A VERY SHORT, FAIRLY INTERESTING AND REASONABLY CHEAP BOOK ABOUT

CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT

JASMIN MAHADEVAN

◎SAGE

SAGE

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

The title for the 'Very Short, Fairly Interesting and
Reasonably Cheap Book about...Series' was devised
by Chris Grey. His book, *A Very Short, Fairly
Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about
Studying Organizations*, was the founding title of this
series.

Chris Grey asserts his right to be recognized as
founding editor of the 'Very Short, Fairly Interesting
and Reasonably Cheap Book about...Series'.

Diversity and identity

The previous chapters introduced the cultural, the comparative cross-cultural and the intercultural interactionist perspective as three complementary sides of the CCM triangle. The rationale behind this approach was the assumption that any successful CCM practice needs to meet three minimum requirements (which inform each other): becoming aware of what culture involves (Chapter 1), examining relative differences and similarities across cultures and the limitations of one's own cultural perspective (Chapter 2), and moving beyond perceptions of difference and towards synergies in interpersonal interactions (Chapter 3). The latter involves individual knowledge, skills, behaviour and motivation, as well as reflexive interactions, and the investigation and experience of culture in context. The concept of intercultural competence (Chapter 3) proposes that it enables individuals to 'see more' when interacting (as does the idea of an ethnographic frame of mind); it is yet another tool for the cultural detective.

Solving cultural puzzles also involves questioning previously held beliefs or holding multiple perspectives in mind, either simultaneously or one after the other. To this end, the present chapter challenges the assumption that national and societal cultural differences are the ones that matter for CCM. It investigates diversity and alternative collective identities ('who we are in relation to others'), within and beyond perceived cultural borders, and as related to power effects.

The key themes of this chapter are multiple cultures and alternative group-related identifications (such as professional and organizational cultures, or social class), critical diversity markers (such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.), majority–minority relations, and identity beyond presumed cultural borders (e.g. hybrid or bicultural identities). Most concepts originate from sociology, anthropology and diversity studies and are not normally part of a CCM text (but should be, due to reasons which will be discussed). To develop these concepts into a critical CCM tool, I have combined them with the postmodern technique of 'deconstruction' (Derrida, 1978) to form what I would like to call the 'critical multiple cultures perspective'.

Acknowledging this perspective might enable us to overcome three implicit dangers of CCM theory and practice, namely overstating the

importance of national/societal cultural differences, exaggerating (macro-) cultural homogeneity and regularity, and assuming that inter-cultural interactions are power-free. All issues manifest themselves in the intercultural training business, which is the reason why my argu-ment departs from this context. This example also provides a link to the previous chapter.

Insights from the intercultural training business

Intercultural training refers to a preparatory, often group-focused course of about one to two days on a specific topic. Courses can be broadly differentiated into 'doing business in [a specific country]' and general 'cultural awareness/intercultural communication'. Their pur-pose, or at least their unique selling proposition, is to 'make' individuals interculturally competent, either in general or as related to a specific business culture or CCM task.

Intercultural training promotes methods such as role play, so-called critical incidents (specific situations and misunderstandings from which wider cultural learning can be derived, e.g. Thomas, Kinast and Schroll-Machl, 2003a, 2003b), case studies and simulations over or in addition to a facts-oriented transmission of knowledge and language training (Pusch, 2004: 15). The underlying assumption is that interactional and experiential learning – learning that involves behaviour and emotions beyond cognition – might be the closest one can come to actual inter-cultural experience. Implicit to the idea of simulating actual experience with other methods is the understanding that the recipients of intercul-tural training lack prior intercultural experiences. Following this understanding, the focus of intercultural training often lies on *preparing* for another culture.

Intercultural training is also a 'hands-on' field: its practical concepts and methods for cultural preparation 'emerged from experience and [were] built on practical application', rather than 'from abstract intel-lectual inquiry' (Pusch, 2004: 15). Training material often speaks of culture in terms of metaphors, such as 'culture as an onion' (Geert Hofstede), 'culture as an iceberg' (Edward T. Hall), or 'we relate to cul-ture like fish to the water' (Fons Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner). This can be considered an attempt to make culture as intuitive and comprehensible as possible for those trained.

Corporate intercultural training activities, particularly those in mul-tinational corporations, take place in an 'intercultural training triangle' which involves three distinct groups (Mahadevan and Mayer, 2012).

These are those to be trained; the corporate Human Resource (HR) department commissioning, selecting and evaluating specific trainers and training activities; and external intercultural trainers, the 'Interculturalists' (Dahlén, 1997). In their interactions, we can observe how market pressures encourage the belief in national cultural differences and their negative consequences, and a focus on standardized intercultural training tools. This example also allows us to identify multiple cultures and to understand how perceptions of difference are related to divergent identity-related interests and motivations.

The need to buy and sell standardized cross-national cultural differences

Intercultural training is not a formalized professional field, despite trainers in many countries being loosely connected to SIETAR (the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research). Due to this lack of formal requirements, HR managers (who might not be well versed in intercultural theory themselves) face a 'buying problem': who shall they choose to deliver an intercultural training, what are the criteria for selection, and how can they evaluate the success of an intercultural training activity?

Market pressures play a role, and the more you can pack into one or two days of training, the better it might seem. When working as an intercultural trainer, I heard HR managers say things such as 'we only have one day, there are 25 people to be trained, and we need cultural awareness and how to do business in India, China, Russia and the Middle East', accompanied by a 'yes, we know, this is not ideal, but this is the only thing we could get HR money for … '.

This reminds us that intercultural training is a *business* with market pressures and the 'need to sell' or 'buy' national cultural difference. It might say less about what intercultural trainers and HR managers *really* wish to train – or whether they even prefer intercultural training over other methods[1] – and more about what the external and internal market, as structured via the intercultural training triangle, deems to be cost-efficient and cost-effective.

As a result, interculturalists (who need a job, after all) need to make the impossible possible, and this inevitably leads to standardized comparative tools, such a cultural dimensions or Kulturstandards (culture standards; see Chapter 2). According to Swedish anthropologist Tommy Dahlén (1997), the bestselling strategy might be the one that stresses the existence and negative impact of national cultural differences ('country xyz is *so* different that your project will fail without an intercultural

training session'). This way, the interculturalist affirms her/his position as the (only) expert to overcome national cultural difference ('but *I* know exactly what your employees need').

To simplify selection, and to standardize training execution and evaluation, HR managers, particularly those in larger companies, might also choose intercultural training agencies (who represent numerous trainers) over individual freelance interculturalists (who are often 'country experts'). This again strengthens the need for a measurable and standardized content across all the training activities provided by an intercultural training agency.

HR also has to convince corporate leaders, the internal cost-accounting department, and sometimes those to be trained, that their investment in intercultural training is justified. This means that HR, too, has to sell 'negative cross-national cultural differences' internally to support their claim. In order to do so, HR managers (who are not the intercultural experts themselves) might rely on the interculturalists' input, which is passed on to those making corporate decisions on intercultural training activities. All these aspects further affirm the need to 'buy' or 'sell' standardized, negative, cross-national cultural differences.

Multiple cultures and identity-related perceptions of negative difference

Often those to be trained are not the ones making the decision about who is going to train them and how, as this is the intermediate HR department's expertise. At this point, multiple cultures and perceptions of negative difference intersect.

For example, in the case of engineers or engineering-management to be trained, HR often assumes these professions are 'less socially competent' than management. In the words of an HR manager (Mahadevan, 2011a: 92, 95): '[Engineers] simply don't have enough social skills … You can't even have a structured meeting with these people [the engineers]! How are we supposed to teach them advanced intercultural competency!'

So is this negative perception an objective fact or an etic perspective which fails to grasp emic meanings? Engineering is a social activity after all, so there *must* be an 'engineering way' of expressing and recognizing 'social skills'.

It might also be that the engineering department to be interculturally trained rejects the need for such a training based on the firm belief that national cultural differences do not exist or at least do not play a role in global engineering (Mahadevan, 2011a, 2012a). So how should HR

or an external interculturalist react to this statement? Both might take it as proof of a lack of intercultural competence. This interpretation might even contribute positively to HR managers' or the interculturalists' self-image: their perceived usefulness, their image of self, and their corporate legitimacy might depend on it. This reminds us that HR managers and interculturalists have a *need* and a *motivation* for national cultural differences to exist and to trump the alternative (emic) belief in global engineering which is specific to an engineering professional culture.

Still, the emic perspective of a global engineering community also seems plausible: the fundamentals of science are independent of culture (concepts such as gravity are not culture-specific, and Newton's apple falls down in every culture). Managing technology might indeed be less culturally-relative (in the comparative cross-cultural sense) than managing people. Engineers are also united by theories, practices and methods that are unique to their community of practice (see Chapter 1), and when interacting interculturally in specific contexts they rely on specialized knowledge which outsiders, such as HR management or intercultural trainers, do not possess. So how can we be sure that national cultural difference outweighs all other 'ways of doing things'? If intercultural competence is at least partly context-related (as we must assume), then it might well be that HR managers and interculturalists do *not* know what kind of intercultural competencies are required in engineering (Mahadevan and Mayer, 2012). So are national cultural differences *really* the most relevant to this context? Maybe engineering and managerial cultures are the most relevant categories to be considered? Maybe the interculturalists as organizational outsiders are the cultural aliens?

On the other hand, engineers, too, might pursue their own identity- and status-related interests and *make* certain engineers different if it suits their purposes. For instance, I have also experienced that some established headquarter engineers perceived new (and less labour-cost intensive) offshore site engineers as less competent in order to defend themselves from being laid off (Mahadevan, 2011a). Those afraid of losing their jobs found proof for this perspective, which they communicated to higher management, in the intercultural training selected by HR and provided by an intercultural trainer (for instance, the presumed polychronic nature of an Indian working style was presented as proof of why Indian engineers were unable to meet schedule requirements). Those who felt secure perceived Indian engineers as 'engineers, too', who were no different from any other member of a global community of practice. This suggests that perceptions of difference are also related to people's own identity fears. At the same time, national cultural differences *do* exist – but what is their impact on the individual in context?

So which belief should HRM and intercultural trainers affirm in such a situation – global engineering or national cultural differences?

Majority–minority relations play their role as well. In the previously discussed company, all but one of the engineering managers (and most engineers) were male, and in the internal 'downsizing war' female off-shore engineers were often worse off than male offshore engineers, as the male majority across both sites tended to unconsciously devalue female competencies to secure their own jobs. At the same time, females at the headquarters were often better off than those at the offshore site (Mahadevan, 2015a).

This suggests that the intercultural training triangle – presumably like many or most CCM contexts – is also an arena for power and identity struggles. These mechanisms are linked to conflicting identity needs and motivations, to majority–minority relations, and to the general pressures of a profit-oriented environment.

Multiple cultures and collective identities

The previous example highlights the interplay between multiple cultures, such as national, organizational, departmental, professional, site cultures, and many more. When I speak of a 'multiple cultures perspective' in this book, I refer to an approach that acknowledges the possibility that *any* of these cultures might be the most relevant marker of difference in a complex context (not only national or societal culture).

CCM scholars take different positions in this debate. Some (e.g. McSweeney, 2009) focus on how nations are internally heterogeneous and culturally diverse; they critique the sole focus on national cultures. Others find political national cultures (Chevrier, 2009; d'Iribarne, 2009) or national cultural values (Minkov and Hofstede, 2012) to be fairly homogeneous, even in global management, or in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nations.

A critical CCM requires us to juggle and combine both assumptions when studying or experiencing cultural differences. For example, we might need to interpret organizational cultures independent of nationality (Witte, 2012), while still entertaining the possibility of dominant cross-national differences, for instance, as related to corporate values (d'Iribarne, 2012) or managerial learning styles (Barmeyer, 2004). It is via this paradox that our sense of 'who we are in relation to others' – our identities – emerges.

Identity describes a concept of self which seems 'fixed' but changes over time (e.g. Weedon, 2004; Lawler, 2008; Jackson II and Hogg, 2010).

It requires both identification and recognition (S. Hall, 1990), both of which are ongoing, interlinked processes of relating oneself to others. For instance, when considering what it takes to be 'British', individuals not only relate to familiar ideas about national belonging, they also recognize others as belonging within this category or not (S. Hall, 1990).

Identity is defined in relation to others, particularly in relation to 'who one is not' (Weedon, 2004: 19). It emerges as a two-way process, namely via ascriptions made by others ('who others think you are') and processes of self-referencing ('who you yourself think you are'). Researchers therefore speak of 'social identity' (Lawler, 2008) or 'collective identity' (Baumann, 1996). This implies that humans do not *have* an identity in the sense of a self-sufficient, autonomous self or a process which occurs solely *within* the individual, but that we all *learn* identity through others. For example, we are familiar with our specific national identities and the requirements of how to express them.

We could even assume that collective identities (understood as 'who I am in relation to others') and culture are one and the same, and you might try this hypothesis out by substituting 'culture' with 'collective identity' for every argument so far. Those arguments related to meaning, knowledge, habitus, etc. – the fluid, interpretative, contextualized and changing facets of culture – might still hold true. However, arguments related to social structure, laws and regulations might not. At the end of the day, the world *is* clustered into nation states which are intertwined with supra-national institutions and spheres of regional and global economic integration, and it is these units that provide the frameworks for today's socio-economic, judicial and political structures (Cairns and Śliwa, 2008). For instance, national legal systems are only seldom subject to negotiation, and it therefore seems appropriate to investigate their cultural roots with macro-level tools, such as cultural dimensions or Kulturstandards (culture standards; see Chapter 2).

We could now say that collective identities cover subjective culture but do not cover every aspect of objective culture (see Chapter 3). This suggests that perceived sameness and differences across nations might have a structural (objective) and not an interpretative (subjective) root. Both should not be confused, as often happens. For example, many textbooks ascribe differences in work attitude, working hours, social cooperation to some permanent 'cultural attitude' or 'collective value', and not to the simple fact that there might be certain work regulations and laws encouraging a certain type of behaviour within a particular national environment (Tipton, 2008). Objective roots and national frameworks might also explain why some studies still identify distinct national cultural values (Minkov and Hofstede, 2012) or a shared political national culture (Chevrier, 2009) in multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nations.

To integrate multiple cultures and group-related identifications, CCM scholar Sonja Sackmann (1997) put forward the notion of 'cultural complexity'. This perspective acknowledges that individuals are part of many cultures, such as organizational, professional and team-based cultures, and that structural factors such as function, tenure and hierarchical position influence the configurations of culture (Sackmann, 1997: 3). The cultural complexity perspective also assumes that individuals might switch between multiple context-specific cultural identities.

Our sense of identity and how we recognize others also tend to be linked to mechanisms of power. For instance, social identity theory suggests that individuals tend to value their own group over others (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), a tendency which is called an 'in-group bias'. In the previous intercultural training example, HR managers truly believe that they are the only ones who know 'how to have a structured meeting', which makes them more socially competent than engineers. New HR managers learn these HR-identity requirements and how to express them, and are consecutively recognized as 'HR managers' by others. On the other hand, engineers have other identity requirements to consider, for example, 'being rational' based on the principles of mathematics and science, which lie at the core of 'global engineering identity' (Mahadevan, 2012a).

We can also assume that whereas collective identities are viewed as complementary, others are thought of as being mutually exclusive (Lawler, 2008), and both aspects might differ across how individuals view themselves and how others perceive them. Complementary collective identities are 'stacked upon each other'; they do not pose 'identity problems' in our own eyes or the eyes of others. For instance, if you are a male engineer *and* a long-distance runner, both identity facets might contribute to a required 'habitus of endurance' in engineering (see Chapter 1): they don't pose an identity problem, neither in your own eyes nor in the eyes of others, which means that your self-referencing and ascriptions by others overlap. However, if you are a *female* engineer and a long-distance runner, matters are more complicated, as you are now part of a gender minority in engineering. So maybe in your own eyes these three identity facets fit together, but clash in the eyes of some fellow (male) engineers or managers. Perhaps your competencies are undervalued when jobs are scarce: ascriptions by others create an identity problem where there is none for you.

Mutually exclusive identities are viewed as binary opposites, either by ourselves or by others, or by both parties. They lead to perceptions of irreconcilable difference (the *whole* identity is perceived as *completely* different). For instance, a female engineer might not 'feel at home' among fellow male engineers and may perceive her being

female as opposite to her being an engineer. This constitutes an identity conflict on the level of self-referencing. Or fellow engineers might perceive a female engineer as a 'non-engineer' due to her gender. In this case, an identity conflict emerges from the ascriptions made by others. Last but not least, both mechanisms could come together.

Ascriptions by others are sometimes linked to their collective identity fears. Consequently, the process of 'finding out what we have in common' (identity negotiation) might be obstructed, and 'identity wars' (fights over the 'better' or 'the only true' identity) could follow. For instance, if an engineer practises religion in the office, fellow engineers might perceive this as a threat to the identity requirement of a 'rational engineering'. As a result, they might react negatively and violently towards any religious expression at work, stop interacting with those practising religion and demand that religious beliefs be separated from engineering work (Mahadevan, 2012a).

Critical diversity and the mechanisms of difference

The previous considerations suggest that identity and recognition are more than just processes of self-referencing and ascriptions by others: they are a power mechanism, by which some differences are given more weight than others, and are used for defending or affirming people's own collective identity and status. To investigate these power effects, I suggest that CCM learn from critical diversity studies (P. Prasad, Pringle and Konrad, 2006). This might bring about a 'critical multiple cultures approach' to CCM. My argument departs from a simple inter-action, namely a handshake, from which we will deduce implications for diversity, identity and multiple cultures.

The handshake or when difference matters

This is a story of difference, as once experienced by me (in this case, a native German of mixed ethnicity with an Indian surname). It highlights how the meanings ascribed to a small difference create large and mutually-exclusive categories of difference. Difference then becomes reality; it *matters*. This is how the story goes.

Throughout my corporate life in Germany, I have worked in companies or departments where 'shaking hands' was a formal ritual to be employed only during official customer visits or when meeting new

people or corporate outsiders. All of these organizations were somewhat 'young', cosmopolitan and sometimes highly technologized. What I had never encountered was entering the office in the mornings and doing a round of handshakes with everyone. This was something which I had only observed as an external consultant, mainly in small- and medium-sized German enterprises. To me, these companies seemed 'old', local and not high-tech, an etic perception which was obviously rooted in what seemed normal to me.

However, at a certain point in my life, I (again, a native German of mixed ethnicity with an Indian surname) became part of such a corporate culture myself and did not shake hands routinely in the mornings with everyone. Most of the time, I just forgot about this norm (which was not mine) and shouted an informal 'hi' or 'morning' to everyone present, as seemed appropriate to me. In retrospect, I reckon that it just did not occur to me to approach those working at their desks explicitly and individually, and – as it would seem to me – to 'force' them to stop what they were doing and shake hands. Even after I had become aware that this was the expected norm, it still felt like a strange, overly formal signal – it was just not 'me'.

You could now say that this is a simple thing: people have just learned slightly different ways of greeting each other at work, they will get over it, and that's that.

However, as it turned out, some of my colleagues began wondering about this new colleague of theirs (me). Questions circulated the office: 'maybe, it has something to do with her being an "Indian woman"?', some speculated. 'Maybe, it is a religious thing', others asked themselves. Around this time, I once entered the offices wearing an Indian-style embroidered shirt, and a few weeks thereafter, another colleague who hadn't been present that day told me that she had been told that 'Ms. so-and-so' (me again) 'is wearing a sari at work'. The sari is a female dress of South Asia consisting of a blouse and several yards of cloth draped around the body. My ethnic shirt was far from it, but also not too close to my mainly male co-workers' business-shirt-and-suit either.

After a few months, I had become a somewhat familiar face at the office. Still, one senior male colleague continued performing the following ritual on meeting me in bi-monthly formal project-team meetings. First, he would initiate a handshake, and then shy away in mock apology and say, 'oh, I am so sorry, I forgot that you don't shake hands'. After a few months of this play, I had become so annoyed by the whole thing that I made it a point *never* to shake hands with this colleague, and others would look on in wonder at our performance.

What might this example tell us about difference in CCM? First, it shows how processes of self-referencing and ascriptions made by others might diverge and create overwhelmingly different, mutually exclusive identities. The factual starting point is a small difference, namely slightly different interpretations of when and how to shake hands which originates from minor differences in regional, industrial, corporate, generational and potentially gender-related cultures within a single country: a difference that emerged from the normalities of social life. At this point, it could either have been unnoticed, or most likely, meaning would have been negotiated and somehow those involved would have become accustomed to each other. However, because this small phenomenon is exaggerated and ascribed to large markers of difference – societal culture, religion, etc. – it does not simply 'vanish' and instead becomes noteworthy. The handshake was *not* a big cultural rite at this company or an important symbol by which to express culture. It *became* big in the eyes of some and towards some, and those involved *made* it big.

After this process has started, other equally small cultural phenomena, such as a slightly ethnic choice of female dress, are interpreted as proof of this inflated, seemingly 'factual' difference. Over the course of time, strong feelings become attached to the symbol of the handshake. At a certain point and for some individuals, difference is not only a reality of life but becomes insurmountable and is made an object of a frontstage cultural 'play' (Goffman, 1959; see Chapter 1). This play involves performances of dominance (the male co-worker) and resistance (the new female employee); it reminds us that the relations of power, the meanings of difference and cultural contexts, are intertwined – a key point in the next chapter.

The handshake example suggests that specific contexts are shaped not only by perceptions of difference, but also by what perceptions of sameness and difference *mean* from the perspective of those involved, and which origins and categories perceived difference and sameness are ascribed to. This process emerges within specific boundary conditions and is at least partly open to negotiation. In the 'handshake example', I could either have been a young, cosmopolitan, female, German co-worker used to an informal corporate culture, or an 'Indian woman' who is somewhat 'religious'. The interpretative decision of others regarding this question will influence 'how I am perceived' in this context. This will influence my options of 'who I *can* be' and 'who I *want* to be'. Any negotiation of meaning will take place within these boundary conditions. It is at this point that difference starts to 'matter', and we can now say that what is perceived as a 'cross-cultural reality' is merely a by-product of it.

Ultimately, in uncertain interactions, we might simply have to 'risk' a positive and complementary interpretation of another person's identity – for we can never be sure whether our negative (etic) perceptions and the categories to which we ascribe difference are true or not. For instance, the new co-worker in the previous case (me), might either be a traditional 'foreigner' or an informal yuppie product of the internet revolution, and there can be no certainty of who this person *really* is, or if any of these labels are correct at all.

We can never know in advance the direction in which a context is going to develop: we will just have to leave the answer to this question open and continue investigating culture in context, based on the trust that all those involved will act with the best intentions.

The only way to make a context 'certain' is to project negative difference on the other person, and this might not be the most fruitful strategy. The negative labels chosen tend to be etic ones and might say more about those attaching them than about the person they are ascribed to. So, with regard to the 'handshake example', you might ask what motivates the established male colleague to invest time and effort in a regular front-stage play of difference, and why does the new co-worker react to this play?

Critical diversity and intercultural interactions

The previous examples suggest that there are two distinct conditions from which to approach collective identities in CCM, namely the perceived cultural middle (the majority perspective or cultural norm) and the cultural margins (the minority perspective or exception from the cultural norm). In the handshake example, it is the new co-worker who is not part of the cultural middle; in the global engineering example, it is female and/or offshore engineers.

When speaking of culture here, I understand it in the sense of 'what the relevant majority defines as collective identity in a specific context', not in the sense of 'what culture actually is'. For example, if maleness is the norm, then female constitutes the minority. If a certain religion is prevalent, then atheism or any other religion constitutes difference. As a result, certain minority members might be perceived as more alien than they actually are – they might be 'othered' (see Chapter 1). At the same time, members of the majority might cherish the feeling of being alike, and be 'saming' each other (just think of beliefs in a 'strong' and homogeneous national identity as opposed to presumably 'alien' immigrant communities). Both processes inform and legitimize each other, and in such a way, culturally relevant categories of sameness and difference are created and affirmed.

In the intercultural training example, engineers are *not* alike all over the globe, but might uphold this collective self-image to 'same' themselves against HR's exaggeration of national cultural differences. HR then becomes the respective 'other', and both interrelated perspectives and in-group biases are further affirmed (Mahadevan, 2011a). Likewise, the handshake is not a key symbol of organizational culture in the previous example, but triggered by the need to make sense of an unexpected minority practice, it *becomes* an important tool of identity-saming and of recognizing the 'majority identity' for some. Consequently, some individuals – being perceived as a minority or different in the eyes of the majority – need to defend or prove their identities while others don't have to do so. This reminds us that the 'identity rules' required for recognition are not objective, and that only some set their terms.

Diversity literature often speaks of the 'Big 6' or 'Big 8' when considering relevant markers of difference. The Big 6 are gender, ethnicity (or race), age, ability, sexual orientation and religion (or worldview/*Weltanschauung*); the Big 8 add other context-specific markers such as nationality or organizational role (see an overview in Plummer, 2003: 25; Bührmann, 2015: 23–42). Due to the fact that the Big 6 are part of many anti-discriminatory legal frameworks, e.g. in the European Union (Bendl, Eberherr and Mensi-Klarbach, 2012: 79), it seems sensible to concentrate on these when investigating critical diversity aspects of CCM. Studies suggest that companies and individuals at work have culturally learned to perceive these categories as dichotomist and to attach hierarchies to them, and that this might have critical implications (e.g. Tretheway, 2001; Ward and Winstanley, 2003; Zanoni et al., 2010; Acker, 2012; Levay, 2014; Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin, 2016; Mik-Meyer, 2016).

For instance, it is generally assumed that individuals are born into the male and female 'sex', yet in biological reality combinations between the two do exist. Likewise, 'gender' describes the culturally-learned sense of behaviours and expectations which are mapped onto a specific 'sex' (Bührmann, 2015: 25). Please note again that culture has nothing to do with human biology. Still, an individual might be *perceived* as different in a negative way due to their ethnicity, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and so on, and this makes critical diversity markers and their intersections culturally relevant. They therefore need to be considered for a critical CCM. For instance, if we find that female engineers are perceived as more incompetent than male engineers when jobs are scarce, we might need to question the dominant cultural meanings of 'competence' as related to dominant cultural meanings of 'female' and 'male'.

Likewise, it is often assumed that national belonging requires ethnic homogeneity, and this might disadvantage ethnic minority and migrant

individuals at work (e.g. Van Laer and Janssens, 2011; Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin, 2016). This also relates back to the 'Big 6' diversity dimensions themselves and how they are used. For instance, people tend to speak of 'race' in North American contexts, of 'ethnicity' in Western Europe, and of 'migration background' in countries such as Germany wherein the category 'race' is historically laden and national identification is rooted in presumed ethnic homogeneity (Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin, 2016; Primecz, Mahadevan and Romani, 2016). This reminds us that the labels wherein we frame difference are linked to our own cultural glasses, even on scholarly level.

Still, not every perceived difference has power implications. For example, a friend of mine – an ethnic German, tall, blond, Nordic kind-of-guy – who lived and worked in the Silicon Valley and used to play badminton semi-professionally – was once the cause of the newspaper headline 'the first non-Asian guy to win the San Francisco Open'. Apparently, this was a relevant minority category when compared to the standard 'Asian-American badminton-playing type'. His partner in the men's doubles was also an internationally mobile highly-qualified corporate employee, a black Rastafarian from Jamaica. Both individuals were perceived as equally exotic on the badminton court; however, it was only the Rastafarian Jamaican who experienced being body-searched at airports when travelling internationally.

This suggests that the white, highly-educated German badminton player is merely excitingly different in a single context. For the Rastafarian Jamaican, the real-life consequences of being identified as a certain 'type' of individual by others weigh heavier and across more contexts. In international management, the implicit point of reference is the 'white, heterosexual, western, middle/upper class, able man' (Zanoni et al., 2010: 13), and the Rastafarian Jamaican, for example, cannot avoid being categorized in terms of race. Still, he is able to pursue an international career. This suggests that he, too, possesses sufficient symbolic and economic capital (see Chapter 1) which he can utilize to his advantage. He is also a majority member in terms of gender, and this might counterbalance other negative effects.

How to manage diversity is highly debated.[2] The business case for diversity proposes that the exclusion of parts of the workforce results in an inferior outcome. From this viewpoint, the Rastafarian Jamaican is not excluded. Another perspective assumes that advantaging some over others contradicts the assumption of merit-based organizations upon which, for instance, individual performance and employees' sense of fairness is based (*could* the Rastafarian Jamaican have achieved more?). Another argument originates from the simply human – or, as you might say, ethical – viewpoint that all human beings should have

equal opportunities in the workplace and beyond. From this perspective, we might need to 'do something' about the international management environment experienced by the Rastafarian Jamaican or the female offshore engineers. (The internationally mobile German badminton-playing guy and the new female cosmopolitan co-worker seem safe.)

We also need to ask ourselves what it takes to overcome exclusion. Should we be colour-blind, that is treat everyone the same, or should we favour disadvantaged individuals over others (positive discrimination)? Critical diversity studies encourage the latter, based on the reasoning that exclusion is historical and systematic, that is long since rooted in the system, and that it takes a critical mass – a minimum number of minority individuals in certain positions – to overcome such effects (P. Prasad, Pringle and Konrad, 2006).

Some might now argue – for example, when finding arguments for who to body-search at airports – that 'statistics show' that 'this group' is 'more criminal' than another group, and countries might base the laws and regulations on this principle. Still, for a real person, this 'statistical approach' means; if you are unfortunate enough to be born 'black Jamaican', to express Rastafarian beliefs via your hairstyle, and to pursue an international career and travel a lot, then you might just have to live with being body-searched ('rules and regulations are nothing individual, after all … '), and many might not question this principle. Ultimately, this 'statistical approach' would also lead to a 'well, if you are born female and choose to become an engineer, then you just have to live with a higher risk of being laid-off … ', and at this point half of the world's population might disagree. This reminds us that, while we might have learned to view some marginalizations as more 'normal' than others, we *should* view all of them as what they are, namely unfair to the individuals whom they concern. Matters are complicated by the fact that some diversity makers are visible at first sight whereas others remain hidden or can be disclosed voluntarily (e.g. sexual orientation).

We should also bear in mind that most discrimination is implicit (and not explicit), which means that we cannot exactly pinpoint its origins and power effects, and that perspectives will diverge (what does the handshake example *mean* to whom?). For instance, a corporate ad might search for 'the best candidate' and not specify their ethnicity, but still, in the end, only candidates of the majority ethnicity might be selected. Whereas an ethnic minority member might view this as proof of discrimination, the ethnic majority might have the feeling that those selected are simply 'more competent' and not believe in ethnicity having any effect on their choices whatsoever (Holgersson et al., 2016). This presumed 'truth' might even prevail across national and organizational cultures (ibid.).

In some contexts, it might also be unclear what can be gained from higher diversity and how majority individuals might profit from it. It is often said that diverse teams are more innovative, yet they might also need to overcome higher initial obstacles to successful intra-team communication (finding a 'common way of doing and expressing things' is harder). Therefore, all team members must find the effort worthwhile, and again this tends to favour majority individuals over others. As conceptualizations of intercultural competence suggest (see Chapter 3), we need to be *motivated* to utilize the benefits of diversity, and this motivation needs to go deeper than purely economic arguments or individual interests. Otherwise, those who are not personally involved can afford to neglect matters of inclusion (because they themselves are included already) and might even sabotage efforts towards a more equal workplace (because competition, e.g. on the job market, might increase if previously disadvantaged groups are equally included).

These considerations enable us to see how intercultural interactions are not well balanced in the sense that two individuals meet on equal terms, and allow us to trace how one side might set the terms for the other. They also remind us that, if those who are advantaged (often the majority) think that you are different or don't belong, your ascribed difference and non-belonging might become a reality, regardless of how highly you score, for instance, on intercultural competence.

Approaching CCM via a critical diversity perspective highlights the need to look beyond an interaction itself in order to learn who is systemically, structurally and historically disadvantaged. It enables us to figure out which motivations and interests are attached to workplace diversity, and to include critical diversity markers such as race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ableism, and so on in our cultural analyses. These are crucial contributions to a more 'equal' and 'fair' CCM practice, and we should not make do without them.

At the same time, we should also not become too sure of our 'critical' diversity categories. For instance, both white female candidates and non-white male candidates seem disadvantaged when it comes to top executive positions in Europe (Tienari et al., 2013; Holgersson et al., 2016). So whom to choose over the other? By making a choice, e.g. by supporting female minorities, corporate diversity policies might exclude ethnic male minority individuals (Tomlinson et al., 2013), and vice versa. In the end, a critical diversity practice, too, requires us to juggle and combine multiple viewpoints in order to make it more certain that our perspectives are fair and balanced, just like testing cultural dimensions in context (see Chapter 2) or negotiating meanings in intercultural interactions (see Chapter 3).

⬤⬤⬤ Identities beyond national culture

We can also approach critical diversity from another angle: most CCM theories and practices – this book included – implicitly assume that our lives evolve *within* national or societal identifications and that this is the starting point for how we experience culture. Still, we can observe that some individuals live and interact beyond national cultures. Biculturality is the most commonly used term for this phenomenon (Brannen and Thomas, 2010).

Individuals can be born into biculturality (e.g. children of a bicultural marriage) or become bicultural (e.g. via living abroad or being internationally mobile). Whereas some individuals might experience a high conflict between their different cultural identities, others might not, and both conditions can be favourable to bicultural competence. For instance, a perceived identity conflict, if dealt with, might result in higher reflexivity and cultural awareness (Brannen and Thomas, 2010). Bicultural and/or bilingual individuals are often able to access multiple interpretative frames and to 'span boundaries' across languages and cultures (Barner-Rasmussen, 2015). These bicultural competencies are assumed to be transferable across cultures in general (Brannen and Thomas, 2010).

Another phenomenon beyond national cultures is 'third culture kids', a term coined by John and Ruth Hill Useem (see Pollock and Van Reken, 1999). These are children of internationally mobile or migrant parents growing up in another cultural environment (Pollock and van Reken, 1999). It is assumed that 'third culture kids' retain influences from both the host and home country, but also develop something new and unique which emerges from the space between cultures.

Additionally, there are the 'global nomads' of today's business world, e.g. managers travelling a lot for work purposes, who experience a lot of cultures, yet might not do so in-depth. These are often viewed as high-performers to be considered for international top positions by corporate HR (e.g. Matthewman, 2011). Still, we might wonder whether these global nomads are truly beyond the dangers of a culturally unaware management? Maybe they just know the 'rules of global business' the best on an instrumental level.

Identities beyond national cultures are often described via hyphenate labels, such as 'Asian-Canadian', 'Japanese-Australian' or 'African-American'. This practice points to a 'halfie' identity (Abu-Lughod, 1991) and suggests that the majority of 'non-hyphenate' citizens (and maybe the 'halfies' themselves) cannot just 'let go' of categories of societal culture and national identity. Individuals with a 'halfie identity'

tend to be perceived in terms of 'who they are not'. For instance, descendants of Turkish immigrants in Germany might be perceived as 'Turkish' in Germany and as 'German' in Turkey: each perspective, as shaped by the majority requirements for cultural belonging, perceives them as insufficient, while the whole of their identity, competencies, knowledge or skills remains unseen by most (Mahadevan, 2010).

Those living outside their country of origin, the so-called diaspora, tend to carry a version of their 'home-country culture' in their backpack that is different from the cultural developments there (S. Hall, 1990). Based on this understanding, Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Australia (a random example) do not live 'Japanese culture' as it is understood in Japan, but their own versions of it. They also live 'Australian culture', but combine multiple influences in new and creative ways.

At the same time, it could also happen that members of the diaspora live 'old' versions of the culture of their country of origin, particularly regarding highly symbolic rituals (see Chapter 3) such as marriage rites, family traditions or parent–child relations. These meanings and related behaviour of a certain era have been brought to the new environment and are now cut off from how those meanings changed in the country of origin. Because such meanings are highly symbolic and culturally relevant, members of the diaspora might be reluctant or unable to discard them; they pass on an 'older version' of culture which then changes into a new direction, based on the context-specific influences to which it is exposed. This means that any diaspora culture is a unique combination of 'new', 'old' and 'third' cultures, which informs and is informed by the cultures of the countries of origin and destination.

At work, the competencies of ethnic and migrant minorities tend to be undervalued (Syed, 2008; Syed and Özbilgin, 2009). For instance, Ingo Forstenlechner and Mohammed Al-Waqfi (2010) analysed discrimination as perceived by 40 first-generation Muslim ethnic minority employees and applicants in Germany and Austria. All interviewees perceived being discriminated against on the grounds of their 'being Muslim' and 'being ethnically different'. Interviewees also expressed the highest commitment at work when they did not feel discriminated against, although they had expected to be. This reminds us that discrimination is an emic reality in many individuals' lives, and that companies can profit from moving beyond it.

The very labels 'bicultural' or 'bilingual' affirm a dominant identity. Both terms, too, depart from the dominant assumption of a single cultural or linguistic identification and of a single national cultural belonging. Instead, 'halfie' might be the ironic self-description of those 'between cultures' when being faced with this perception, and I personally like this term the most.

Such a halfie identity might have its advantages, for it could well be that cultural awareness or intercultural competence are more easily possessed or achieved by those who experience episodes of 'otherness' or 'unfamiliarity' throughout their lives. To the halfies themselves, this might just be a seemingly 'normal' condition of their lives, but in anthropology, international business and management this is actually a highly-valued and sought-after competence. For instance, there are minority aspects in the lives of many prominent anthropologists, and this suggests that there is something to be learned from 'not fitting in' in the eyes of others and from being forced to 'deal with' questions of identity, recognition and belonging. Still, this, too, seems to require a conscious effort.

For example, a male German student of Turkish descent once told me that my class on diversity and identity was nothing new at all: 'But this is normal, my grandmother experiences this [being othered] every Ramadan in Germany!' This suggests that he was not aware that something very normal – namely, being perceived as a minority and having to juggle different requirements for belonging – was something that a person growing up in the 'cultural middle' might never have thought about or experienced themselves. This means that also a bicultural of 'halfie' life experience, if not reflected on, might be equally shaped by 'native categories' as any other social perspective. This suggests that individuals living in the cultural in-between are not 'automatically' interculturally or biculturally competent (Brannen and Thomas, 2010).

To develop a personal disposition into a conscious CCM tool, you (as a halfie) will need to become aware of what seems normal and make this explicit to others (not every migrant Turkish grandmother is a natural born cross-cultural manager). At the same time, a successful 'halfie manager' in a certain national or organizational culture might have climbed up the ladder not despite but *because* of their ability to adapt to the dominant identity requirements and hide their 'being halfie'. So maybe, at a certain point of a typical managerial career, there are not hidden 'bicultural' resources to tap into any more. This means that, whereas marginality, biculturality or partial otherness might be an advantage for a critical CCM and an ethnographic frame of mind, the same minority identity facets might be a disadvantage to purely national or inner-organizational management.

Globalization might not result in higher cultural homogeneity across the globe, as is often assumed, but instead an increasing variety of global and local ('glocal') combinations. Glocalization, a term made popular (but not invented) by Roland Robertson (e.g. Robertson, 1994), refers to the understanding that we can see the co-presence of universalizing and particularizing effects in today's (business) world. This is also called 'McDonaldization'. This fast-food chain exists in

many countries, it seems to offer a 'global' product and lifestyle, yet that lifestyle is locally adapted (lamb-burgers in the Middle East, vegetable burgers and no beef in India, a blander taste in North America and Western Europe). Therefore, glocalization is broadly the socio-cultural equivalent to the business concepts of standardization versus adaptation/localization. It suggests that individuals have more choices, but that not everyone chooses the same. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s you could not buy certain South-Indian spices in a city like Munich, and acquaintances of South Indian descent would come back from a trip to India loaded down with bags of spices. Nowadays you can buy those spices in Munich, but it is unlikely that many would wish to do so beyond the local South-Indian diasporic community. Likewise, managerial styles across the globe might be characterized by an increasingly individualized combination of more possibilities in more contexts – yet management in general may not have become more similar or 'global'.

In recent years, I have also experienced that local students in my German CCM classes perceived themselves as inferior compared to students who had spent a year abroad, who had travelled a lot in their lives or who spoke excellent English. At the same time, nobody seemed to admire students who spoke, let's say, Greek, Italian, Turkish or Arabic with their parents at home. Also in management, it is more likely that a white male candidate with a cosmopolitan life experience in the English-speaking world is selected for a top executive position than an ethnic non-white male migrant individual with roots outside the developed world (Holgersson et al., 2016).

This reminds us that not every international exposure is valued equally, with cosmopolitanism perhaps being its most favourable version. Cosmopolitanism, that is 'identification' with the world in general, has been suggested as an alternative to 'culture' in the sense of a single territorial or national identification (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002). Cosmopolitanism suggests that, at some point in the future, those of the 'cultural middle' and 'from one locality' are the ones who need to defend themselves in the eyes of a rising cosmopolitan and 'beyond national cultural' elite who will then be the ones dictating the terms of culture. It remains to be seen whether this will be to the benefit of all (Hannerz, 1990, 2004).

This insight introduces yet another perspective to the meanings of difference. For example, the previous handshake example tells the story of a bicultural and bilingual cosmopolitan female German (who happens not to greet others as expected). One of her colleagues utilizes this small difference in greeting habits for othering her. It might well be that he does so out of his own fear of not meeting the requirements

of the shiningly new cosmopolitan 'managerial world' which this new co-worker represents. So, *could* it be that it is *he* who is the disadvantaged and undervalued individual in today's business?

Deconstruction and the need for more authentic acts of identification

In the end, we are all labelled by others and label others in return, and we cannot foresee the consequences of the identity labels involved. Although the specific mechanisms of exclusion might differ across contexts and individuals, diversity *always* seems to involve more favourable and less desired identities. This influences the differences we perceive, the meanings we give to difference and the categories to which we ascribe difference, and the ensuing implications for our identities and the identities of others.

For instance, throughout the previous chapters I have referred to scholars with the help of national and disciplinary 'identity labels', such as 'French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu'. Such a practice affirms single national identifications and cross-disciplinary difference and loses sight of alternative identity markers. Alternative labels would have been an option, for virtually all of these scholars have pursued an international career, lived in multiple countries and worked across disciplines. In some cases, I could not even come up with an appropriate disciplinary or national label, but once stuck with the principle I could not change the whole system. This reminds us that not only large discourses but also even the small and everyday labels we chose might become dominant and prescriptive (Näslund and Perner, 2011), and that we choose new labels within the frameworks of the choices we have already made and the labels which already exist. From now on, I am therefore going to refrain from scholarly labels in this book.

Still, non-labelling is also an implicit act of labelling, and all our choices of (non-) labelling have power implications. For instance, if I speak about 'manager xyz' and 'female manager abc', we can deduce that the male manager is the norm (for here, the identity tag 'male' is not added, it is the dominant category). If someone is explicitly labelled as the 'first African-American president', then we can infer that a 'white' 'US-American president' is considered the normality (if we assume that 'white' and 'black' are opposing racial social constructions), and we can deduce the power implications from there. At the same time, because we have not added the identity tag 'female', we should also assume that this individual is implicitly male.

'Reading between the lines' in such a manner is referred to as 'deconstruction' (based on Derrida, 1978; see also Critchley, 1992; Fougère and Moulettes, 2011).[3] Deconstruction is based on the assumption that we can deduce power implications and hierarchies from the choices of what is (not) said or done. It involves holding opposites in mind (e.g. ascribed categories of race), not only to understand how they differ but also to highlight how they are related (all our skins are coloured in an infinite number of shades): it is an act of interplay.

Via deconstructing established practice, we might question whether 'normal' labels and identity tags are actually representative of the person whom they concern (all labels are a somewhat arbitrary choice). So why is it that the label 'African-American president' was chosen over all other options, even though it might not be an accurate representation of the individual to whom it is attached? Bi-racial or multi-racial individuals are often categorically labelled 'non-white', despite their partly 'white' ancestry, and we can deduce hierarchies of 'whiteness' and 'non-whiteness' from this practice. We are therefore required to challenge the label 'black' and to question the power mechanisms by which it is attached.

Deconstruction also questions presumably power-free perspectives, such as 'emic' and 'etic' (see Chapter 3). In a multinational corporation or any competitive and profit-oriented environment where individuals need to succeed, identity and difference serve a *purpose*. The basic idea of CCM and intercultural competence is to increase the advantage of some over others, and the critical intersections in the intercultural training triangle point to these divergent motivations and interests on multiple levels. Who will triumph in the end is also a question of power, and of the ability to control and resist. This makes it seem even more relevant that we pay attention to the power-related *purposes* of CCM and intercultural interactions (control versus resistance) rather than solely differentiating between emic and etic (T. Jackson, 2013, 2014; based on L.T. Smith, 1999).

At this point, I would like to encourage you to research the life history of the 'first African-American president of the United States' and perform your own empirical act of 'imagining otherwise'. You could also try to deconstruct identity labels in your real-life interactions, or re-examine the previous handshake example. Such deconstructive acts might contribute to more authentic acts of identification. They could enable us to view others as 'who they are' – in their own terms – as far as possible and to see how they are not only different but also related. This allows us to become aware of the power implications of our patterns of identification and recognition, and to relate our managerial practice towards wider social requirements, such as fairness and equal opportunities. The following chapter builds on this thought.

████ Notes

1   There are other methods than intercultural training, for instance, intercultural coaching (an intercultural coach works together with a coachee in a long-term supportive process to develop individual capabilities), or intercultural team development (e.g. team members of a global team coming together in a joint activity). Still, preparatory intercultural training remains the standard tool in my experience, presumably due to cost-related reasons and the need to standardize training content in order to evaluate its return-on-investment.

2   The underlying sources to my discussion are *The Sage Handbook of Work-place Diversity* (edited by Alison M. Konrad, Pushkala Prasad and Judith K. Pringle, 2006); the *International Handbook on Diversity Management at Work* (edited by Alain Klarsfeld, 2010); and the *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies* (edited by Steven Vertovec, 2015). This is also the reading I would recommend.

3   Deconstruction is linked to the postmodern paradigm (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Romani, Primecz and Bell, 2014). In contrast to positivism and inter-pretivism, postmodernism weighs the multiplicity, fluidity and heterogeneity of individual perspectives over the assumption of a shared and fairly homoge-neous culture. Postmodernism presupposes multiple meanings, based on how individuals position themselves in relation to each other. These relations are understood as power relations, and this links postmodernism to the power-sensitive perspective on CCM (see Chapter 5).