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### The Indian Mindset
Editorial

The Indian Mindset: A Model for Multiculturalism?

Mindsets play an important role in maintaining social cohesion. Defined as a set of assumptions about reality, they reflect a group’s history and underlying philosophical leitmotifs, as well as the external spheres of influence which may have impacted the its development. The group viewpoint is so well engrained that people are often not consciously aware of how it shapes decision-making and behavioral interaction.

Upon studying the Indian mindset, observers will immediately note that Hinduism has profoundly influenced the country. It’s a philosophy that doesn’t try to be a religion in the classic sense — it makes no claim on any one Prophet and teaches openness and universal tolerance of differences. This helps explain why India is so multicultural, given that the Hindu way of thinking permits an assimilation of cultures, languages and religions. Most importantly, it urges all to unite body and mind on a higher spiritual plane in order to “know the truth of the universe.”

Our interview with Vinita Balasubramanian (page 3), an expatriate living in Germany, is a perfect example of Indian thinking. Her thoughts and feelings are carefully balanced, personifying the Hindu ideal of tolerance, and may also explain her extraordinary success as an intercultural facilitator.

Two additional pieces carry the theme of multiculturalism further. Our correspondent in Montreal, Dan MacLeod, writes about the multiculturalism of the traveler (page 11). And Vanessa Shaw shares her thoughts on multiculturalism in Madrid and the impermanence of identity (page 14).

A small correction: In “Intercultural Film Data” (Dec. 2012), we wrote that the center was located at the University of Heidenheim. It should have read, University of Hildesheim.

Patrick Schmidt
Editor-in-chief
India is an exotic land of contrasts, a wealth of sights and sounds, tastes and textures so extreme it boggles the mind. The vast, kaleidoscopic flux of impressions inspired Rimsky-Korsakov’s famous “Song of India”. Although a Western interpretation of the country, having very little in common with Indian traditional music, it captures the subcontinent’s mysterious flow and majestic richness, where ancient and modern co-exist.

Indian history spans over 4,500 years and includes a staggering variety of cultures, languages and religions. It’s no accident that the British, who ruled the country for over 350 years, called it “the brightest jewel in the crown” thanks to its cotton, silk, indigo, gold, jewels and spices.

Upon visiting the country in 1895, Mark Twain was inspired to write: “India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend and the great grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India.”

A person whose character and identity deeply reflects this land of contrasts is Vinita Balasubramanian. Raised in a conservative Hindu family but educated in a strict Catholic convent, she experienced at an early age the contradictions of the human condition and the urgent need to overcome cultural misunderstandings. Then, newly married, she found herself in Germany with her Indian husband, learning to cope with the German way of life. Some 35 years later, with the publication of her exceptionally insightful book, “Leben und arbeiten in Indian” (Life and Work in India), she has established herself as one of the leading intercultural specialists on Indian-German relations.

When interviewing her, I couldn’t help but feel she incarnated the Indian soul of self-reflection, modesty and intuition. I asked about her early experiences in life.

I was born in the south of India in Mysore but I grew up largely in the port city of Chennai, which used to be called Madras. My father worked for the railroad and was transferred quite a lot, especially in the first 12 years of my life, so we lived in several places, including the far north near Delhi.

The north is very different from the south and, if I think back, that was my first real intercultural experience. Different language, different food. Actually, if you grow up in India, you grow up multiculturally. We lived in the Moslem area of Chennai, so I woke up every morning to the sound of the mosque. My parents were fairly conservative bourgeois Hindus but they sent me to the best school in the area, a Catholic institution run by nuns. We were expected to develop our minds, not really our sense of self or any of these other things.
As I mentioned, we were Hindu but my closest friends were a Christian and a Zoroastrian [a person whose religion is based on the ancient teachings of the Persian Zoroaster]. Having friends from completely different backgrounds helped me understand the relativity of values at an early age.

Quite apart from religion, they ate meat while my family was strictly vegetarian. Once, when I was recovering from a bad 'flu, the doctor advised eating an egg a week. As eggs were not allowed into the house, it was brought to the garage by the gardener where I had to eat it raw because nobody was willing to even touch it. My daughters think I had a really bizarre upbringing!

My friends and I weren’t conforming to each other as such or to a set pattern, but we were held together by certain values, shared common interests and had same outlook on life. I think that fits in with Professor Stefanie Ratje’s definition of ‘cohesion’ - culture acting as the ‘glue’ holding disparate elements together.

The Hindu religion isn’t dogmatic about how to attain enlightenment or preach that non-Hindus are doomed to go to hell. This makes it much easier to live in multicultural settings. Even with my conservative family, it was perfectly all right to go into a church because God is everywhere…“All rivers flow into the sea.”

So, you could say it was a sort of a “let it be” philosophy that the Beatles once sang about. Absolutely. In India one grows up learning to have a greater acceptance of differences. I went on to a Catholic university after attending an all-girls school in Chennai. All the professors were women, about a third were nuns. It had very high standards and was a no-nonsense institution. If you were doing poorly, you got a “talking to” from the nuns; if your grades didn’t improve, you were encouraged to leave!

What did you study at university?
I studied English literature, then focused on Greek tragedies and especially Shakespeare during my Master’s. Everything imaginable in human experience is to be found in his works: romantic love, humor, jealousy, the dark night of the soul, it’s all in there. I’m still very fond of Shakespeare - every time I go to England I try to get in at least a couple of performances. Did you speak English at home?

We largely spoke Tamil at home but English is the lingua franca in India because of all these different languages we have. If there’s a party, everyone spoke English, the same held good for school and university—for me English was never a foreign language.

I also had to learn the country’s official language, Hindi, at school. Having a range of languages is very helpful...
interculturally, you become more open to the nuances of culture reflected in a language. This strikes me afresh every time I do stints working as a translator or interpreter.

In today’s world English is usually the lingua franca for intercultural teams everywhere. Team members use English flavoured with elements from their own mother-tongue and cultural values. When a German talks about ‘Vertrauen’, it is not exactly what an Indian means – Indians often say ‘faith’ rather than ‘trust’, which has different implications.

With your love of Shakespeare, how did you end up coming to Germany?

Well, right after I finished my studies, I got married. My husband was just starting a PhD in mechanical engineering in Karlsruhe and I took a German course at the Goethe Institute in Chennai. When I arrived in Germany, I could ask questions like how to get to the train station, but I didn’t understand any of the answers! I was thrown into this environment where almost nobody spoke English, not even students in those days. In the mid-70s, Germany was much less open, less Americanized. There was hardly any foreign food—if you wanted a snack, you ate “Currywurst”.

I took some German courses at the university in Karlsruhe and qualified later to be a translator. Having learned to be systematic and disciplined, I was “up and running” in the language within a relatively short time. In the meantime, a small language school hired me, gave me exactly four hours of training and sent me to Daimler to teach English.

My colleagues and I taught groups and also gave individual lessons to executives. I was quite young and the executives were in their forties and fifties and had seen a lot of the world.

With four hours of training, how could you teach properly?

The formal teacher training followed much later. To be honest, all I did at the beginning was listen a lot. I’d offer vocabulary and correct them when needed but at the same time it was sort of like listening-therapy. I was surprised when they kept asking me to come back; this method of learning seemed to work for them. I think we underestimate the importance of being listened to attentively. After all, learning is more than just a cognitive process. It transfers best through human interaction, the ‘affective approach’—something which applies just as much to intercultural learning.

That’s when I first realized how language impacts personality. When you speak a foreign language, it’s as if you’re wearing a mask. You can either talk about things that you’d never dream of talking about in your own language or feel inhibited by it.

Listening to these executives helped me to become immersed
in the German mindset. Part of it comes from friends and from living in Germany, of course, but I think my depth of understanding of German mentality comes through listening and observation in a business context.

So you could say that, through a process of osmosis, you became part of the German mindset.

Absolutely. You’re thinking along the same lines, not just looking in from the outside. You end up developing the German in yourself...You could say I have three little overlapping corners tucked away within me. My working persona is German, the Protestant work ethic. My thought processes are Anglo-Saxon, perhaps even Catholic, thanks to my education. And from a spiritual-emotional viewpoint, I have a Hindu-Buddhist approach. These are various facets, all of which are very useful in intercultural communication. It helps to be able to look at things from a variety of perspectives.

What was the turning point, when you started to do intercultural work, not English training?

Well, I’d like to say, strategically speaking this was the road I followed, but it didn’t really happen that way. It was a twist of fate many years ago. I was part of a big group of facilitators – 4 in all - at a Daimler seminar called “Global Ways” for employees working worldwide. I felt I didn’t know enough at all, so with my convent school training, I rushed off to the library — not Google in those days — and took out all the books I could find. But I learnt most of all from the experience of the participants and the other facilitators—you could say it was electrifying! My formal intercultural education came later and was much less revealing.

Over the years I have held seminars and team workshops in several countries. For obvious reasons, a lot of my work is related to India and Germany. I don’t have to think so hard about doing the ‘right’ thing here - there is a high degree of instinctuality.

Where do you see the biggest issues when Germans and Indians interact?

There are the classic ones in business, which have been around for a long time. Obviously, the first one is communication. Germans often tend to find Indian communication baffling. It’s a bit of a cliché that Indians never say ‘no’ clearly but there’s also some truth to it. Communication patterns can be much more diffuse in India for various reasons. One is the importance of contextuality, another is the constant fine-tuning of one’s own communication to suit the expectations and responses of the partner or partners. That’s hard work, believe me!

The other issue is the notion of time. Indians are said to have a cyclical rather than a linear concept of time. It’s much simpler to examine the pattern of working in India. The work approach can be compared with doing a jigsaw puzzle. Indians tend to do a bit of this here, a bit of that there, then they have a
cup of tea and come back to put in another piece - or take one out. At some point, let’s say at the end of the week, or at the end of the month, the jigsaw, that is the project, has been completed. Germans supervising or observing this process find it chaotic – mid-way all they can see are bits of this half-finished jigsaw puzzle with huge gaps in-between, and so it’s almost impossible to imagine what the finished picture is going to look like.

Finally, personal relationships and communication, which can be an issue, but which is also the solution to many of the issues. Indians are great believers in personal relationships at work. Germans tend to avoid mixing work and pleasure, they prefer to keep their relationships businesslike, their communication factual. But in India, it’s a way of life - the degree of personal warmth and communication determines the success of the team. As soon as you have built up a personal relationship, communication problems disappear. Some problems, such as adherence to schedules, obviously don’t disappear entirely, but the team can handle it better because they can talk about it more openly.

I was at the SIETAR congress in Berlin recently and one of its themes was “cosmopolitan communication”. I felt it was an attempt to redefine a very traditional philosophical approach: if you demonstrate empathy to others, if you share human warmth, a foundation is created and no matter what the cultural background is, communication works.

In Hinduism there is a belief that every human being is part of the great universal soul. If you can detect a glimmer of this universal soul in the other person, I think that’s when communication begins to happen.

I find that beautifully expressed, almost poetic.

Thank you. We are not just our minds, we are not just our personalities, we are not just the culture we grew up in. We are all these things and much more than this. Perhaps what we should strive for is to act on that higher plane which connects us all – the essence of our common humanity.

Do you think this could be a way to overcome national conflicts, racism?

Perhaps not politically, but on an interpersonal level, yes. At first glance the term ‘racism’ is a straightforward concept, often associated with white people oppressing people of other races and discriminating against them. This approach does not take human interaction – with all its attendant unpredictability - into account.

Let me give you an example from my own family at the time of the British Raj. During that period Indians were discriminated against, for example with signs outside British clubs which read ‘Indians and dogs not allowed’. What is less known is that discrimination was also happening in reverse, i.e practised by the Indians against the British. In those days upper-caste
Indians had very strong notions of ritual impurity. For them it was unthinkable to eat or drink in the homes of the British or even touch them, like shaking hands. My grandfather, who used to work as a civil servant for the British-Indian railways, would be invited by his English bosses to their official dinners. My grandparents were happy to attend, but they wouldn’t touch any of the food or drink served there.

Now the surprising thing is that my grandfather’s behavior was apparently more than just tolerated by the colonial powers that be. He continued to be invited to dinner, and rose to become the first Indian Board Member while the British were still in power. And – most surprising of all - he had a number of warm friendships with British associates which continued until well after Indian independence.

So we have institutional discrimination, i.e. British colonial rule on one hand and Indian ritual discrimination on the other. Yet, in this particular case it does not seem to have prevented a meeting of minds. I can only surmise that it worked because both sides were able to rise beyond the limitations of their particular worldviews. They were connecting on a less mundane plane, apparently on a level of empathy and mutual respect, and finding the spark that connects.

Are you saying your grandfather was an interculturalist?

In a certain sense, yes. Curiosity and openness are essential prerequisites for being an interculturalist. Though my grandfather was a strict Hindu, a very traditional man, it didn’t stop him from studying Persian so that he could read Islamic literature in the original. Or requiring his grandchildren, including me, to read a verse from the Bible to him after breakfast. And willingness to learn from others. He was a stickler for punctuality, something he admired about the British. He was doing the Indian thing of assimilating.

Done wisely, assimilating is the Indian ideal, even if it does not always work in practice. You have a culture, I have a culture. The culture we are creating together is a synthesis of both. We are both constructing what is sometimes called a ‘third-culture reality’. And when that happens, the initial cultural differences become irrelevant.

Intercultural understanding is ultimately ‘work in progress’ created by the people involved. We as interculturalists should act as catalysts to further this process.

Well, this has been indeed a most revealing look into the Indian mindset — something very different from Western thinking. Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts and time.

It has been my pleasure.

Interviewed conducted by Patrick Schmidt
The Indian Mindset
A Striving Towards Self-Knowledge

by Patrick Schmidt

The vast, culturally-diverse Indian subcontinent, with its extraordinarily rich history, has given us four of the world's religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Additionally, it has absorbed external influences from both the Muslim religion and the legacy of British colonialism. Yet, what makes an Indian an Indian is the pervasive influence of Hinduism.

Contrary to what most Westerners think, Hinduism is more a philosophy than a religion. It preaches openness and universal tolerance for differences — nothing is false; everything is true in a way. Life is an endless cycle of rebirths, known as karma, where all living things die in one bodily form and return in a different one.

This subjective worldview, prevalent in everyday behavior, is reflected in the proverb: "There is nothing noble in being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self."

Over the centuries, this mindset has predisposed Indians to become more accepting of their status in society, which explains in large part the old system of castes. Also, while Christians believe that salvation comes from the Bible, Hindus believe all roads lead to salvation, including Christianity.

Perhaps the best definition of Hinduism can be found in what the Supreme Court of India once said. "Hinduism is unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one Prophet, it does not worship any one God, it does not believe in any one philosophic concept, it does not follow any one act of religious rites or performances, in fact, it does not satisfy the traditional features of a religion or creed. It is a way of life and nothing more."

Central to Hindu thinking is the mystical experience mukti, a "liberation" from the illusion of finality, which leads to an ultimate reality called brahman, defined as the supreme, universal spirit. It cannot be seen or heard but its nature can be known through the development of self-knowledge. One needs to transcend the body and the conscious mind which hides the true spirit of man. The desire to achieve enlightenment is part of the reason Indians are strong believers in meditation.

Yoga, of which there are many schools, is a form of meditation designed to unite the body and mind in the quest for atman, the individual soul or spirit. The body is the most primitive manifestation of the soul and needs rigid discipline to move to a higher spiritual plane. According to seventh-century Hindu scripture, "He who realizes the truth of the body can then come to know the truth of the universe."
Striving toward enlightenment, accepting one's place in society and being tolerant of differences have all impacted the Indian perception of reality and, thus, social behavior.

Individual identity and position are stratified. Unlike Americans, whose identity is based on questioning the status quo and moving up the social ladder, Indians are inclined to accept their state in life, permitting strong group identity. In turn, mutual support allows them to feel more secure in their ways. Indians, as a whole, are open to foreign ways of thinking as long as the foreigner is respectful of them and doesn't challenge religious and social structure.

One can see the acceptance of diversity in modern society. Although over 80 percent of Indians are Hindus, the country has one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, as well as a large number of Christians, Sikhs and Jainists. The nation recognizes 24 languages, 18 of which are classified as official.

Despite some setbacks, intercultural interactions seem to work as a whole due to a collective sense of mutual respect. The Constitution of India mirrors this: “Majority rule is tempered by minority rights protected by law.”

Reincarnation and its accompanying concept, fate, play a major role in the perception of time. Punctuality is far less important than in the West; time is cyclical and opportunities will come again, perhaps in another life. If you succeed, so much the better--your present life was destined to be successful. If you fail, destiny was unkind--maybe things will turn out differently in the next one.

The flip side to being less sensitive to outside pressure and material gain is the desire for spiritual oneness. Indians strive to attain the best outcome by looking inward, which sometimes makes it difficult for them to work as a team--each individual thinks subjectively. Foreign investors experienced this after liberalization in 1991, when projects got bogged down awaiting government clearance at various levels.

Understanding the basic cultural undercurrents will help to alleviate potential misunderstandings...and aggressive behavior on the part of frustrated non-Indians. But such awareness, while essential, is by no means sufficient. One may also need to reframe situations in a manner acceptable to Indian counterparts.

A combination of awareness and reframing will certainly permit a more subtle, calibrated strategy on the subcontinent.
Meditation
An ancient Indian practice

by George Simons

Though Christian meditation goes as far back as the 12th century, from the mid-19th century on, Eastern philosophy and meditation have made inroads into Western culture. The current wave began in the late 1960s, when young people were protesting the established order, questioning, and seeking inner peace, often through drugs. Indian Gurus came to the USA and Europe, invited by pop cultural icons to spread the teachings of meditation.

The Beatles, immersed in Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s Transcendental Meditation (TM) produced their most famous album, *The Beatles* (“The White Album”), after several months in India. Young Germans, fresh from the Rashneesh ashram in Poona, paraded yellow robes in the Hamburg’s streets.

Eastern meditation, rooted in Hindu antiquity, was developed and spread by Buddhist missionaries as far as Japan. Meditation’s many forms generally provide disciplines, mental and physical (sitting, dance, yogic asanas), that help us transcend “illusions” or “defilements,” what we flood ourselves with as “everyday realities.” The outcome? A state described as nirvana or enlightenment—experiencing peace of mind, bliss, and freedom from suffering. In a multitasking world, we hear our minds chattering about tasks piling up at work, our next holiday, worries about children and monthly bills. What Buddhists call our “monkey minds”, jump from one thought to another as a monkey swings from tree to tree.

To get beyond this, meditation disciplines may teach focusing on a single element, e.g., breathing, or a sound, or chanting, as done by monks East and West. These extract the mind from striving and drifting back and forth, invite it to dwell in the here and now— often a joyful experience.

Daily meditation generates measurable brain changes. In participants mediating 30 minutes daily for two months, researchers found increased gray-matter density in brain areas associated with stress, empathy, sense of self and memory. Participants were happier, more empathetic, more secure. New research suggests that long-term meditation may reduce impulsivity and reactivity, causes of depression, binge eating and attention-deficit. Brain scans taken before and after meditation show increased gray matter in brain areas charged with memory and learning. Until recently scientists thought brain development peaked in the early 20s. Practiced attentiveness appears to help continued development, adding efficiency and flexibility.

Meditation, leading to here and now awareness, puts into perspective judgments, fears, knee-jerk reactions to stories we tell us about ourselves and others. Besides benefitting our well being, it helps us see beyond the socially constructed realities we tend to share and perpetuate. We need not become monks, but attaining a “beginner’s mind” may add to and powers of observation and enrich intercultural insightfulness.
In the clearing stands a boxer
And a fighter by his trade,
And he carries the reminder
Of ev’ry glove that layed him down
Or cut him till he cried out
In his anger and his shame,
“I am leaving, I am leaving”
But the fighter still remains...

New York officially picked itself back up after the September 11th bombings on Sept. 29th, when “Saturday Night Live” opened its season as scheduled and Paul Simon performed “The Boxer” for Mayor Guiliani, a group of firefighters and police officers and a spellbound crowd.

Paul Simon, native son, and his anthem about a fighter who keeps on going no matter how bad things get...and it’s not so much that he refuses to give up but that he can’t and, in any case, doesn’t know how.

Tens of millions of shell-shocked Americans watched that performance. Of all the songs the country has produced, it was the perfect choice of metaphor: the boxer was Paul Simon himself, in the rubble of his hometown; it was the mayor and all the men behind him, the uniforms and ash-smudged helmets; it was every person in the theater, many of whom were afraid to be there, rumors of new attacks.

I watched that song being played in that moment and knew everything was going to be okay, New York was back on its feet, the country was back on its feet.

Despite its Manhattan back-drop, though, nobody thought of it as a symbol for the city until Paul Simon played the first few notes that night.

The boxer laying out his winter clothes, the whores on Seventh Avenue, they are the city’s denizens, the downtrodden who have no choice but to struggle on, and they are usually either immigrants or their sons and daughters.

Boxing itself is a timeline of a century of ethnic groups rising in America and leaving the sport behind once they rise: first the Irish were champions, then the Italians, then African-Americans followed by Latinos.

There are different kinds of multiculturalism. Some, as in India, are endemic to a place once history flows across
Struggling...

— continued

it. Others—in cities like New York, Boston or Montreal—are clusters of first-generation humanity flowing from the waterfront inward in mishmash of languages, rituals and mindsets.

There is extra-ethnic multiculturalism: any association of day-care workers or cancer-survivors or gays-and-lesbians will unite all the colors and religions of any city, at least in Europe and North America.

There is also the multiculturalism of the traveler.

My first years in Canada, hitch-hiking home for Christmas, New Brunswick to Boston and back, over 1100 miles, in temperatures as low as −40 (where Celsius and Fahrenheit meet).

I quickly learned to seek out truck-stops, especially Dysart’s up in Bangor, Maine. Over a six-year period I spent some 200 hours either in truck-stops or in trucks, got to know the life of the driver, the lives of the drivers.

They weren’t supposed to carry passengers—they could lose their jobs—but it wasn’t just the long hours alone behind the wheel and desire for a few hours’ conversation, it was also that they saw themselves as marginal, on the fringes of society, “outlaws” some fancied themselves. As a hitch-hiker, I was like a cousin to their brethren.

I got to know about cab-space and suspension in Kenworths as compared to Peterbilts, knew how much each cost, what kind of payments were involved for independents, what kind of hours they needed to get to make it work, knew the terms and expressions, the jokes, the language they spoke.

That would be my guide for the future.

Traveling “rough” across Europe—one-star hotel rooms sans toilette when I couldn’t find a friendly couch to crash on. Thus did I discover an entire community of British and Irish ex-pats in Munich, most without working-papers, and a boxer from Belfast named Jim let me sleep in a sleeping bag on his floor for two weeks. And a Newcastle Geordie named Jamie helped me do a story for CBC-Toronto about black-market Munich.

Or, later, when I had a monk’s cell of a room (sans toilette) for an entire winter at the Grand Hotel de Paris in the Arab-heavy ethnic stew that is the neighborhood around Clig-
nancourt. My best friends were two Kabyles who owned the café where I had coffee every morning and beer in the evening, Ali and Akli, they came from the same Algerian village. Ali said my mother’s being half-Italian made us “cousins”, said all the tribes from around the rim of the Mediterranean were blood-related.

I became a member of a club which didn’t include the French. When one of Ali’s friends gave a loud speech one night about what pigs the French were, I said to Marco, “He should calm down before somebody gets upset!”

Marco thought this was hilarious, interrupted the diatribe to announce to the entire café, “My friend is worried some of us may be French!”

The rest of them found it as funny as he did and he turned back to me, laughed, said “Who here is French here?"

“I am a Kurd from Turkey, he is from Rumania, they are from Portugal, you are from Canada and everyone else from Algeria!”

No accident that these minorities-in-their-own-lands, Kabyles and Kurds, found themselves in Paris. Even less that they shared neighborhoods with all the other groups fleeing poverty or persecution or both. No wonder, either, that they were the ones to take me in, help me out.

Ali let me run a tab whenever a check was late and, when I missed a plane and was stuck without a room for two days, Lalou let me sleep on his sofa. He lived across the street and repaired espresso machines; he drove around Paris on a three-wheel motorcycle with a cab with room for tools behind his seat.

He told me he’d grown up in the mountains—no electricity—and couldn’t speak a word of French, knew nobody when he arrived in Paris at 17 years old.

...
am not from Madrid, or Spain; however, for some reason during my first week living in Madrid I was stopped and asked for directions... by Spaniards. It was dinnertime in Madrid, about 10:00 o’clock. A Spanish couple in their twenties looking a bit lost were scanning their surroundings. They appeared to be contemplating which passerby to approach for directions. Well, they chose me. Me, wandering about with a tourist map in my pocket I had picked up at the airport and still suffering from jetlag. I was exploring the streets for the first time; I certainly didn’t feel I radiated an image of someone who was versed in local knowledge. Needless to say, I wasn’t able to help.

That was weird enough, but there was more. A week later, while I was waiting in line at the bank, a woman in front of me turned and asked a question - something about a cuenta. I stumbled over my Spanish, as she stepped back saying “Ay, perdón, no eres de aquí...” (Oh, sorry, you’re not from here). Really? Does that mean she thought for a moment, I was a Madrileño? It was my guiri (foreigner) accent that tipped her off.

I have to admit these moments made me feel proud that my American-identity was not so apparent. I played with the idea that perhaps I am becoming an effective interculturalist- flying under the radar even to the locals! This is probably a bit of an arrogant idea. The reality is, there is enough multiculturalism in Madrid that identifying a resident has become an ambiguous science.

Evidence of the growing community of expats and immigrants is everywhere in Madrid. Tucked amidst the cobblestone streets, small groceries sell imports from Russia and Brazil. During a ride on the metro you may hear Spanish ballads sung by street musicians in an Ecuadorian accent. You might stumble upon a Mexican Mariachi group serenading in Plaza del Sol. A stroll through Parque Retiro and you can purchase discount fake Louis Vuittons and pirated DVDs from immigrants trying to make ends meet. Chinese-run shops, locally coined Chinos, offer household necessities at discount prices when Spanish shop owners have closed their doors for the daily siesta. Here in the country that prides itself on pork culinary treasures such as jamón serrano and cochinito (suckling pig), you can find Indian restaurants offering vegetarian samosas and tikka masala tapas next door to a place serving falafel, and halal shawarma.

Spain and its capital have shifted from near-isolation to multicultural explosion in just a few short decades. Tucked behind the Pyrenees Mountains the Iberian Peninsula is separated from the rest of Europe; Madrid sits atop a high plateau in the center of the country sur-
rounded by open countryside. Geographically Madrid has been able to hold its identity in a protected and discreet location. Political events have also influenced a theme of isolation here.

Francisco Franco ruled Spain under a dictatorship for more than 40 years. At that time, outside influences were deemed dangerous and nationalism was encouraged. Regional cultures and languages were discouraged and initiatives enforced a unified mono-culture within Spain.

When Franco died in 1975 Spain began to restructure into a new democracy, yet it still ranked as one of the poorest countries in Europe throughout the 1980s (Financial Post 2/5/2012). Big changes came quickly: A newly democratic Spain joined the European Union and the Eurozone. It began interacting with its neighboring countries like never before. Spanish pesetas became antiques and Euros started flooding into the banks. The late 1990s economic growth and housing boom went hand-in-hand with an influx in international immigration.

According to census data, the population of Madrid grew by over 270,000 between 2001-2005. That is a lot of change for a city of three million. Change came in many forms. The country prospered and enhanced its infrastructure, which included a high-speed train system. Centuries-old-Madrid evolved into an impressive modernized capital. And, although the economic boom is over now, the multicultural community remains today.

I am part of that community of internationals and non-Spanish residing in Madrid. Our presence here is contributing to the cultural landscape. As I try to find my place in the mixture, I am also contributing to the new multicultural identity of Madrid. The heart of old Madrid, traditional Spain, the isolated Iberian Peninsula is still here. Yet, it has also been thrust into a motley of new intercultural relationships. Just as elements of my own identity are revealed through the interactions and experience of living in a new cultural environment - Madrid is experiencing this as well.

Qualities of myself that seemed hidden back home in California are now much more apparent to me. It begs the question - what is the essence of my core and true identity? What is it about Madrid that brings out a certain part of me and other parts seem to fade away? With all these recent changes for Madrid, are certain elements of its identity being revealed that were once less noticeable? Absolutely.

As interculturalists, we must encourage the detachment from a permanent sense of identity and culture. Neither
of these things can be frozen in time or place because of their nature: time and interaction affect them. Relationships are reciprocal. We can only really define who we are upon interacting with others. Culture is not a thing that exists in a permanent state, but it is an interactive relationship.

As Madrid and I get to know one another, we are both influencing each other. I am different, and so is Madrid. Our identities have not left us, but have changed in some way. My lifestyle has changed and I feel differently about myself. Madrid has a growing multicultural community that is also leaving its mark on how this city understands and expresses itself. Although these changes are interactive, we do have a say in how we manage them. Gabriel García Márquez was not an interculturalist, but he was a beloved Spanish writer and poet. In one of his classic stories, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, he discusses the impermanence of identity:

“He allowed himself to be swayed by his conviction that human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves.”

Rapid change and an abundance of newness might make it seem the identity of Madrid has wandered off into a new path. Yet, Madrid is still a place long been worthy of envy and admiration. Artists, wanderers and dreamers continue to convene here to enjoy the magic of the Spanish way of life. As for me, I’m still trying to understand myself in *La España Profunda*. I have released my previous understanding self and am allowing my interactions here to influence how I am reborn again.

Multiculturalism offers us this opportunity— to revisit what exactly makes us our unique selves. The best place to start is by detaching from a concept of permanence in something so fluid as identity. From here we can connect to the essence of our unique selves and better identify it in others. In this way multiculturalism becomes not a threat to identity, but an educator.

Vanessa Shaw is an American expat, currently living in Madrid. She’s a writer, interculturalist and English teacher. She can be reached at vanessashaw@gmail.com Follow her blog at www.bookofness.com

Madrid — continued
Book Review
When Culture Matters;  
The 55-Minute Guide to Better Cross-Cultural Communication

Indy Neogy  
Euro 11, 101 pages  
Published by Verb Publishing Limited

When Culture Matters is only about 50 pages long, though the bottom corner count is 101, since each opposing page of the main text is only a one-sentence précis of what is on each opposing page. I read it and relished it on the bus on the way to the grocery store and back!

Described as a “55 minute” guide, it is just that, the clearest most incisive and comprehensive briefing about culture, cultural competence and how they look in life that I have ever read. It is, despite or perhaps because of its diminutive size, a positioning of exactly where our best notions of intercultural understanding and practice can bring us right now. It is not a replacement for further, deeper studies, new metaphors, or for effective hands-on training and coaching, but makes evident their raison d’être. It provides a program for what you need to know and do, what you need to be aware of, including your own limitations, and what resources and people you need to call upon to do communicate and do business across cultural fences and in multicultural environments.

Yes, the book is business focused, particularly on marketing, which is, after all, how business stay alive, the place where the rubber meets the road, i.e., where the brand and the product come face to face with the different other, be it partner, collaborator, producer, supplier, vendor, marketplace or consumer.

Neogy calls on intercultural theory without being either a true believer or allowing it to limit current contexts of reality or future developments. He is about real engagement. Actionable tips, dimensions of behavior and cultural descriptions and models all have their uses, but they are only the acolytes of cultural truth, which is a more of a well-honed juggling act than an enunciation of something to be believed. Cultural truth is created from the day-by-day exercise of awareness of self and others. It is learning to listen and communicate effectively at every level from the ethnic-national to the functional group to the individuals who integrate these strains into their here-and-now values, speech, behavior and decision-making. Reflection is as important. I notice that it is often the left undone part of the work of maintaining and enhancing cross-cultural effectiveness.

The last few pages of When Culture Matters contain a glossary of key concepts, a couple of which I would like to mention:

1. The law of leaky communication: given digital technology, communications quickly spread beyond their intended targets and can cause cultural embarrassment. Think WikiLeaks as the extreme example.
2. Polyphony: Rigid consistency cannot be the aim of communication and collaboration today. Think church choir, Bortnianskyi’s Cherubicon, not military marching boots.

The short biblio is evidence that Neogy has visited the past, looked at today and used his insight to synthesize the future.

Reviewed by George Simons
Given that North Americans by and large have been quite a migratory lot, is it possible that the author could label what we would normally and vaguely identify as “regional differences” as “nations” with powerful and distinct identities? Colin Woodard, historian and journalist would have us believe that even today the North American continent embraces eleven of these, which he describes as “rival regional cultures” that beg serious attention, if we are to understand and deal with North American politics, economics, and above all social values.

Perhaps the key distinction here is that, according to the author, nations are what have culture; states try to create them. He reminds us that the dynamic of artificial boundaries, “bringing states into existence” are a result of colonization or political gerrymandering, and not necessarily coherent or coterminous with the cultures of the people enclosed by them.

I list here some of Woodard’s eleven “American Nations,” with a couple of identifying cultural descriptions.

— Yankeedom (New England): once religious, now secular Puritan moralism, in pursuit of the greater good. Communitarian but authoritarian, feudal, and declining, but by migration extending its cultural influence over the northern Midwest and the Left Coast.

— New Netherland (New York city): A global commercial trading society, tolerant, pragmatic and creative. Dutch in many ways, despite declining numbers of those of actual Dutch origin

— Deep South: British colonial origins in Caribbean slave plantations, polarized on racial lines, frustrated nation state, currently struggling to maintain recently acquired political ascendancy.

— The Midlands (Midwest): Germanic, government skeptical, trying to mind its own business, passive and sometimes pacifist, includes the core of English-speaking Canada,

— The Left Coast: Related to Yankeedom in values, at war with a libertarian–corporate agenda and the values of the Deep South.

Frankly, I could not lay the book down, not only because I’m somewhat of a history buff, a discipline of which I find all too rarely utilized in intercultural work, but because it literally made me reflect on who I am, adding a dimension unfamiliar to the sense of diversity that I have lived out to this point. History can both explain how we got to where we are and substantiate who we are.

American Nations provides a perspective that helped me understand how and when I connected to and disconnected from others in the US context. We live and work in a time when cultural diversity has been promoted to the point where its significance is called into question on both practical and moral grounds, and in particular where the influence of culture is pooh-poohed despite clearly identifiable strains of cultural discourse in the pooh-poehers. There are many ways of picturing US demographics, e.g., urban and rural, red and blue States, diversity of ethnic origins, etc. Woodard’s perspective helps us bring a lot of these together and helps us make better sense of them.

Reviewed by George Simons
Dear SE members,

Join the 19th Annual SIETAR Europa Congress 2013 to be held in Tallinn, Estonia, September 18th-22nd, 2013 at the crossroads of transformation and development.

You will have the opportunity to discover Estonian culture as you team up with experts and professional from all over the world and share knowledge, skills and experiences.

We invite you to present latest research and best practices and join us in strengthening links with international companies as well as with NGO groups working across cultures. Welcome with us into the SIETAR network new colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe. This is our opportunity to develop lasting relationships, create learning experiences and broaden our existing network of intercultural expertise.

Last but not least, catch up with old friends and make new ones!

Register now before the 31st of May 2013, and receive the early bird discount (20%).

Sing up here: http://www.sietareu.org/congress2013

And for more details on congress attendance and the call for papers and workshops, please visit our online site or email the SIETAR Europa office.

www.sietareu.org
office@sietar-europa.org

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From the Geert Hofstede Consortium

A Well Rounded Student Experience in Bulgaria

Joint Master International Communication

at the New Bulgarian University beginning September, 2013

The New Bulgarian University in Sofia offers foreign and domestic students the opportunity to study under highly competent professors in a program carefully designed to enhance their communicational and cultural competences. The degree will prepare them for a successful career as specialists on the international job market.

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The New Bulgarian University’s partner universities in the consortium are:
- IULM, University of Language and Communication, Milan, Italy
- Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, the United Kingdom
- Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania
- Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen, Holland

Together they offer the joint Master in International Communication. Students have the opportunity to study at two universities and, upon graduating, receive two degrees and a consortium certificate. Ongoing harmonisation of the curriculum, the assessment criteria and procedures ensure comparability of the programme.

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Students study at one of the five consortium universities and complete the following modules:
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For the 2nd semester, the New Bulgarian University offers specializations in:

1. Effective communication through special events: Special events give an organisation the opportunity to connect with its audience on a unique level. Students will examine the complete cycle of the event, and focus on how to execute an event in an international setting.

2. Psychology of mass communication: Which theoretical models can explain the communication processes of mass media? Which strategies can be used to influence different segments of the international audience? Students will review theoretical concepts of mass communication and their practical application.

3. Exploring communication in new media: How different is traditional media from new media? How can interactivity, functionality and usability be used to enhance the effectiveness of new media? Students will look at how new media has changed the way organisations communicate, and examine how to exploit its full potential.

The course will be based on competence-based learning. Students will work on ‘real life’ cases brought in by companies and (governmental and other) agencies. The course is offered in English to an international student body.

For more information, contact Prof. PhD, D.Sc. Tolya Stoitsova at tstoiitsova@nbg.bg

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CALL FOR PAPERS
VOLUME 6 (2013)

“LANGUAGING IN CULTURES”

15th March 2013: call for abstracts
30 June 2013: full papers

LANGUAGING IN CULTURES

Issue 6 will include an interview with David Crystal, focusing on language and in particular on the glocalization of language(s), English, and what this means for those who need to internationalise outside of their own habitual language.

We would be happy to receive proposals for Cultus 6 regarding plurilinguism, a lingua franca or translation/interpretation in relation to intercultural and transcultural realities. As a theoretical notion, ‘languaging’ denotes a fluid system of communication that is constructed and performed by individuals during ‘collaborative dialogue’. Though usually used to talk about language learning, the term ‘languaging’ will here be extended to encompass language change across cultures.

For further information please visit our website: www.cultusjournal.com

Cultus: the Journal of intercultural mediation and communication is an international refereed journal focusing on the role of culture in constructing, perceiving and translating reality. The Journal aims to develop an awareness of the interplay between language and culture in communication.

The goal of this Journal is to promote research, education and training in communication by investigating language, languages, cultural models, conflict, mediation and interculturality. Furthermore, since translation is considered as mediation between cultures it will be included as a way of seeing cultural linguistics at work.

Each issue contains a selected number of internationally refereed articles broadly themed around a central topic in intercultural communication, and also includes an interview.

Editors: David Katan (University of the Salento)
Cinzia Spinzi (University of Palermo)
Events, workshops, congresses

Dublin, Ireland 7-10 March, 2013
La Recontre de Fingal The Association of European Cities and Regions for Culture - Les Rencontres, in liaison with the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union will offer this symposium on culture and sustainable development. The meeting will put forward creative, innovative policies and projects in European urban and rural areas. For more information, contact roxelane. oliyarkomilikiw@lesrencontres.eu, tel.: +33 1 56 54 26 35

Developing Intercultural Training Skills. This 5-day course is for experienced trainers in language and management training, who want to further develop their skills in course design and delivery or integrate cross-cultural topics into their current courses. The facilitators are Adrian Pilbeam and Phil O’Connor. More information at www.lts-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm

Winterthur, Switzerland 4-6 June, 7-8 June, 2013
Interactive Training Strategies This three-day workshop practices what it preaches by helping the trainer design and conduct 24 different types of effective games, simulations and activities. Design Clinic and Advanced Interactive Strategies This 2-day workshop is designed for those who have already completed Thiagi’s 3-day Interactive Training Strategies course and provides consultative advice and feedback on activities that you are currently designing. For more information, contact info@diversityandinclusion.net

Tallinn, Estonia 18-21 September, 2013
‘Global Reach, Local Touch’ is the theme of the upcoming SIETAR Europe congress. It will be a ‘glocal’ event, using the latest technology to be wired to the rest of the world with live presentations from partner organisations across the globe, along with interaction from our audience via Twitter, Facebook, etc. There will be plenary sessions, conferences as well as TED-style presentations and workshops. More information at: http://www.sietareuropacongress.org/

Online Everyday

The SIETAR Europe group discussing “Competence in Intercultural Professions” on LinkedIn has now over 3500 members in the group. Hot topics: “Can Non-Europeans Think?”. “Our Global Culture and IT.” Plus it offers videos, articles, books, tools and other resources for the intercultural profession. For more information, contact George Simons at diversophy@gmail.com

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