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the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication

TRAINING FOR A TRANSCULTURAL WORLD

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Editors

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Foreword | 8 |
| The Transcultural turn: models, training and translation itself. New frameworks for training. <i>Introduction by David Katan</i> | 10 |
| FREPA - A Set of Instruments for the Development of Inter-/ Transcultural and Plurilingual Competences <i>Petra Daryai-Hansen and Anna Schröder-Sura</i> | 20 |
| Motivation in Multicultural Settings - Using the Synergy between Cultural Dimensions and the Reiss Profile <i>Susanne Königorski</i> | 37 |
| Handling Communication in International Partnerships: Insights on Competence from the echina-UK Programme <i>Helen Spencer-Oatey and Stefanie Stadler</i> | 51 |
| Push and Pull: The Competencies required for working internationally <i>Nigel Ewington and Tim Hill</i> | 80 |
| The Mobius Map for living and working in the Cultural intermezzo <i>Nikola Hale</i> | 93 |
| Perceptions and interaction on Facebook: Germans and Americans. Anxiety, opportunities, growth, change and learning <i>Jacquelyn Reeves</i> | 113 |
| Transtaining Interculturators or Training Communication Experts in Today's Transcultural World <i>Marián Morón-Martín</i> | 132 |
| Becoming a translator: the development of intercultural competence in Spain <i>Ana Gregorio Cano</i> | 154 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Travel insurance policies: a playground for training transculturally-aware translators <i>Katia Peruzzo and Isabel Durán-Muñoz</i> | 171 |
| From titles and cultural transfer <i>David Limon</i> | 189 |
| Notes on contributors | 209 |
| Guidelines for contributors | 214 |

Foreword

This issue asked for contributions focussing on research, models, strategies, and also practical exercises which either break new ground on classic linguacultural divides, or are able to reach beyond static, stereotypical 'cultural differences' and make some headway in improving communication and mutual understanding in an increasingly transcultural and virtual world. As we had such a response, boosted through the active contribution of SIETAR Europe papers given at Krakow "Interculturalism Ahead: Transition to a Virtual World?" (September 2011), instead of our usual 5-6 papers we have 10 but, sadly perhaps, no interview this year.

The first papers in this issue offer specific frameworks or models, all of which move us on from the static cultural-difference models, and chart how the transcultural turn is developing; while those on university training and translation give us a stark reality check. Though there is some light, and much investment in training, especially through foreign study, the picture regarding student perception of the training and of 'the Other', along with actual professional translation highlights the fact that there is still some way to go before we can talk of a real 'transcultural turn' in practice.

We hear much about EU supported initiatives in education and training. In particular there is FREPA a Council of Europe 'Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures' (Daryai-Hansen & Schröder-Sura) and INCA, the "Intercultural Competence Assessment" suite of tools (Cano). From the business world we have a fusion of cultural dimensions with the Reiss Life motives (Konigorski), rhizomatic (rather than tree diagram thinking) embodied in the analogy with the Mobius strip (Hale); WorldWork's 'International Profiler' (IP) and International Preference indicator' (IPI) (Ewington & Hill) along with a more communication focussed enhancement (Spencer-Oatey and Stadler).

Areas of perception of cultural difference include a German-American study of Facebook (Reeves), the intercultural benefits of EU supported 'Applied Language Europe' (ALE) European university study exchange

(Morón-Martín) and the 'Mobility in Higher Education' project (Cano). With regard specifically to translation and transculturality there is a discussion on the use of corpora and travel insurance texts (Peruzzo and Durán-Muñoz) and a case study on the translation of film titles.

David Katan
Cinzia Spinzi

The Mobius Map for living and working in the Cultural intermezzo

Nikola Hale

Abstract

In this opinion piece, the author presents her current stage of thinking about inbetweenness in eight thoughts about the intercultural encounter, which she calls the “cultural intermezzo.” Firmly grounded in life from learning and educating on five continents over 35 years, she shares some insights to add to our growing field of perspectives on the intercultural encounter. The concept of “liminal space” as an essential part of intercultural learning and training is emphasized, as it provides a valuable stage for learning while crossing borders of many kinds. Our world today requires us to explore the specificities of the intercultural encounter with new approaches to organizing knowledge, allowing for multiple perspectives to crack the underlying cultural codes. Rather than taking mainly a tree-like knowledge structure to diagnose, analyze and support resolution of differences, we can possibly better serve our ever increasingly hybrid world with a matrix of the intercultural encounter. Ultimately, the author presents the Mobius Map as a metaphor for the way through the unpredictable terrain of the cultural intermezzo, with provocative questions for further investigation in our ever-developing field of interculturality.

1. Introduction

When I leave one cultural environment and begin to enter another, I find myself in a liminal space. Liminal, from the Latin, *limes*, for threshold, applies to those uncertain times in our lives when we stand on the threshold between the "old" which may no longer work and the "new" which is still ambiguous. Norris B. Johnson (2007:76) describes the ethnographic researcher as being in a liminal space, “separated from his/her old culture, yet not incorporated into the new culture.” This experience can apply to crossing borders, changing relationships, new jobs, or other philosophical questioning. The liminal space serves as the entry

into the new space which is created in intercultural encounters, which I call the “cultural intermezzo”. The transition period into the cultural intermezzo is a space and time of inbetweenness for exploration in intercultural learning and training.

This essay offers perspectives to add to our ongoing discussions about the intercultural encounter; a literature review of pertinent authors on the subject of interculturality is not the intention here, but rather providing food-for-thought for intercultural practitioners.

2. Living in liminality

Arnold Van Gennep described (1909:21) the stages of the coming-of-age rituals: separation, which includes a stripping of social status, the middle stage of transition, i.e., the liminal period, and reassimilation into the new society. The liminal period that Victor Turner (1969:95-97) explores in his focus on the middle stage of transition is one in which status and roles of those who find themselves here are not clearly defined. In line with the main theme of this journal, “inbetweenness”, this ambiguity, when crossing borders of any kind in a cultural encounter, offers great richness for co-creation. The very fact that we sojourners do not have a well-defined role in the society we enter gives us permission to create. We are still outsiders in the new setting, and yet begin to feel that the norms of the old environment no longer hold. A global artist, Sheila Hicks, writes on being an expatriate painter in Paris for over 50 years, “There’s an immense amount of freedom in being an outsider; you’re a heretic - it becomes a way of life.” (Camhi: 2011: AR26)

Some expatriates and other sojourners may thrive on the liberated role in the intercultural encounter, while for others, this ambiguity may lead to loss of balance. With good support we can enable our trainees to benefit from this transition phase. As Barbara Schaetti and Sheila Ramsey (2000) describe, “Living in liminality encourages complex, multiplicitic perspectives. The daily experiences persuade the actor to think in terms of “both/and” rather than “either/or”. One of the challenges in intercultural learning and training today is how to simulate the liminal space that border-crossers experience, in a safe and risk-free training environment so that the speed of events can be reduced and the subtle nuances which arise in intercultural encounters can be examined closely.

Similar to the breath pauses, or kumbhaka, which yoga teachers encourage practicing, between the inhale and exhale and between the exhale and inhale, the liminal space can provide a resting space between the known and unknown to gather energy and clarity before crossing completely into the cultural intermezzo. (From field notes on being in liminal space, April 2012) on site in the lesser Himalayas, living with Kshatriya mountain village people:

Do I love it here or do I hate it? We were waiting for weeks for some technical renderings of a water tank, the cost estimates for the project and the geological survey of the area. And every craftsman and technical person we contacted didn't answer or didn't have time or sent the wrong thing. Time was running short for submission of the detailed project report. As my planning mind-set and default nervousness about missing deadlines ultimately caught up with my patience and respect for diversity, I asked Rohit, one of the Indians I was working with, to call the contractor yet another time. He reminded me of the concept of "jugar". It's the Indian phenomenon of "make-shift", duct-tape, creatively using whatever is available in order to get the job done. And I thought, "oh yeah, particularistic, low uncertainty avoidance, relationship-oriented, yeah, I get it," until I realized how very intellectual my understanding was.

After I was treated to the chance to experience Indian jugar first-hand a number of times, I begin to observe the deep and unspoken trust involved in knowing that the people you have worked with for 12 years and known for 25, will help you out in a fix, even if it means driving three hours at night in the rain on unpaved curvy mountain roads with no railing along the cliffs, to bring you what you need, even if they didn't reply to the last five requests for progress on the project. And in the end, two days before I left and still not too late for submission, we got a handwritten cost estimate and a rough first rendering." And there I was, (JUGAR!) Thinking of the male German engineers I often meet in my intercultural training seminars, who are very good at planning and reliability and predictions, I could just imagine how frustrating this Jugar would be for them.

The consequences for intercultural training are that we need to be pushing our trainees out of their comfort zones, in order for them to feel their own liminality, and reflect on alternatives in such situations. The Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr (2005), said in his lecture on Sadness "...transformation almost always happens when you're inside of liminal space...the job of a good spiritual director [or intercultural trainer] is to

lead you to your threshold...encourage you not to be afraid of it...so that you can learn its lessons.”

3. The cultural intermezzo

The lessons we can learn in the cultural intermezzo, a mental, physical, emotional and psychological space that we enter in the intercultural encounter, can lead to smoother intercultural collaboration. I call this space the “cultural intermezzo” since it is like a musical intermezzo, a composition which fits between other longer pieces. For many of our trainees, this is what their intercultural encounters entail: short interactions outside their comfort zone of the known. And since many of us find ourselves in life-long cultural intermezzi, as expatriates or living and working with multicultural groups, it seems worthwhile to explore what is happening in this space.

The approach I propose, the Mobius Map, supports our learning in the cultural intermezzo, allowing for multiple perspectives and enhanced comprehension of what is said and is not said, what is done and is not done. Upon entering the cultural encounter, we find ourselves in that liminal space between old and new. The liminal space seems to present three major clusters of responses: reaction, pro-action and contemplation. The first group comprises comments showing strong reactions, resistance, difficulties, expression of deep alienation, frustration and powerlessness. Proactive responses appear in the second cluster, exemplified by heightened energy, a rise in adrenalin, impulses to solve the issue, rising to the challenge, mustering of strength, euphoria about the excitement of change. Contemplation is the key word in the third cluster, consisting of meta-level reflections, a bird’s-eye view before taking action, and the silent observation of the situation.

I am not suggesting that one of these clusters is preferable; all are natural human phenomena when confronted with diversity and change. The key is that all three combined can provide the healthy caution, balanced with the energetic movement and the Buddhist calm to learn how to successfully collaborate in the intercultural encounter. The intercultural trainer is charged with diagnosis of the weighting of these three tendencies among their trainees and designing training tools which help them to create a healthy balance.

On the threshold to the cultural intermezzo, I find myself outside the

comfort zones I have developed through life's lessons. I begin to realize that my default settings which inform how I usually react or communicate are not always appropriate or even useful here in this new space. Being on the edge can be exciting or scary, energizing or draining or somewhere inbetween. Whatever being on this edge does for me, with me, and to me, it creates a heightened sense of self. Could it be that we interculturalists who find that liminality is often wonderful, exciting, sexy or rejuvenating, do not take our trainees' anxiety, anger or a sense of powerlessness seriously enough? Are we designing learning sessions for our trainees based on what WE need in these situations or on what THEY need?

Our students and managers are so focused on appearing interculturally competent, cosmopolitan, tough, having endurance and being able to cross borders, that they may not have an access to a venue for examining deeper feelings about the intercultural encounter. In some organizations it is not acceptable to admit fear or concern or not knowing the right solution. While this classic quote from the Zen master, Suzuki Shunryu has often been cited, it is time for it to become a mantra in the intercultural training of open-mindedness and curiosity. "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities. In the expert's mind there are few." (Suzuki, 1973:21)

How can we as trainers re-capture and maintain this beginner's mind? I propose that we also need to push ourselves outside of our expert trainer/consultant mindset and comfort zone regularly to feel again the rawness of being on the edge. Yet another flight to yet another country to hold yet another training seminar, even if the group of learners is new for us, does not fulfill this requirement—it means doing something completely different as a beginner. How often do you do something you are not already good at? (From personal field notes on the cultural intermezzo, May 2012) on project in India, going to a wedding with Dilbar and Negi-ji)

So, today is an auspicious day for sathi (the wedding ceremony), riding with Arjun, the driver, and Dilbar and Negi-ji from our place to Debra Dun, supposedly two and half hours by car. Here we are in the Wild West Indian traffic. I read an editorial in the Times of India about how the Indian driving style is a metaphor for Indian society these days. If you wait for the next guy to go first, you will never make it forward. Don't ever stand still and don't look at the other drivers, just grab the gap.

This ride is taking forever...first we didn't leave at 3:00 as Dilbar had originally said, but actually it became 4:00, well no, 5:00, oh no, not til 5:30. And now me in my planning mode: When will we be there? Are we late for the wedding? Will there still be time for mehndi (hand painting)? Why are we going to the hotel first? I am already dressed for the wedding and my scarf keeps falling off my shoulders. How will I find a toilet at a wedding with 800 people? (Nupur, Robit's wife, just recommended, "don't drink anything." And I am thinking, for six hours?)

Taking my deep breath and looking out the window at the elephant crossing signs, I realized that I was not letting go. Where was the non-attachment my meditation teacher talks about? We finally arrive at the hotel and Dilbar starts having a loud argument in Hindi with the clerk about something. And you know what? I recognize that I can embrace this ambiguity! I don't need to know exactly what's going on. Jugar, it will work out. And he will resolve the problem. And all I have to do is sit down and read and stay loose so that I am not "wasting time waiting", I am being here now. I must admit, my secret little default setting is wondering (was only one room reserved instead of two? Or was the price on the phone different from now?) No idea, but, let's just sit. Oh, here's Dilbar, case closed,"chalo". ("let's go" in Hindi)

What happened in this intermezzo? How could ambiguity become accepted? And how do we design training elements which simulate this situation?

A yogi writes in her blog (Bui: 2012, n.pag.), "resting in kumbhaka allowed me to see firsthand that...the inhale, pause and exhale were all essential components of breathing. When I acknowledged and accepted this, the different parts of my breath began to work more harmoniously together." Can we transfer these effects of the breath retention and alignment from yoga to the centeredness required in the cultural intermezzo to stay true to ourselves and yet flexible enough to adapt when necessary? (From field notes on the allowing yourself the contemplation which the liminal space can provide, April, 2012) in Pauri, 2,600 meters above sea level, upper Pauri Garwahli mountains).

The power outage meant we needed to use candles and solar lamps. The cook, Gopi, carefully washed the organic vegetables with bottled water for me. As I set the table for him and the driver and another staff member and Dilbar, the manager, and me, Gopi looked at me strangely. What was I doing wrong

again? I wondered. When it was time for us to eat, only Dilbar sat at the table with me to eat from the porcelain plates: he with his hand and me with a spoon. The others squat on the floor with their metal plates, eating with their hands in the unlit kitchen. Then I understood, "so it is, it is so". "There was nothing to change, no dilemma for the Indians and mine had now been resolved, without words.

4. Approaches towards intercultural training

The development of tools for intercultural training has a history from even before the oft-cited Peace Corps and Canadian Foreign Service programs in the 1960's up until the post-modern cutting edge insights now being introduced. A long-felt need among interculturalists is, "where do we go from here?", after we have looked at the empirical descriptive research of Hofstede (1984), Trompenaars (1993), House *et al* (2004), and have introduced the European and Anglo-American models for negotiation, mediation or conflict escalation.

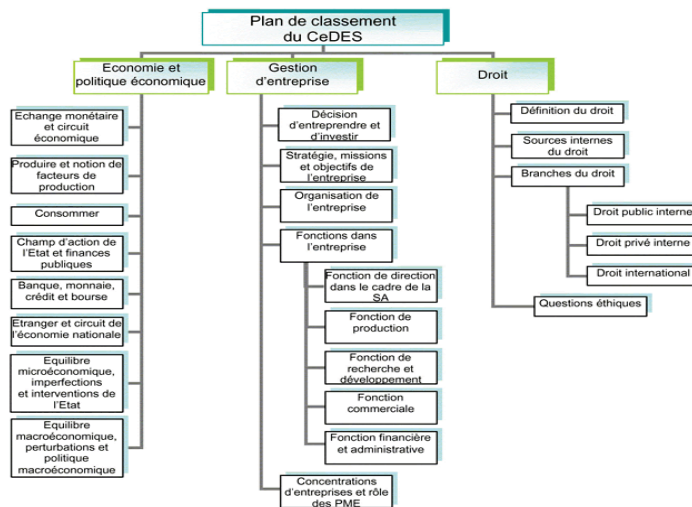
Certain basic aspects need to be examined, however, before setting off on this path towards intercultural training, namely, which approach do we take? Literature and pressure from industry to derive a method could induce us to take a competencies approach, namely an accumulation of the abilities and skills a "global player" needs to have at his/her disposal upon entering the cross-cultural encounter. Here the intention is to create the "ideal profile" of a successful global player, based on social competencies and a roster of attitudes, behaviours and meta-skills leading towards the disposition of intercultural competence. Another path of inquiry could lead us to the model approach, assuming that any "reasonable" and ethnorelatively sensitive person could learn a model or models for negotiation or conflict resolution and then apply this in the intercultural encounter.

Attempts in European business schools, e.g. at many of the universities of applied sciences in Germany and northern Europe, to train students in the various aspects of intercultural communication and management have addressed issues mainly on the cognitive and sometimes affective level, assuming that the international experience alone would lead to intercultural competence. Subsequently, the students became more sensitive to cultural differences, more aware of their own cultural programming and more knowledgeable about the hidden cultural

dimensions. However, the essential behavioral step towards gaining intercultural competence was missing: how to not only analyze and diagnose but also collaborate with people with default settings different from mine?

This essay aims to address this issue: how can we combine cognitive styles of organizing knowledge with heartfelt first-hand experience to support our trainees' learning to move freely and creatively without fear in their intercultural encounters?

5. Organizing knowledge using arborescent paradigms



Organization of knowledge in the field of intercultural communication has partially been regulated and developed by experts of definition, categorization and canonization. Going back to the concept of experts and beginners, consider what James Banks wrote, "...experts are identified by comparing their assertions to the canon of accepted thought" (1993: 6-7). In a genealogy of knowledge, information is vertically positioned in a binary structure for organization; each piece of knowledge has its own place and territory and is closely connected to its predecessors and successors in a static location. This is the classic form of knowledge management in a world with the illusion of static stability.

Where can we find the inspiration for knowledge in an instable world?

As serendipity would have it, an art exhibition which played with the concept of rhizomes from French philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1976, 1987), provided the inspiration. In their introductory manuscript, *Rhizom*, published in German, they delineated two ways of looking at reality. These can inform new approaches to intercultural knowledge management in a dynamic unstable world. First, they describe a tree-like structure, or *arborescence*, which denotes organizing knowledge with progress in one direction, and with continuous binary divisions, and with no horizontal connections. Next, they elaborate on a rhizomatic or networked connection of information which is non-hierarchical and dynamic.

At training seminars for German engineers at Siemens in the early 90's, we saw how very accessible Hofstedian scores were for these learners. This empirical research, presented in an arborescent manner, had the advantage of being clean-cut, defined, and measurable. A binary tree-like categorization, such as is found in typologies of the species, carries a



plausible logic, which allocates one unique place to each item in a hierarchical structure. I have a not-so-secret hunch that for those of us reared in the European-Christian parts of the world (who prefer order in the universe to be able to sleep at night, with our Hofstedian scores and tidy labels of competency lists), this is a comforting way to describe culture. As Alexander von Humboldt (1833) wrote, "All scholarly work is nothing more than continually putting new information into generally accepted rules". If this is the organization of knowledge which fits our default setting, then arborescence orders our complex universe in a comforting manner.

One of my favorite illustrations of our love of order is the work of the Swiss photographer Ursus Wehrli, in which he takes artworks or photos of mundane objects or situations and "cleans them up." In one famous piece he takes Van Gogh's bedroom, and then displays the same room tidied up with everything stashed on and beneath the bed.

6. Cultural marginals

How can we organize knowledge for people who live and work outside of the group in which they grew up in? Janet and Milton Bennett (1993: 113) have defined cultural marginality as “a cultural lifestyle at the edges where two or more cultures meet.” Cultural marginals include “refugees and immigrants, global nomads, third culture kids and long-term adult sojourners in other cultures”. In my own travel journals I write about “crossing borders, crossing souls”. I have been tracing my own marginality since I was about six, trying to find narratives about this cultural marginality such as those Eva Hofmann (1989: 210) so elegantly poses, “My [foreign] friends and I are forced to engage in an experiment that is relatively rare; we want to enter into the very textures, the motions and flavors of each other’s vastly different subjectivities—and that requires feats of sympathy and even imagination in excess of either benign indifference or a remote respect”. Hofmann’s descriptions of the ambiguity in the intercultural encounters she has, as an émigré from Cracow to Canada, provide a first-person narrative of the liminality experience.

Do we all need order? Can we live with ambiguity? What about those of us, through incident or upbringing or both, who have lost the illusion of order or never really needed it? Can we at times in our lives achieve the magic zone which F. Scott Fitzgerald ([1931]1993: 69) described?

... let me make a general observation – the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

This could be paraphrased as, the sign of a first-rate intercultural competence is the ability to accept the validity of multiple perspectives, “and still retain the ability to function.” While it may be difficult for trainees with a monotheistic, universalistic orientation to accept the tenability of two “truths”, it is exactly this flexibility which is required to crack the cultural codes in the cultural intermezzo. Being able to accept the logic of “both / and” is difficult if our trainees have not lived, loved and worked outside the society of their primary socialization.

As you cross the borders in your life stages, life roles, career switches, do you also ask yourself, what *is* my default setting? Can I have more than one? However deeply I go into decoding my adopted cultures, will I always hit upon nuances which throw me off center? Was being a cultural

marginal a valuable precondition to becoming a sensitive intercultural trainer?

Is the increased cultural sensitivity a strength which enables us to decode, describe and sometimes even explain what is happening in the cultural intermezzo to others, and simultaneously, a weak point in our own ability to persevere and stay aligned due to our extreme adaptability? If our trainees are not cut from the same fabric, will their resistance to adaptation be even stronger in the face of misunderstanding and will this in the end be an asset of resilience or a drawback for them?

Do we tend to train participants to be like us in the cultural intermezzo? Do we prefer trainees like us? Is it easier for trainees whose cognitive style is like ours to learn from us? How can we interculturalists expand our own repertoire of training styles to reach different kinds of learners?

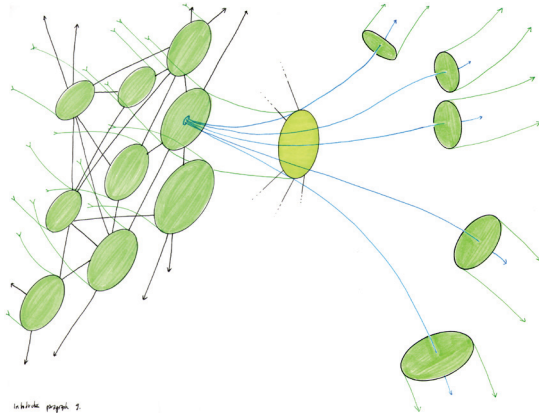
7. Organizing knowledge using rhizomatic perspectives

The increasingly transitory nature of human interactions today means that arborescent paradigms are no longer sufficient or adequate in decoding the cultural intermezzo. Our trainees' behaviors and value systems cannot be reduced to their passports, as they are often cultural marginals themselves. In addition, the phenomenon of accelerated globalization shifts the requirements in intercultural learning and training. The speed, density and complexity of communication and information exchange today all mean that in post-modern thinking, we need to focus on the process of negotiating meaning real-time in the cultural intermezzo, and no longer trying to teach safe categories of predictable behaviors. As Stephen Best (2012) explains, we need to attend to "the social process whereby people communicate meanings, make sense of their world, construct their identities, and define their beliefs and values". (Rather than taking a tree-like knowledge structure to diagnose, analyze and support resolution of differences, we can better serve our ever increasingly hybrid world of transculturality with a multi-dimensional networked matrix of the intercultural encounter. This matrix, the rhizomatic representation, can be used for intercultural training to meet what has been called "postmodern challenges to the Western rationalist universalist paradigm." (Berry and Siegel, 2000:143).

Sami Nair (2010: 5) writes that globalization forces us to ask ourselves, "Who am I". He affirms that we all have multiple identities and that

modern universality is a mestizo humanism. The new era, he claims, does not mean the falling away of the nation nor the disappearance of the state but rather that the new Europe is mestizo. This brings me to a budding vision of a 360-degree, flexible and interwoven mesh of skills and strategies, which I would like to call a rhizomatic perspective.

A diagram of the rhizomatic approach, Used with permission of Marc Ngui, 1987



Deleuze and Guattari describe the basic principles of a rhizome which can be adapted as a valuable metaphor to the intercultural field in this era of hybridity, mestizization and composite identities. They describe a rhizome as a contrast to a root-tree arborescent system which

looks at cause and effect in a linear and chronological manner. A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, an intermezzo.” (1987: 27) One of Deleuze and Guattari’s basic tenets about the rhizome, “Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other point” (1980:7), is obvious in our social media-matrixed world and in how relationships and consequences of actions are felt globally within short intervals. This implies that if knowledge is connected in a rhizomatic manner, then there are connections to be found which we would not have previously predicted. When we are in a liminal space, two things can be true simultaneously. Taking the example of so-called “facilitated payments”, I can claim that both “corruption is good” and “corruption is bad” are true in certain situations. I dislike corruption and yet, in some countries, I will pay what is necessary to secure the building permit I need. While I do not want to reinforce this kind of behavior and believe we should boycott such payments to serve as a model to others, I have to be able to sleep at night. And I can’t sleep at night, thinking about the negative consequences to my employees’ and my family’s ability to earn a living, if we don’t get the building permit to protect my property.

So now the question remains, how can we crack the cultural codes in the intermezzo using the concepts of arborescent and rhizomatic perspectives?

8. The Mobius Map

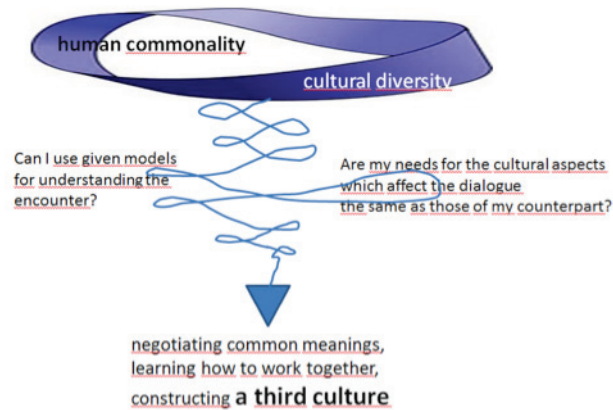
I like maps. But I like the territory more. However, I don't always have the chance or time to experience all those territories myself. A well-known ashtanga master Richard Freeman (2003), is one of many authors who have differentiated between a map and the territory in that the map is a symbolic and artificially created static aid in understanding and navigating through the dynamic and rich territory. The map is not a substitute for reality; without it we would be lost, but with it, we can only predict conditions which may occur. We might miss out on the richness of the territory without certain landmarks and symbols, but cannot experience all of the richness of reality without the actual experience of it.

So, too, can we create a Mobius Map as a metaphor for the path through the "rough terrain" (LeBaron, 2006: 7) of the intercultural encounter. The Mobius Map is an approach for dealing with more than one perspective. First, this approach takes the arborescent, or tree-like categorizations as a valid way of organizing and understanding reality, while also encouraging us to consider the rhizomatic, or matrix of connections we experience today. Second, the Mobius Map provides a suggestion for dealing with the human commonality we all share and the cultural variations we may prefer.

The name of this map comes from the mathematical figure, a Mobius strip, discovered by Ferdinand Möbius and another mathematician working in the same period. According to Weisstein (n.d.), you can make a Mobius strip by "cutting a closed band into a single strip, giving one of the two ends a half twist, and then reattaching the two ends". What is amazing, at least for my mathematician friends, about a Mobius strip is not only the fact that that it has only one side, but also that it is a surface with one boundary. But the mathematical complexity is not why I chose this metaphor - I took it for its beauty. It is reassuring in the way you arrive back at the place you started at, and yet, exciting with its roller coaster ride, up and down, in and out. This endless surface inspires me to breathe in my cultural intermezzo, since, regardless of how ambiguous things may seem,

the Möbius strip reminds me of the non-duality of the encounter, i.e., that there is no defined right or wrong.

the **Möbius Map** * for the cultural intermezzo



The two curves of the Möbius strip illustrate the flowing and interconnected process of attempting to understand the impact of culture on communication today. This path visualizes the movement along a Möbius strip from one tendency, seeing human commonality and assuming that universals will prevail in interpersonal communication, to the other extreme, seeing everything in terms of cultural differences and thus a need for culture-specific solutions at every step of the interpersonal communication event. The Möbius Map provides us with a perspective which can serve as a dynamic filter for the intercultural encounter, encouraging the actor to continually move fluidly along the Möbius Map of possible variations, staying on path towards collaboration, with a mindfulness which supports the discovery process.

The way to collaboration in the cultural intermezzo is not the oft-cited best of both worlds or a bridge across cultural differences, but rather, a light-footed dance along the path of both universality and particularism. The Map is not a model but rather an approach. As we move through the Map, the parties involved need to be light enough on their toes to alternate between the perspectives of human commonality and cultural diversity in a dynamic manner.

In attempting to apply the Mobius Map to a concrete example, it must be emphasized here that ultimately, how it will be applied will depend on the applicants and the situation, and the process will never be reproducible. The very nature of the rhizomatic questioning process means that any results will rely on the input, which will differ across time, space and people.

Take any critical incident or repeated occurrence in an intercultural encounter, in which the parties involved are not collaborating successfully. For example, if a group of U.S. American and German businesspeople are negotiating on what “fair trade” means in production of textiles. In the first stage, the model asks, can we use given models of communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, *et al.*, for understanding what is happening in the intercultural encounter or conflict? If the given model works for both cultural groups, due to perhaps similar orientations towards conflict management, then we can proceed with just that model we have chosen.

Let us look at the Harvard Negotiation model of principled negotiation as a model. The businesspeople mentioned above may find that this model needs to be tweaked a bit, but it is, for all intents and purposes, culturally acceptable. True, the definitions or connotations of what objective criteria for decision-making are may differ, but the parties involved could accept the model as a structure for their intercultural conflict management process. Proof that the model is accepted in these two groups is its high acceptance as a book. In English entitled “Getting to Yes” (Fisher and Ury, 1981) and in German, “Das Harvard-Konzept: Sachgerecht verhandeln - erfolgreich verhandeln” (ibid, 2000), it is a management best-seller and often used in Executive MBA courses in these countries. I am not claiming it works, just that its theories enjoy high acceptance.

However, as is most often the case, if there are culturally-imprinted reasons for the inadequacy of the model for one or both parties, then we need to ask the next question. Are our own needs for the culturally-impacted aspects which affect the dialogue the same as those of our counterpart?

Take a negotiation in a similar situation discussing fair trade in textile production between Germans and Hindu Indian businesspeople. Here we will see that adopting the Harvard Model necessitates so many adaptations that it is no longer recognizable. The Mobius Map now comes into play. The path weaves back and forth from one curve of the strip, where the landmarks of human commonality are proposed through a series of questions and issues. Simultaneously, on the other curve of the strip, an

on-going reality check is offered, to regularly ascertain whether needs are being met concerning culturally diverse expectations, norms and assumptions.

Some examples of the landmarks on the Mobius Map are questions pertaining to mindfulness such as: Who are the stakeholders involved? What is their relationship? Where should we meet? and other contextual elements. What kind of conflict are we seeing? What are acceptable variations for the parties involved concerning the approach to conflict, the communication modes, conflict styles and the competencies required to collaborate? Does the other party tend to avoid conflict or confront it head on?

The reality checks look at the hidden cultural dimensions which may or may not be at play in the specific incident at hand. Is it appropriate for the other party to discuss this topic in a larger group or should we save the topic for a private meeting later? Does *not* expressing gratitude mean rudeness or the existence of a closeness in the relationship which precludes showing thanks?

The term “cultural variability perspective” from Stella Ting-Toomey (2001: 27) gives us a concrete set of issues which fit into the Mobius Map approach by identifying some of the questions we need to ask when decoding the interactions in the cultural intermezzo. She examines how the parties in an intercultural conflict view the phenomenon of conflict, depending on certain criteria. Some of these aspects which aid in co-creation of a collaborative process include: how do the parties involved create their construal of self, their assumptions about conflict, tendencies towards an outcome-oriented vs. a process-oriented model of conflict, communication style preferences and face management skills, et al. Questions derived from Ting-Toomey’s work include, do the parties see themselves as dependent on or independent from the other? And, is the process important in resolving the conflict or mainly the result? (Ting-Toomey, 2002: 29, 33, 35)

If we adopt the concept of cultural variability as one of the key skills we need to be learning, and teaching, then perhaps a quote from an old master can serve as a reminder in a simple and powerful way. At a calligraphy exhibition outside of Xi’an, my Chinese colleague from our partner university translated a scroll we saw which read, “The wise man is like water; the kind man like a mountain.” (Confucius, VI.23.) This citation evokes for me an admonition to stay strong and true to your values, like a still and gentle old mountain and yet not waste energy by resisting

adversity, just flow around it on your path, like the water in a stream flows around a rock. It illustrates the bamboo and oak qualities we need to cultivate: the gentle strength of oak and the strong flexibility of bamboo, depending on where you come from.

The Mobius Map can provide exactly this strength and flexibility. It builds a framework to address the issues of human universality and those of cultural diversity, thus trying to resolve the formerly viewed tension of diametrically opposed propositions towards managing cultural diversity. The Mobius Map takes the trainees through a series of questions in non-linear order through the rough territory of working across borders, moving from the need to standardize or harmonize business tools, methods, appraisal and accounting systems and practices to the other side of the Mobius Map, taking the local cultural standards and “rules” or conventions into consideration, without losing sight of the business goals and the creation and maintenance of a harmonious relationship. As the players move forward through time, the Mobius Map enables them to negotiate common meanings, learn how to work together to construct a new way of collaboration and ultimately, find a balance between the needs and preferences of the parties involved.

8. Thoughts in process

The on-going thoughts in process include the following proposals which need further investigation:

1. For intercultural conflicts: cultural dilemmas or differences of any kind do not necessarily always have to be resolved. Any “resolution” can at best be a temporary agreement for the goals or needs at the moment. As in a relationship, we are constantly renegotiating our edges, limits and borders. The rhizomatic approach gives us new eyes to examine the cultural intermezzo. It may well be that what appears to be a conflict or problem to one party is simply a life lesson for the other party. By learning which questions to ask and which NOT to ask, we can discover how the other party prefers to be treated.
2. For intercultural training: just like the roots of a rhizomatic plant, such as ginger or bamboo or garlic, the possible combinations we may arrive at are endless, unpredictable and not defined by their starting points in our minds, nor by their endpoints, but by the intersecting interactions. This

means that the only cultural training which will serve in a sustainable manner in our hybrid world of composite identities is one which encourages creativity and flexibility and a fluid mapping process in decoding the cultural intermezzo.

3. For intercultural knowledge management: in contrast to our Humboldtian categorization of reality into unique and non-tangent pillars of knowledge, the rhizomatic representation is dynamic and fulfills the requirements for the social media matrix we live in today. This implies that geographic clustering of societies to predict behaviors is not only not helpful, but possibly a hindrance to the negotiation of meanings among the parties involved.

By alternating in a rhizomatic nature, yet still respecting the needs of some learners and educators for arborescent categorization and definition, we can learn how to decode the behaviors in the intercultural encounter, to build a healthy relationship for positive collaboration and to manage the issues which arise in the cultural intermezzo from a heightened sense of mindfulness.

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