussion and link it with the various concepts of personhood. The culturally defined person is in the centre because it depends on him or her whether a theory of mind applies, whether imputing intentions to others is desired and whether empathy is possible and if so, in which form.

However, for a long time nobody talked about these topics. The lack of interest may be due to the influence of Clifford Geertz arguing that those who presume they are being empathic are merely projecting their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences onto unsuspecting subjects of study (1984: 5-6). Or did the informants only speak of opacity in order to get rid of insistently questioning anthropologists, as Lucien Goldman suspects?

At any rate, in 2008 a special edition of the journal *Ethos* (Throop and Hollan) was published, later in the same year an *Anthropological Quarterly* (Robbins and Rumsey). In 2011 a new anthology by Hollan and Throop, *The Anthropology of Empathy* appeared. In all these

publications the definition by Jodi Halpern is influential. Halpern (2001: 11) defines empathy as “a first person-like, experiential understanding of another person’s perspective”, also as a task of personal imagination, imagining oneself in somebody else’s place. Empathy, as understood in Western cultures, has cognitive and affective features. Cognitively it refers to the ability to see as others see, to simulate their viewpoint. Affectively, to empathise means to feel as if one were the other person. That is, to simulate oneness (Mageo 2011: 69), “... or at least knowing how they [the others] see the world” (Robbins and Rumsey 2008: 416; cf. Throop 2010, 2011).

In the process, the question arises whether these differences in Pacific societies might depend more on individualistic or more on relational accentuations of personhood, more on egalitarian or more on hierarchic social structures of the community. And if this is correct, how? We follow the model of Anita von Poser. “I will question, whether or not more ‘individualistic’ cultures cultivate empathic skills as thoroughly as ‘collectivist’ or so-called relationalist cultures do” (A. von Poser 2011: 174). James Weiner (1994: 24) has described the Melanesian world as a “world of relationality” – we already talked about this in connection with the Pacific concepts of personhood. It is therefore not surprising, when, according to James Carrier, in Melanesian communities it is often held that “motive and even sentiment spring from the relationship of which one is a part. Indeed, one’s very sense of who one is comes not from one’s self, but from the effects one has on others, the ways they respond to one’s actions” (Carrier 1999: 30). However, Rupert Stasch (2008) thinks that opacity may be linked to an egalitarian ethos. Alessandro Duranti (2008) contradicts this because opacity can also be found in highly stratified societies like Samoa. Jeanette Mageo (2011: 76), however, takes an important step forward:

Attachment in more individually oriented places inspires empathy as an imaginative identification of self with another, bridging the self/other divide. In more socially oriented locales, attachment leads to empathy as enacted: giving care in gifts, both material gifts like food but also more abstract gifts of service... to one’s own group and through ceremonies, feast and festivals to other groups. Indeed, enacted empathy is the constitutive practice of what Mauss calls ‘gift economics’.

Accordingly, empathy can be expressed by an action-performance. Mageo writes that *alofa* is not a matter of imagination in Samoa, but a material expression in the form of providing food or services (Mageo 2011; see also Feinberg 2011). Empathy is not a matter of “mind reading”, like in the West, but here it is expressed in actions. To turn the argument around, the Bosmun believe that this emotional permeability is “...possible between people who belong to the same food-sharing realm” (A. von Poser 2011: 169). Anita von Poser cites the sociologist Arnold Buchheimer with the following sentence: “A sympathetic person feels *along with* another person but not necessarily *into* a person” (1963: 63; original emphasis).

All this leads to the question about the universality of the ToM, to ask whether ToM is innate, as psychologists tend to postulate, or socialised (as anthropologists tend to think).

## Is the theory of mind universal?

We followed the approach of Vinden and Astington (2005), mentioned in Chapter 1 (Träuble et al.) of his volume, and we did not begin our considerations with the ToM, the child’s competence, but with the concepts of personhood as starting point – they determine the relationship with other people. Yet Träuble et al. write,

whether or not a culture conceptualises mind as a relevant entity or focuses on representations as motivators for behaviour, the ability per se is a human universal ...

Is this correct? And is the next definition true:

... given the important role of theory of mind abilities for our social functioning ... one would assume that the developmental course [not only the existence] of such an important competence should follow a similar trajectory across different cultures (Träuble et al. Chapter 1 in this volume, addition by Wassmann and Funke).

We, a psychologist and an anthropologist, want to phrase it like this: The theory of mind, the possibility to put oneself in the position of someone else, is probably cognitive and affective, universally present. No doubt it is one of the basic competencies, a universal cognitive basis, an inner



mental process, a part of the underlying cognitive structures, which were already presented in Chapter 1.

In other words: The cognitive competence exists, yet, and this is decisive, due to cultural reasons it can be made visible only at a later stage or can be entirely unwanted. This means, in relation to the latent competence, there can be a postponed (in relation to the Western world) visible performance or none at all, as it can be found in many Pacific societies; neither mentally, nor in action, or the actions are only substitutes of explicit thoughts, as in the case of an opacity of mind. The same is true for emotions (Lutz 1988; Reddy 2001). They are not culturally predetermined, as anthropologists have too often surmised, but they are innate, and according to culture and language suppressed, expressed or differently classified. If a word is lacking, it does not mean that the emotion is lacking.

Here the concept of the cognitive style that the developmental psychologist Pierre R. Dasen frequently uses might be helpful. He thinks that “cultural differences in cognition reside more in cognitive styles than in the existence of a process in one cultural group and its absence in another” (Dasen and Mishra 2010: 13-14). Cognitive style is one’s preferred way of processing information and dealing with tasks (Zhang and Sternberg 2006: 3). In the centre is the individual child, who develops in a certain micro-context in the so-called “developmental niche” that consists of three components: The setting or the social context, the customs in education, and the caretakers with their parental ethno-theories of the child’s development. Among others, the eco-cultural model, developed by John Berry (Berry et al. 2002), is part of the macro-system. The probably best-known cognitive style is field-independence *versus* field-dependence. In the first case, individuals produce judgments independently of their visual or social surroundings; in the second, individuals are more influenced by their surroundings and, accordingly, show social empathy more frequently.

Did not anthropologists often overestimate the “exotic” of “exotic cultures”? On the other hand, research on human cognition all too often ignored cultural diversity. Anthropologists had their problems “... to view things from a different angle” (Bender and Beller 2011: 1). The distinction between (universal) competence and (culturally determined) performance could help us; it also forms the background of the following quotation (Astuti 2012: 4-5).

Angeline Lillard, herself a developmental psychologist, has argued that there are significant variations on the way people talk about minds, persons, emotions, and so on (Lillard 1998). ... Scholl and Leslie – supporters of the view that ToM is grounded in a cognitive module that develops along universal lines [responded]: ‘The cross-cultural differences catalogued by Lillard explicitly include differences in religious beliefs, and beliefs in phenomena such as witchcraft, magic and karma. As such, her view of cross-cultural ToM differences pertains only to *the inessential fluorescence of mature ToM competence*, rather than to *its essential character in early acquisition*... in general, Lillard seems to be looking at differences in *specific beliefs*, rather than at *the concept of belief*. ... even specific beliefs *about* the concept of belief are not necessarily relevant: the concept of belief could be universally grounded in a module [as Scholl and Leslie argue] even though most cultures do not recognize the ‘modular’ account in their own folk psychology! (Scholl and Leslie 1999: 137).

However, folk theories, like the opacity of mind, are probably not simply “inessential fluorescence”, but children seemed to be inclined to automatically compute other people’s belief and expectation, as Astuti puts it, but that, as they grow older, they might gradually learn to abide by the culturally specific folk theory, at least in some contexts. This means that performance is no longer needed everywhere.

For that purpose, comparative studies are needed, and they are on no account neglected, as Norenzayan und Heine (2005) claimed. Yet it is true that the mutual influence of the two disciplines, anthropology and psychology, seems to be imbalanced, as Gustav Jahoda has mentioned in his foreword (this volume, cf. Jahoda 2011).

While one can find considerable evidence for the explanation of social or cultural phenomena in psychological terms early in the history of anthropology (e.g. Rivers 1914; cf. also Jahoda 1982), the explanation of behavioural phenomena in cultural terms has generally been less attempted in psychology (Jahoda and Krewer 1997). The field of cross-cultural psychology that has been developed in the 1980s was and remains an exception, where culture “is taken seriously” (Dasen and Jahoda 1986) by psychologists in understanding human behaviour (Mishra and Dasen 2007: 21).

Since both disciplines are concerned with closely related aspects of human nature (Wassmann et al. 2011), it is not surprising that many topics and questions are shared. There are, however, significant differ-

ences regarding how these issues are addressed in the respective academic disciplines. Within cognitive anthropology, for instance, Barbara Rogoff and Jean Lave (1984; Lave 1988), realising the limitations of the purely cultural focus, proposed a shift away from the “representations collectives” toward a more central role for the single individual. Along the same lines, Maurice Bloch (1991) criticised the prominent anthropological concept of the individual as “over-socialised”. In other words, the idea of one homogenous culture (at any scale, applied to an individual or to the society) can be seen as quite inadequate, given the tremendous variability of individual biographies – today. However, when driven to extremes, the isolated “plain folk” individual, completely stripped of any cultural ties, is a limited model system, too. Nevertheless, apart from some socio-psychological strands, experimental work is often carried out on individuals in isolation and in highly non-natural (but carefully controlled) environments. On the other hand, within the psychological roots of modern neuroscience, the work of Jean Piaget dealt with the expansion of cognitive abilities in children, as a function of biological maturation and constant interaction with the world, a process that leads to continuous modification and refinement of world-views. Although focused on individuals, this now classic work had, therefore, a strong inter-individual and contextual aspect. The question as to whether the results obtained by Jean Piaget and others could be generalised soon sparked the need for cross-cultural comparisons, leading to the advent of cross-cultural psychology. Prominent researchers in this field, such as Pierre R. Dasen, John Berry and Marshall Segall, later concluded that certain information-processing mechanisms per se show very little variance across individuals:

We found evidence of differences across cultural groups, differences in habitual strategies for classifying and for solving problems, differences in cognitive style, and differences in rates of progression through developmental stages [...] these differences, however, are in performance rather than in competence. They are differences in the way basic cognitive processes are applied to particular contexts, rather than in presence or absence of the processes. Despite these differences, then, there is an underlying universality of cognitive processes (Segall et al. 1999: 184; cf. Berry et al. 2002; Mishra and Dasen 2007).

In this approach, Segall et al. see the early generalisations of Franz Boas confirmed, according to which there is a certain “psychic unity” of all human agents. Already in the year 1911, Boas wrote in *The Mind of Primitive Man*:

But it may also be that the organisation of mind is practically identical among all races of man; that mental activity follows the same laws everywhere, but that its manifestations depend upon the character of individual experience that is subjected to the action of these laws (Boas 1911: 102).

Along the same lines, Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner, in agreement with Boas and Segall, explicitly named certain basic capacities that seemed to prove invariant in their empirical research sampling different cultural contexts. Among others, these were the capacity to remember, generalise, form concepts, operate with abstractions, and [to] reason logically (Cole and Scribner 1974). Here we draw the attention to three slightly different candidate faculties that shall be considered as possible basic invariants in human cognition: concept formation, working memory, and ToM (Wassmann et al. 2011). And we take a step forward. We might accept that there is an “underlying universality of cognitive processes”, that “cultural differences in cognition reside more in cognitive styles than in the existence of a process in one cultural group and its absence in another”. We are – perhaps – impressed that through imaging techniques cognitive processes can be visualised – the locus in the brain, not the process itself. Andrea Bender (pers. communication), however, believes, that:

Cognition was seen as information processing, analogous to how information is processed in a computer. And for a long time, cognitive scientists were assuming that the processor and the algorithms with which it operates are shared by all humans, and that only information input and output is culture-dependent. This assumption justified a division of labor between anthropologists, who were interested in the information itself (i.e. the culture-specific content), and psychologists, who were more concerned with how such information is (generally) processed (D’Andrade 1981: 182). However, recent research increasingly suggests that this strict distinction does not hold (Bender et al. 2010; Bender and Beller 2011). Rather, the cognitive processes depend on cultural input as could be demonstrated for a range of domains (e.g. Bang et al. 2007; Atran 2008;

Domahs et al. 2010; Haun et al. 2011). Not only the contents of the processing, but also the processing itself, thus, the basic cognitive processes are influenced by culture.

This would mean that not only the assumed universal competence not necessarily has to become visible or expressed in each cultural context but that the cognitive processes themselves are influenced by culture.

Now, let us turn to the results of the field research presented in this volume. The questions asked above can only partially be answered by numerous field studies. This is not easy, since it became apparent that one cannot simply travel somewhere and ask some quick questions. The starting point of the studies was the question of whether we would find everywhere a ToM, and, in case there should be specific characteristics, how these could be explained.

#### Results from the field

Yap & Fais (Oberle & Resch) n = 69 (3-6 y.)	Tonga (Tietz & Völkel) n = 101 (3-6 y.)	Samoa (Mayer & Riese) n = 43 (3-6 y.)	Yupno (Hoelzel & Keck) n = 40 (3-6 y.)	Bosmun (von Poser & Ubl) n = 26 (3-6 y.)
Change Location Task (CLT)				
	FB • 3-4 y.: 47% • 5-6 y.: 75%	FB • 3-4 y.: 38% • 5-6 y.: 31%	FB nonverbal • 3-4 y.: 60% • 5-6 y.: 65%	
Deceptive Container Task (DCT)				
FB • 3-4 y.: 12% • 5-6 y.: 89% RCh • 3-4 y.: 16% • 5-6 y.: 96%	FB • 3-4 y.: 31% • 5-6 y.: 31% RCh • 3-4 y.: 46% • 5-6 y.: 39%		FB • 3-4 y.: 16% • 5-6 y.: 20%	FB • 3-4 y.: 8% • 5-6 y.: 69%

Table 7.1: Overview of all test results (Bender and Beller 2012: 205)

We argue that theory of mind abilities develop universally among all human populations. The onset of mental state reasoning, however, varies across cultures as a consequence of different socialisation practices and ethnotheories concerning, for example, mental state talk. Therefore, children in specific locales might pass false belief tasks years later than in other places – however, the fact that the corresponding ability develops speaks for the universality of the theory of mind. What is important: we cannot attribute children's difficulties with the tasks to a conceptual deficit, since our findings obviously in part result from competence-masking task features.

The arguments presented here could give the impression of a complete failure for any attempt of a cultural comparison with the help of Western tests, even if they are culturally adapted. However, we do not want to go that far. Obviously, a great many factors play a role in a non-laboratory-situation in non-Western surroundings, and they are difficult to control. We remind of the following aspects which are culturally predetermined and influence the results: Reluctance to speculate about others' minds, to talk about others, a lack of mental state talk (Tonga, Samoa, Yupno), the reluctance to express oneself verbally at all (since people are used to do so by their actions; Yupno), social adequate behaviour forbidding lies and deception (however, those should be used in the test; Bosmun), the children's possibility of discovering their own habitats as far as possible unhindered, without normative educational stimuli (Yap and Fais).

But the tests themselves and the test situations influence the results even more clearly: Highly verbal demands prevented children from demonstrating their competence, and only the nonverbal tasks eliminated confounding demands inherent in the verbal tasks (Tonga, Yupno). Moreover, although the nonverbal part was more culturally adequate, ToM may manifest itself in entirely different areas that cannot be tested, for instance it can be expressed through the medium of dreams or in the *tauak* (signs representing messages for others, e.g., a folded leaf). This indicates that ToM is incorporated into actions, but that it is preferred not to verbalise them (Yupno).

In some places these tests were carried out in public, in a public that can be tabooed, where direct questions are considered rude, a serious difference may exist between the public sphere (which is intensely tabooed) and the private sphere, between male and female spheres, between the behaviour during the day or at night etc. Publicly a question

would be answered by shaking the head or an “I don’t know”, while, at night, in the men’s house or on the beach one would get a detailed answer (Yap and Fais).

Experimental paradigms are themselves Western practices and children in Western countries are more familiar with them. Early games and labelling routines between caregiver and child shape the way for the kind of performance required in testing situations. Children in some Pacific cultures might feel more uncomfortable and under pressure to perform well or to please the interviewer (Samoa, Tonga). Children grow up in a different system of values, playful, relying on their older siblings, full of empathy for others, yet usually without achievement or reward orientation (Samoa, Tonga).

All these topics are partially known from research in cross-cultural psychology, yet they never appeared in such a concentrated form as presented here. Obviously, the human competence to put oneself into the position of someone else exists. If the performance of this ability is desirable, it is rated differently. In all events, the test situation remains very problematic – at least it reveals a lot about the respective culture.

## Final remarks

We want to finish our reflections with six observations we consider important and which relate to methodical aspects and to content.

- (1) Conditions in the field are not like conditions in a laboratory. Normally, the control over test conditions is central for psychologists, since the comparability of resulting data is highly dependent on the fact that interfering variables do not spoil the conditions. In field situations one is firstly inclined to bid farewell to this “sacred cow”. This does not mean, that the work is not done properly – on the contrary, all five contributions can be attested to careful considerations of this problem. By meticulously recording the unavoidable interfering factors, they allow an exact assessment of the reliability of the respective results.
- (2) The research material that is used in Western studies must be adjusted to local circumstances to allow equivalent conclusions. The container tasks that are used in theory of mind studies, where certain objects are hidden at first in one container and then in another container, are not transferable to other contexts without modification. Again, the five

chapters are full of examples for successful adaptations of the research material to local particularities.

- (3) Psychological research, ignoring cultural or social rules and customs, errs regarding the validity of its results. That means that, e.g., the customary prohibition to deceive someone among the Bosmun children, as it is expected as part of the change of location task, may lead to a wrong evaluation of the mental capacities of the tested subjects. The very fact that it is unusual in a culture for children to think about mental states of adults can slow down or even delay the development of a theory of mind. In this regard, Mayer and Riese argue “that the focus of empirical research in the field of cross-cultural developmental psychology should shift towards applying methods seeking to record children’s cognitive skills as they happen, i.e. in children’s daily routine and activities rather than in artificial experimental settings, which may not reflect the character and requirements of the world they actually live in” (pers. comm.). Are cognitive processes really universal? “The concession that culture affects not only *what* people think but *how* they think hasn’t come easily” (Bender et al. 2010).
- (4) A comparison in the vein of “we versus the others” may lead to a levelling and homogenisation of the respective cultures. Hence, a juxtaposition of Americans and Chinese/Taiwanese people (Chua et al. 2005), the usage of “Indians” as a comparison group (M.W. Morris et al. 2001) or the contrasting of the individuality or the relatedness of self-constructs (Markus and Katayama 1991) are all problematic and rather superficial approaches, which strongly remind of the beginnings of the culture and personality movement with their ideas of patterns and configurations. Small-scale groups, which traditionally have been the focus of ethnographic research, are more homogenous but through globalisation, the *vitae* within a culture start to differ from each other. The awareness of this problem leads to reflectiveness among anthropologists and psychologists. Lave (1988: 13) calls for putting the focus on the “social actor in action in the lived-in world” that is not abstract, but relating to the everyday life of each subject. The former confrontation of the individual, context-independent Western person endowed with a free will, with non-Western, highly sociocentric concepts is, on the other hand, a typical Eurocentric and essentialist construct (Biersack 1991; Jolly 1992; LiPuma 1998; Mosko 2010).



- (5) We need to pay attention to the implicit, non-verbal knowledge that underlies stereotypical and routine actions. Language analysis is not the only key to cognitive categories and processes, a fact which has also become apparent in some chapters. The new source for insights into thinking processes are, among others, the “just plain folks” (Rogoff and Lave 1990) with their everyday actions. Actions can “speak”, because thinking and doing are closely related (Funke 2012). Generally, even before they talk toddlers seem to have a rudimentary ToM (Träuble et al. 2012; cf. Goswami 2008: 379). Language plays an ambivalent role (Ochs 1988; Völkel 2010). Since success in a verbal belief task can be confounded with linguistic competence, actions are often more important than the verbal expression, especially in traditional cultures. However, this might change and can also be a reason for the results of the research presented. The mostly violent introduction of Christianity had a decisive influence on the traditional concept of personhood, because “...(e)ngagement with Christian individualism, with a singular person’s relationship with God, presupposes a moral ‘core self’ that makes a person responsible for his own actions” (Hess 2009: ix; Robbins 2001; A. von Poser 2011, 2013).
- (6) Robbins (2001) and A. von Poser (2011) point to the many struggles with which traditional societies are confronted. Struggles that people who hold an opacity ideology are facing when converting to Christianity, particularly in one of its Protestant forms, since they require honest talk. The ones connected with confession, relying on the assumption of the existence of an inner self that is accessible to introspection. The ones that develop when religious or formal rituals are sneered at, and when language is absolutely dominant, like in Protestantism, because many traditional societies value action over speech and distrust ritual speech, just like language generally, because it is not possible to adequately express with it what one is thinking oneself or what others are thinking. The listeners form an opinion. Yet much of this Christian talk is “talk about talk” (Robbins 2001: 904). This creates many serious shifts: From action to speech, from listening to talking, from secrecy and concealment to openness.

What do we gain from the field-studies in this volume? Firtly, on the part of psychology, to begin with, we gain a deeper understanding of phenomena often tainted with a hidden cultural bias, due to Euro- or

America-centrism. Secondly, through anthropological research some phenomena, which have been considered universal, could be put into the right perspective, and the universal validity of many assumptions was called into question. This means an improvement of the research situation, since more precise and context-oriented statements can be achieved. Thirdly, it is instructive for psychologists to reflect on qualitative methods as an addition to empirical-experimental methods. In recent years, the opening towards qualitative techniques from the side of psychology most certainly is the result of such mutual learning processes. After all, a debate about contextualised real-life-studies in contrast to the “artificial lab research” should be interesting for psychology.

The engagement with methods of data collection and data evaluation is of great value mainly for cultural anthropology. Yet, besides that, psychological concepts and theories about human actions in different situations also benefit anthropology. It could cause some anthropologists to think about their cultural relativism, when dealing with theories that are declared universal. By no means should a division of tasks leave the content to cultural anthropology and the method to psychology. Roy D’Andrade (1981) suggested a division of labour, whereby psychology would study how people think and cognitive anthropology would study what people think. The cooperation of anthropology and psychology is not the division of the object of research but the joint developing – at best together in the field as presented in this volume – of a deep understanding of phenomena which occur in cross-cultural contexts. This kind of research takes its time, and it may be strenuous, but it pays off at the end.

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