

SIETAR JOURNAL



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More details on page 21

Two interviews with

Milton Bennett

*A look into an
extraordinary mind*

Artwork by Axel Wendelberger

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Impressum

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SIETAR Journal

Editorial

“The act of creation” and the DMIS

The development of intercultural sensitivity has taken on an importance that no one could have imagined 15 or 20 years ago. Due to the ever-increasing influence of globalization, the Internet and even Twitter, cross-cultural contact has become almost a daily occurrence. The different languages, behavior patterns and values enrich our lives but also leave us confused and lead to cultural faux pas. Our job is to understand why, then develop new skills to communicate and behave appropriately in different settings.

Milton Bennett's *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*, more commonly known as the DMIS, is a remarkable explanation of what the mind does when confronting intercultural difference. It's a powerful theoretical framework, incorporating notions of empathy, consciousness and subjective relativity that shed light on the cognitive functioning of the brain. Each stage indicates a particular perceptual mode and behavior. By recognizing the underlying orientation toward culture difference, you can make predictions about people's behavior; training can be tailored to facilitate development into following stages. It's an intriguing, yet simple, description of what human beings do in new cultural surroundings.

Even more interesting is the road Dr. Bennett took in arriving at his conclusions. I had the opportunity to talk to him



in Milan and, as you'll see in the interview, everything began with his desire to understand “the act of creation” as a young student. Twenty-two years and countless experiences later, his tenacious curiosity led to the publication of an intercultural benchmark. (page 2).

As well, fellow-member Patrick Boylan has been kind enough to give us a look at his recent interview with Dr. Bennett. It shows another aspect of his thinking, namely cultural identity (page 10). And our correspondent in Montreal, Dan MacLeod, reports on current events in the Middle East to illustrate how “reframing” can be used to understand socio-political change (page 11). All in all, it's a rich read.

One last thing — the SIETAR Europa Congress is going to take place in Krakow, September 21-25. It will be an awesome event with many interesting speakers and conferences. Register now before the 31st of March and you will get the 20% early bird discount. See more details on page 21.

Patrick Schmidt, Editor-in-chief

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Milton Bennett talks about the DMIS

An interview with one of the most innovative thinkers in the intercultural world



The Old and New Worlds are in a continual battle as to which best faces the challenges of life. Europeans lead with their culture--a civilisation built on 2500 years of art, science and philosophy--and exhibit greater sophistication and a more intellectual understanding of human nature. Americans answer with the brash confidence that comes of youthful success: a can-do attitude based on impatience with the past and an eternally-optimistic view of the future.

The most fascinating aspect of this clash of Titans is their synergy. George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* shocked many in the straight-laced confines of symphonic music when it premiered in 1924 but it awed many more, with a million records sold by 1927. The composer called it "a musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep [and] metropolitan madness." What was left unstated, because taken for granted, was that the piece was built on the European foundations of the classical form...

The same can be said of Milton Bennett's *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* (DMIS), a ground-breaking study of how the mind adapts to cultural difference. Combining American vitality and pragmatism with European constructivism and cognitive psychology, he analyzed our intercultural reactions according to a continuum which opposes ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism.

Bennett observed that individuals from distinct societies react in predictable ways when learning to communicate with each other. As one's experience of cultural difference becomes more complex, one's potential for exercising competence in relations increases. His model comes closer than anyone's in describing the subtlety of the human brain and his work clearly demonstrates that subjective relativity is essential to getting along in our global world.

Milton Bennett is both a gifted researcher and an award-winning communicator. A Portland State University professor for 15 years, he launched their graduate program in Intercultural Communication and also co-founded the *The Intercultural Communication Institute* (ICI). He currently holds an adjunct faculty position at the University of Milano Bicocca and is a founding director of the *Intercultural Development Research Institute*, located in Milan, Italy and Portland, Oregon.

Eager to know more about the experiences that brought about his DMIS, I visited Dr. Bennett in Milan, where he now spends a good part of his time.

Let's start with your early life-experiences...

Soon after I was born in Boston, my parents moved to Seattle, where I spent my first eight years. After that we lived a couple of years in Stockton, California. All I can remember about Stockton

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Milton Bennett

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It was during his studies at Stanford that Milton Bennett became fascinated with the phenomenon of creativity.



was that it was flat and I was able to ride my bicycle. From the age of ten, I lived in a small town outside Portland, Oregon. The schools in McMinnville provided a better education than I would have experienced in a big city. And there was a small liberal arts college, which had a large number of foreign students.

So more diversity than a normal small town?

Yes, but I was used to differences. When we lived in Seattle, my mother used to take me to other places in the city that were not so homogenous as where we lived, just to give me the experience of being around people who were different.

Another thing my parents did was host a student sponsored by AFS (*American Field Service*). He came from Hamburg, Germany, and became a good friend. After graduating from high school, I did a three-month tour of Europe with Helmut, who really perked my interest in other cultures.

Also my father became the international marketing representative at the small company he worked for. He ended up travelling a lot to Europe and Asia and made me acutely aware of the importance of international business.

Obviously, your curiosity about cultural differences came to you early in life. Did you want to become an interculturalist from the beginning?

No, not at all. Through high school, I had two big interests--one was science and the other was writing. I participated in national science projects, was given scholarships and sent off to science camps. My studies began at Stanford University, where I majored in physics for a couple of years but realized I didn't really want to do that. I found myself moving to the other side of my interests and joined the creative writing program at Stanford.

Interesting things were happening in the mid-'60s. I got involved in research at the Palo Alto Medical Center, taking part in early experiments with LSD. At that time LSD was legal and seen as a consciousness exploration; it was taken seriously by researchers. There were a lot of safeguards and always someone there who could intercede if anything went wrong. I had some interesting experiences and wrote about them in psychology classes. What LSD does is to lower interconceptual boundaries, so there's a flowing of one thing into another. Some of the insights in my work were facilitated by those "trips".

I ended up graduating with a creative writing degree and the upshot of that was I became interested in cognitive psychology--how the mind creates. "The act of creation", to borrow the phrase from Arthur Koestler's book; writers are tuned in to that. The combination of LSD-exploration and cognitive psychology came together to provide me with

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Milton Bennett

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“To borrow the phrase from Arthur Koestler’s book ‘The Act of Creation’ is in itself a really interesting event of consciousness.”

motivation to explain this interesting act of consciousness. How does it work? Why would it work that way?

I decided to do a masters degree in psycho-linguistics at San Francisco State University. I thought this would be interesting to explore the psychology of language as a way of understanding the act of creation and consciousness in general. It was a combination of general semantics, more or less based on linguistic relativity; the Whorf/Sapir Hypothesis was central to this movement. The basic idea of general semantics—which has been largely lost—is that many problems in the way we think about things have to do with the “reification” of language. [Editor’s note: *The fallacy of treating an abstraction as if it were a real thing.*]

Misapprehensions are related to that. For instance, some say the most dangerous word in the English language is ‘is’, because it’s taken as a statement of reality rather than as a linguistic convention to create a representation of something.

So you wanted to know how linguistics, in the context of creative writing, affects our representation of ourselves and others.

You could say so. And I shifted to the meta level, seeing myself as somebody interested in explaining things, being

creative in the explanation of description rather than a generator of artistic creativity. I did the course-work, which was very interesting, then joined the Peace Corps and was assigned to Micronesia.

What was the Peace Corps like at that time?

The Peace Corps was in transition, moving from pre-departure to on-site training. The pre-departure consisted of exposing us to a set of grueling psychological stress tests. The idea was if the local inhabitants attacked you psychologically and you could resist, that would make you a good volunteer.

Then they dropped us on an island called Truk, now called Chuuk. They left us alone except for language classes; it was a sort of sink-or-swim immersion. The program was run by former volunteers who had no sophistication in talking about the culture—nothing about communication, values, beliefs or behavior. There was a little bit about etiquette, but only as a side-effect of the language.

The only thing good was the language-training; classes were excellent and we lived with a family who didn’t speak any English. This generated, in my mind, the idea of being a “fluent fool”: you know the language but nothing about the culture. In 1998 I published *“How not to be a fluent fool”* and discovered that Winston Brembach had already coined the term.

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Milton Bennett

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His first long-term intercultural experience was to spend two years as a Peace Corps volunteer on the Truk island in Micronesia.



Those two years in the Peace Corps were both mind-blowing and mind-numbing. There were moments of complete boredom and, at times, tremendous change. Looking back, my major experience was learning and speaking Trukese to the point of being negotiable at some of the most complex levels of that society.

What did you do after your time with the Peace Corps?

I came back to finish writing my master's thesis. It was about empathy and sympathy. I think empathy describes the mechanism of consciousness-shifting. Empathy is intentionally setting up the condition of trying to apprehend another's experience sufficiently to feel "as if" you are having that experience yourself. This is the basis of all good communication, although people mostly think of it as a therapy technique. Empathy is particularly necessary for intercultural communication.

I was really interested in *intentional* consciousness-shifting, whether facilitated by LSD, done through meditation, or a basic act of creation such as a novelist might engage in. I believe it's an extension of boundaries, allowing yourself to move through something that's not your normal experience. The same could be said about an artistic happening, such as watching a ballet or appreciating a sculpture, you're "taken in" by aesthetic empathy.

At the same time, I was doing some interesting studies on voluntary control of internal states: bio-feedback and certain paranormal phenomena like remote-viewing, where one's perception seems to be located outside or even at a distance from one's body.

Upon finishing your thesis, you continued your studies on extending boundaries?

Yes, but I wasn't sure how to go about it. Then I got a call from Dean Barnlund, a former professor who was organizing a conference at the International Christian University at Mitaka, outside Tokyo. I said to myself, "If he thinks I should go, I'm going!" I had no money but I went out and borrowed it. As it turned out, it was a seminal conference in intercultural communication. It was in 1972 and a lot of the early intercultural people were there and many decisions were made, one being to set up SIETAR.

Then a second fateful thing happened. Our Japanese guide got drunk at dinner and the train he put us on was going in the wrong direction. I was with Bill Howell, who was setting up a doctoral program in Intercultural Communications. At the end of our long trip he said, "Why don't you come to the University of Minnesota?"

You accepted his invitation?

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Milton Bennett

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“Intentional consciousness shifting is really an extension of boundaries that allows you to move through an experience that’s not your normal experience.”

Yes, to do the program as well as teach intercultural workshops; they date back to the mid-’60s in Pittsburgh and were based on Edward Hall’s work targeting foreign students. Now they were being used for all kinds of students, not just foreign, to explore ethnic differences, what we call diversity today.

Did the workshops deepen your knowledge of consciousness-shifting?

Yes. But intercultural communication is not unique in supposing there’s some kind of “shift” necessary to appreciate someone else’s experience. In certain types of therapy the level of intensity demands a bigger act of empathy on the part of the therapist than does everyday communication. The same thing happens at artistic events. And leadership is also related to context-shifting. People at the Harvard Leadership Initiative call it “contextual intelligence”, the ability to be aware of context and to shift. Intercultural communication is an *operationalization* of shifting consciousness.

Another powerful thing about the program at Minnesota was the dissertation work I did on the “forming-feeling process”, an early attempt to say perception is really about apprehending the feeling of something and communication is about giving form to that. Antonio Demasio wrote a book on this, *The Feeling of What Happens*. The forming is more

the categorization, the structuring of the experience. I called this a system of “processual complementarity”, meaning that these two sides were constantly being reconciled—it’s a dialectic that maintains itself.

What you’re saying is that intercultural competence is a more sophisticated description of the feeling?

There are two levels here, Patrick. One is of someone moving through that sequence, acquiring a more sophisticated experience of cultural difference by having more sophisticated strategies for describing, giving form to the experience.

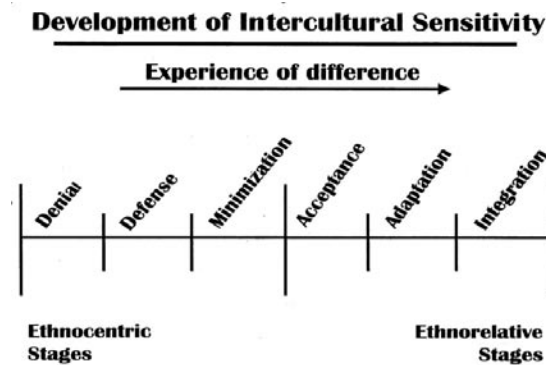
[Editor’s note: *This interview took place in my hotel room but, before we could get started, we were told Dr. Bennett had to return downstairs and register. Ironically, this annoyance provided us an excellent example of “forming-feeling”.]*

[When the employee came] we first reacted angrily and said to ourselves, “He’s an idiot!” Then we have our cultural informant describe the context, in that hotels in Italy are now required by law to check everyone going to a room for reasons of terrorism. This is organizing that experience in a more sophisticated way. So rather than say something simplistic—“He’s an idiot!”—we say, “Well this is an interesting situation.” We don’t necessarily prefer it but we see how this fits in to a more general cultural pattern of some sort.

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Milton Bennett

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The different positions in the DMIS

The same thinking often happens at the end of my workshops. Participants say, “If we’d known this before, we’d have avoided misunderstandings with our foreign colleagues. Now we have a more coherent structure.”

Yes, what you’re doing is taking them through that process, giving them a more sophisticated way of understanding. In a lot of cases, it’s retroactive: they’ll reflect on the experience they had and say, “Now, I see what was happening.”

The other thing is on the meta level; the DMIS itself is a description of how people get better at this. All of us, carry around certain trailing tendencies and one of them is a little bit of superiority and familiarity with our own culture and a little bit of a negative response when something happens that’s different. The question is how quickly can we reconstrue the experience with more sophisticated categories?

You mean to have a more neutral, appropriate view?

Yes. Here our cultural informant says the employee was a little overzealous but not really an idiot, which allows us to reframe. How open are we? Assuming we’re further along the developmental sequence, we’re looking for resolutions. We’re distrustful of our gut reaction if we think it may be

ethnocentric. When he told us to register, we initially reacted in an ethnocentric manner, not as an Italian would.

However, we have to be careful in not accepting everything as cultural. In some situations the other person is an idiot [and] acting wrongly in his or her cultural context. If we’re unable to see how that person is acting inappropriately, we’re being just as insensitive as if we were ethnocentric.

To get back to my Ph.D. work, it was the theoretical extension of the master’s program, consciousness-shifting, but going into the more general theory of how perception and communication were operating in this forming-feeling process. This established the theoretical base for being able to talk about consciousness-shifting in general. I began teaching courses on consciousness and paranormal communication and did this for a number of years but I slowly began doing more and more intercultural work. I’ve never seem them being as distinct.

So you could say intercultural communication is a form of paranormal communication?

Yes, it’s paranormal in the sense that it’s not what we normally do. But it’s in the realm of human capabilities.

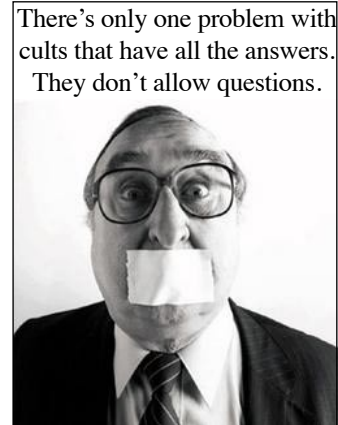
How, then, did the DMIS come into being?

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Milton Bennett

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Milton Bennett has always been interested in cults, which are just "little models of ethnocentrism."



It was a combination of those two things, running intercultural workshops and doing consciousness studies. All the time my brain is organizing stuff around forming, feeling, extension, empathy--all this consciousness work I'm doing.

The original motivation for the DMIS was training-methodology. In the mid-'80s, methods were often thrown together in haphazard ways. A lot of concern was for pacing issues, like you should do simulation after lunch because it keeps people awake. There was no pedagogical sequencing or logical consideration. I wanted to answer the questions "How can we sequence this material better in training programs?" [and] "What do we hope people will be able to do at the end of this?"

This was an early attempt to define intercultural competence. I'd define the end-state as integration--the ability to shift from one state to another--whether it be bicultural or multicultural -- what I now call an expanded repertoire of worldview.

What's the beginning state? Some of my early studies at Portland were around cults: a little model of an ethnocentric culture, very strong. People who otherwise might not be ethnocentric join these groups and become ethnocentric. Those who run the Moonies and, to some extent, the

Scientologists really know which buttons to push. The caution is to recognize the process, not the nonsense being said. I defined the process cult-leaders use in generating followings and, to my surprise, it was later published in a book for FBI agents!

When it came time to define what is ethnocentric, I had a pretty good idea: the experience of your own culture as central to your reality. All of us are, to some extent, convinced about our set of beliefs...religious, national, etcetera. The cult-people think their view of reality is completely and uniquely central to reality.

So what is the beginning state? It's this experience of your own culture as being central and it moves through this forming-feeling process that I name stages--they're really more positions along the continuum than stages. What you're doing is marking different organizations of experience; the DMIS is based on subjective organization. The more complex structure you have for dealing with cultural differences, the deeper the experience you have.

How does this different organization of experience actually work?

There are two levels. My ability to understand you depends on my having a relatively complex facsimile of

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Milton Bennett

— *continued*

“Intercultural competence is acquiring a more sophisticated experience of cultural difference by having more sophisticated strategies for describing, meaning giving form to that experience.”



you and your experience. That said, I also need to have a relatively complex explanation for how it is that I go about apprehending that experience. So not only do I need to have the idea that you're a complex human being, but I also have to have an infrastructure that allows me to take that perspective. And both of those things are developing simultaneously in the DMIS.

In the ethnocentric condition, I have virtually no sense of the complexity of the other. I have this complete simplification of anything outside of my own experience [but] I may have a pretty complex experience of my own context.

To go back to the point, the movement through the developmental model is [that of] forming feelings, getting better at consciousness-shifting. I think that the DMIS represented a formalization, in an intercultural context, of all the work I'd been doing on consciousness from my last two years at Stanford up 'til 1986. In those 22 years, it had all come together.

So the DMIS came out of creative writing, LSD experiments, linguistics, the Peace Corps, foreign students, and paranormal and intercultural studies. There wasn't a conscious effort to say "I'm going to discover the stages people go through when adapting to other cultures."

You could say that. The impetus to write the DMIS came from workshops which asked "What do we do next?" I articulated this in Michael Paige's book *Cross-Cultural Orientation* or in a special issue of IJIR (*International Journal of Intercultural Relations*), I forget which...Both occurred pretty much at the same time in 1986 [and] the response led to the re-publication of the DMIS in a somewhat more sophisticated form in 1993. Since then, I've been refining it. It was about 2004 when I did my last major rewrite and I'll probably do another one soon.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt

In the second part of the interview, found at this link

www.sietareu.org/publications/newsletter

Milton talks about the issues facing the intercultural field and in the virtual world, the usefulness of the IDI and recommendations to young people going into the field.

And on the next page, you can read an interview of Milton conducted by Sietar member Patrick Boylan. There, he discusses a person's cultural identity from a "constructivist" perspective

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Cultural Identity and Integration

Milton Bennett talks to Patrick Boylan



In a recent interview for the journal Cultus, Milton Bennett discussed what makes up a person's cultural identity from a "constructivist" perspective and how this perception enables a trainer/teacher to get better results in preparing trainees/students to interact effectively with culturally diverse interlocutors. An excerpt follows below.

The interview was conducted by Patrick Boylan, vice-president of SIETAR-Italia and member of the editorial board of Cultus. The journal's web site is www.cultusjournal.com, for those interested in subscribing. For a limited time SIETAR members can download the entire interview – free of charge – at www.tinyurl.com/cultus3.

BOYLAN: So how does your constructivist view of reality differ from, say, a positivist's view?

BENNETT: If you're a positivist, you think you can grasp the reality of a client's intercultural competence or of a foreign person's cultural heritage with a simple questionnaire, and then pigeon-hole that competence or that culture using a chart or an inventory of traits. And you are convinced that your chart maps really-existing qualities, and that the traits you list have real existence.

But if you're a constructivist, you find all that illusory. Instead, you try to get to know that competence or that culture through

reconstructing it within you, by analogy with something outside you that you can only glimpse as in a dark mirror. To be more exact, you co-construct that "emerging reality" within you, by interacting with that client or that foreign partner in certain controlled ways.

This is what little children do, too. They constantly test their mother or father to see how much they can get away with. They "map" their parents' value system (the "Accepted Rules of Behavior" which even their parents may be incapable of defining precisely, at least in many borderline cases) as a constantly emerging reality that, through repeated testing, gradually takes shape within their minds – although it will never ever acquire a definitive form.

BOYLAN: So we construct reality from nothing that already exists definitively, right? And we do so through the kind and quality of interactions we have. Does this apply to our identity, too?

BENNETT: Yes. The constructivist view is that you cannot really avoid creating your own identity. The question is whether you are aware of that or not. Typically we operate in a group, we receive our socialization through a group, we maintain that pattern of behavior (which we call our culture) through interaction with people in the group, and we may – or may not – be aware that we are in the process of constructing all that. But once we become aware, then we can take charge of the process.

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Reporter's Sketchbook

...an American in Montréal

The whole world is watching...

by Dan MacLeod

Part from the untimely demise of Catherine the Great (aptly named), what I best remember from my Russian History class is that a couple of failed attempts preceded the October Revolution of 1917. And that, each time, the French were to blame.

Paris was, of course, the Center of the Universe in the latter half of the 19th century and it was there that Russia's aristocracy sent its youth to be educated. There were no serfs in France and no royal family; it was a new *république* and revolutionary ideas, such as democracy, are contagious.

Ironically--and just as logically--Josef Stalin made sure outside influences no longer played a role once he'd ultimately replaced the czar. Liberated Soviet prisoners-of-war who'd spent time in England were summarily executed upon returning home in 1945.

Which brings us to "reframing"...and also what I call *deframing*.

Two things happened in Tunisia last month: one internal and organic, the other by way of Australia via Washington. The man who set himself on fire in protest of a corrupt dictatorship was the tipping-point but his message was heard in the context of a world-wide joke. Everyone in the



Wikileaks has allowed the public to "reframe" their views on world politics

country knew their rulers--nicknamed "the Family"--were nothing more than a crime-syndicate but it was *WikiLeaks* that propulsed private fear and loathing into public revolt.

Over half a million Tunisians live in France and, when *Le Monde* published U.S. diplomatic cables referring to the theft of billions of dollars by their "mafia-like" government, the news traveled quickly. Suffering in silence becomes impossible when you realize that what you thought was a secret is widely known. Humiliation is beyond the scope of basic human dignity and the ensuing revolt was partly a case of anger at national embarrassment.

At the same time, Tunisians suddenly realized they were the only ones who could take their country back. Washington, Paris and the rest of the world had obviously known for years what was happening but Washington, Paris and the rest of the world weren't going to intervene.

Reframing is a multidimensional process based, first and foremost, on information. The problem is that "information" is a relative quantity, a subjective entity.

As I write this, I'm watching CNN. It's February 3rd, the day after seven people were killed and over 700 injured when regime-paid thugs attacked the protesters in Cairo's (aptly-named) Liberation Square. The new vice-president has just

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The whole world...

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Thousands have been injured, and 300 killed, in the first two weeks of demonstrations.

blamed the violence on “foreign infiltrators” and reiterated that, although the young people had done their country a service by pointing out real problems, Mubarak must remain in power for another eight months due, among other things, to “logistical problems”.

CNN’s perky host says “We’ll see if this is good enough for the protesters...” before she reverts to a default-smile and jumps to the next subject. It’s the morning show, not a hard-news context: there’s a major snowstorm to talk about, and next Sunday’s Super Bowl, and actor Charlie Sheen’s drug problem.

But her reaction is also automatic, the media playing it safe. Ever since jobs became scarce in the ‘80s, self-preservation means a counter-intuitive effort to avoid saying anything which may get you in trouble. The problem is that reporting the news in a toneless voice is a form of *deframing* reality.

The vice-president’s comments were a slap in the face for the protesters as well as an overt warning to foreign journalists covering the protest. Suzanne Malveaux seemed not to understand the message she was delivering to CNN viewers around the world.

If the media pass on propaganda as “objective” information, politicians are that much worse. Canada’s bombastic--and dogmatically pro-Israel--foreign minister, Lawrence Cannon, was still calling for “an end to violence on both sides” a day after everyone else in the world knew it was Mubarak’s goons versus unarmed protesters.

Reframing: a freedom *Blitzkrieg* in Tunisia leads to a democratic revolution across Northern Africa and the Middle East. Social media energize millions of over-educated unemployed youth to change their world...and ours.

Deframing: the region’s flashpoint regime clings to power by silencing social media, then all media. Nearly a thousand protesters are injured in a well-organized attack even as visual images disappear from our tv screens. Foreign journalists are beaten and detained by mobs directed by secret police while Egypt’s 80 million people--35% of whom are illiterate--are fed a non-stop diet of pro-Mubarak gibberish on state-run television.

Reframing: Shahira Amin, high-profile host on that same state-run television, resigns amidst the violence. If this revolution fails, life, as she knows it, is over. She’s on the phone tonight with CNN, telling the world “I could no longer tell lies.”

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My first experiences in Germany

by Pratibha Mallu



Many of us foreigners who have been living in Germany for a very long time now have probably forgotten what our first months were like. Here is an article by a young Indian lady who, in a simple and charming style, describes her initial impressions of Germany.

My first experience with German culture was the day of my arrival, 29th September 2002. My brother and I were inquiring about the departure time of the train Frankfurt airport to Karlsruhe. To my surprise, the railway employee immediately informed the train driver to wait for a minute, took my big suitcase and ran towards our train. He made us board the train and informed the driver to start. I couldn't imagine that happening in India: I would have had to engage a porter, to carry my heavy luggage and I may have missed the train.

When I traveled to Bremen the next month, I was trying to make a call from the public telephone. I tried to call several times the same number, but to no avail. There was snowfall and cold temperatures. In order to make myself warm, I ran towards the near-by shelter in between every call. Observing me, a person approached and questioned me in German. The next time, he asked in English, "Are you looking for drugs?" Shocked, I answered "no"! I thought, why did he approach only me and not anyone else and ask such a question? Do the people in this country ask for drugs like "tea or coffee" in India. After struggling for a period of time, an answer sparked

in my mind. The person observed anxiety and disorientation in my face — I obviously was in culture shock.

But I noticed some positive aspects of German life. For example, when I withdrew money at the ATM (Automatic Teller Machine), the money I received was in different denominations. The local weekly markets open punctually at 8:00 and close exactly at 12:00. Immediately after, the cleaning the leftovers of fruits, vegetables, etc. is quite normal. There is not any signs of the previous existence of the market. The collection of garbage on the streets at very early hours of the day (even during the snowfall season) and the separation of the trash into different categories are valuable lessons to learn.

The bus stops are well organized with a detailed map of a particular region where the bus travels. And the bus timetable includes details of all stops. The arrival time of buses is a regular feature. Similar kind of organization is also found with road signs. While I was traveling in a private car, I noticed the presence of signs wherever necessary for finding the way. This makes it easier for any new traveler. This is almost contrary to the Indian conditions, except in some cities and highways. The German organization systems are indeed worthy to learn and copy.

To experience how Germans practise their Christian faith, I visited a church in Witzenhausen, Kassel. In India, I saw

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many foreigners in the spiritual programs and heard that the people in the West are generally materially oriented and thought there wouldn't be any spiritual programs. To my surprise, the church was full of people, like an Indian temple. And I joined a student group, which met once a week, reading the Bible and singing songs in praise of God.

Nazi protests still exist today. For me, Nazi movement is only in the history books. When I saw the Nazi movement in Gottingen, this was more than a surprise. The demonstration seemed to be well organized and the number of police was more than the number of demonstrators. In India, the reverse is the case.

Returning to my home country

After about three and half years in Germany, I returned to my home country. On my way back, I needed to stay four hours at the Bahrain airport. It was the starting point of re-entry shock. In many ways, the culture of people at Bahrain airport resembles the Indian culture. People were found in groups according to their country of origin and talking loudly within their respective groups. This kind of culture once familiar to me was strange now. Even though there were cultural similarities between different Asian countries, staying so long in Germany made me feel the Asian culture as an alien culture.

At my home in India, I could feel some changes within me, making me feel strange to stay at home. Being alone and away

for a period of time made me feel new within the family and of course with friends and relatives. For example, coming of people at different times of the day and not necessarily informing of their arrival. Or the servant and master relationship in India seems to be wide. I learned in Germany that there are usually no personal or family servants and there is not much difference between a boss and his or her sub-ordinates, the relationship is friendlier.

What can I conclude from my long absence from India?

Living only in your home culture means to have only knowledge about one particular culture. For a better understanding of other cultures, one needs to stay in and experience different environments. During my initial months in Germany, the new culture was difficult to grasp. However, after a period of time I started to integrate myself into the German ways and an understanding came about. Upon returning to home country, my native culture appeared new to me. However, I could understand and adjust to my native culture within a week.

Later on, I came to an understanding that their different behavior or thinking originates from different cultural backgrounds. Differences are apparent only for a period of time. But after a period of time, you adopt to the new culture, and unknowingly you will become a part of it and your understanding of it increases. After having a number of shocks, I have become accustomed to accepting new situations; they seem to be no more shocking to me.

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Book Review

Xenophobe's Guide to the Estonians

(This critique first appeared in the *Baltic Review*, December, 2011)

by Hilary Bird, Lembit Öpik, Ulvi Mustmaa
£4.99, 96 pages
Oval Books 2010



The Xenophobe's Guide to the Estonians is filled with clever observations and self-ironic descriptions that shed light on the Estonian soul, its uniqueness and its phobias. Here you can find our best kept secrets to piece us together. Bird, Öpik, and Mustmaa, the authors of this short book, describe the Estonian way of life with humor and wit. Okay, a hilarious read—but you may wonder, “Who are the Estonians and where is Estonia?”

Does it exist? Yes, it does. “Find it underneath Finland, about the size of Denmark or Switzerland,” would be a quick Estonian orientation. A land between the East and West, next to the Baltic Sea, a place where wandering tribes and invaders have passed leaving their mark on this nation of nature worshippers, who have somehow made their way into the 21st century.

While Estonia is very multicultural, with more than 120 ethnic minorities, native Estonians define nationality through language and ethnicity. *The Xenophobe's Guide to the Estonians* focuses on those who see themselves as the original Estonians. Meeting an Estonian for the first time and speaking Russian would generally not be in good taste, though you may never know if you offended your interlocutor or not. Why? Simply because Estonians have their own identity and they can be great poker players. Don't expect an Estonian to talk about their feelings openly or what is bothering him or her – the one who suffers lives longer. Estonian Russians would be a different matter but they are not under the microscope here.

Bird, Öpik, and Mustmaa review Estonian national symbols, for example, *Kalevipoeg*, the national epic and the Estonian flag's horizontal stripes of blue (top), black and white. Blue is for loyalty, the beautiful blue skies, seas, and lakes; as well as the blue peasant jacket of the past; black speaks of both oppression and fertile soil; white recalls virtue, winter snows and the light of summer nights. These colors help explain Estonian likes and experiences.

The authors address the country's past with just the most important bits, relevant for understanding how history has shaped Estonians' mentality and fears. However, I would like to add a mention of the period of the Northern Crusade battles, the ancient Estonian fight for independence, guided by the mentality, “better die fighting for freedom than live in slavery,” led by Lembitu, the ancient Estonian elder of Saka-la county and military leader, who tried to unite Estonians to fight the German conquest.

His death at the battle of Madisepäeva (St Matthew's Day) resulted in 700 years of servitude for Estonians, not a happy outcome. Invasions in Estonian territory spanned seven centuries during which there were only three uprisings when Estonians decided that “enough is enough.” Perhaps this explains why Estonians can be masters of both patience and quiet protest, and prefer silence to going on strike. Set-backs in life are normal, yet success comes from not giving

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The Estonian Song Festival is one of the largest amateur choral events in the world.



up. What counts is what's inside you. No wonder Estonians can adapt to different situations.

People say everyone has ideas in Estonia but no one likes anybody else's —“two people, five opinions.” The strength gained from the wisdom of nature, resilience and resistance allowed Estonians to survive numerous invaders and preserve their own ways of thinking, customs, beliefs and traditions. Their saving grace has been a combination of inventiveness, flexibility and tenacity.

Doris Kareva, an Estonian poet, has remarked that time in this sea-oriented culture does not flow from one place to another, but is in ceaseless arrival, an eternal murmur of the waves. *Tasa sõuad, kaugele jõuad*, “row quietly and you will travel far.” And, *ikka tasa ja targu*—ever quiet and wise. Estonians dream quietly about their future and hope things will turn out for the best, but also think what might happen if they don't (if things are going well, there'll likely be a reversal of fortune).

Bird, Õpik, and Mustmaa say Estonia is a young country, though Estonians are not a young nation. Estonia may be young in the length of its first independence (1918-1940) and in the time since the restoration of independence (1991-present), but Estonians have a very old soul. Their ancestors arrived in this homeland about 10,000 years ago. There were also Estonian Vikings and the Viking soul is still hidden in many of us—and it may peek out after a few drinks!

Bird, Õpik, and Mustmaa mention that Estonian humor can be difficult to grasp—a mixture of sarcasm and self-irony, not unlike British black humor. Sometimes you must read between the lines to get the punch line. An Estonian might not joke around in a social setting, or if he or she does, it may not sound funny at all to you. A successful Estonian social evening is grilling meat with friends, singing, beer and sauna.

You can be quite confident that whenever you meet an Estonian they'll be pondering how you size them up and whether they should say this or that about themselves. This illustrates the Estonian self-consciousness, aversion to conflict and beating themselves up with what others might think of them.

Less than 9% of Estonians attend church once a month or more, the lowest ranking in Europe. But then again Estonians are really Earth believers deep down. Everyone will have their own judgment day. There is an Estonian saying, *Loll saab kirkus ka peksta*—a silly person gets beaten up in church too.

Bird, Õpik, and Mustmaa describe the Estonian language with humorous grammatical descriptions and examples of pronunciation. If you think Estonian is related to Russian, Lithuanian or Latvian, think again. It is a difficult language to learn, but as with any language, anyone can learn it. Some older folk say that at one time the Estonian language won second place after Italian in a beauty contest with the

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Estonians cherish their long historic traditions, and at the same time are eager to adapt to the modern world.



sentence “*Sõida tasa üle silla*” (Go slowly over the bridge).

Titles are not so important in Estonia – after all, most Estonians don’t feel comfortable being in the spotlight or being made a fuss of. However, respect for the elderly and for those in higher positions is expected, which doesn’t mean Estonians like hierarchy. An Estonian might not tell you that you have made a social gaffe—but you may need to get the silent message.

“So if others tell you to put your head in the oven, you’ll do it?!” “Keep your mouth shut in the cold weather or you’ll catch cold.” These are proverbial lectures Estonian children are likely to get at home. The point is to think for yourself and always think before you act. If an Estonian tells you to “mind your own business,” don’t think of it as an offense, but just as a word of wise advice.

What is life like in Estonia today? Have you heard of e-Estonia, digital prescriptions, e-elections, skype? It is a wired world! Economically, however, many Estonians have “borrowed themselves to death” and will be financial slaves for the rest of their lives, trying to keep up with the Western (largely USA) model and with their richest neighbors. All too many have gone abroad to taste something different. Agriculture has lost much of its importance (mostly due to EU directives and quotas) and currently makes up only about 8% of the country’s industry.

There is concern about losing Estonianism and a dose of intolerance is lurking inside many Estonians. Integration of immigrants (a two-way process, by the way) is a painful topic as not all settlers from Soviet times have fully integrated. This is even more worrisome in light of EU policies and newly arriving immigrants. The darkest scenario suggests that native Estonians become the minority in their own land and eventually cease to exist.

On the other hand, their perseverance and adaptability to live side by side other nationalities in the past may help them survive and go on for centuries to come. Estonians seem to be on the road, carrying the past with them, looking for better ways and taking risks, if they dare, hoping to find what they are looking for without losing touch with their souls and that indefinable quality that makes them really happy inside—*ilo*.

The Xenophobe’s Guide to the Estonians is a recommended read for foreigners dealing with Estonians, those planning a trip to Estonia, or those just eager to find out more about us. It’s a great gift for Estonians who have a good sense of humor, as well as giving the unknowing reader a decent portrait of us—an interesting and enjoyable way to learn something new about a piece of the world that too few can locate on the map. Even if you have no connection to this land, it will engage your curiosity!

Reviewed by Katrin Volt

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The Charming Austrians

The historical and cultural factors that have shaped the Austrian communication style



by Patrick Schmidt

The majority of non-German tourists who come to Austria assume that the country is like Germany because Austrians speak German. And a quick look at their history tells us of an intertwining relationship to their northern neighbor. Austria suffered during World War II and all the other wars in which Germany was involved. One would think sharing a common historical fate, along with the same language and many similar cultural values, Austrians would have the same communication style.

Yet, Germans will quickly tell you that isn't at all the case. For them, Austrians seem to be unclear, "wishy-washy" when they communicate. You can note this in the language. When a German says he'll do something, he'll say "*Wir machen es*". You get a clear sense that the task will be done. An Austrian is more likely to say "*Wir machen es schon*". The underlying message is we will try to get it done.

Or take the Austrian concept of promise – *versprechen*. I learned it within a few days after moving to Vienna. After my wife and I finished unpacking, we had a lot of cardboard boxes that belonged to the moving company. I called up and was told by a nice, young woman that a truck would come by on Friday. All I had to do was put the boxes out on the sidewalk, which I did. But by Friday late afternoon, they were still there. I called the company and before I could say a word about this unpleasant situation, the young lady

immediately apologized and promised me in a most charming manner the boxes would be picked up the next day. Her seductive charm melted away a potential conflict.

So I brought all the boxes back into the apartment and, the next day, dragged them all back out to the sidewalk. I assumed that a promise meant a promise, the way I experienced it in Germany. No, the boxes weren't picked up on Saturday. There were finally taken away on Tuesday!

Interculturalist Frank Brück writes in his book *Interkulturelles Management: Kultur Vergleich Österreich, Deutschland, Schweiz*, "Whereas Germans like to be objective, direct and credible, Austrians emphasize relationships and avoid conflict." And as one young Viennese summed it up to me, "*Die Österreicher sind ein fröhliches Volk*", (the Austrians are a happy people) always trying to smile and maintain *Gemütlichkeit* (cosiness) with others, even if it means not doing what they say they're going to do.

Why do Austrians have such different communication strategies than the Germans? I've been observing how they communicate and also done some reading. These three historical points may provide an explanation.

The Influence of Catholicism

Austria is a Catholic culture. Catholicism is a religion of

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The charming Austrians

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Austria has had historically a conservative approach to governing, which was an alternative mixture of “humanistic absolutism” and police state controls.

synthesis, acting as a mediator between Man and God. It teaches sins can be forgiven through the act of confession. Psychologically, this has an enormous liberating effect -- the heavy burden of self-responsibility is gone. Light-hearted behavior is possible; sins can be washed clean; nothing is starkly black and white...

Not so in Germany, heavily influenced by the writings of Luther and Calvin. It teaches people that they have to find their own moral responsibility toward God through acts of honesty and the search of the absolute truth (*Wahrheitssuche*), even if it means hurting feelings of others. This emphasis on selfreflection and righteousness are, at times, placed higher than harmony with others. Moralistic, confrontational behavior is almost guaranteed.

A Conservative Tradition

Being right in the middle of Europe, Austria has absorbed contradictory currents of Western democratic thinking and Eastern despotism. The relatively democratic and egalitarian spirit of Western European culture came from free City States like Venice, Frankfurt, Lübeck and Hamburg. People in these cities could question freely and without fear the status quo. They played a decisive role in the development of self-governing independent regions, which eventually evolved into a separation of church and state.

This never happened in Austria. Not one of its cities demonstrated any signs of independence. Vienna, Graz and Innsbruck were originally the residences of local nobles. Then they became administrative centers for the Habsburg rulers. Salzburg belonged to the richest and most powerful archbishop in the German-speaking territories.

Furthermore, historians point out the Habsburg's approach to governing was that of an alternate mixture of “humanistic absolutism”, exemplified by Joseph II, and police-state controls, symbolized by Metternich — a sort of conservative Yin-Yang arc. The upshot of this is Austrians are more likely to accept the status quo. They historically have never “burned down the house”, like the French did in 1789. Rather, through the centuries they have learned to express dissatisfaction indirectly and frustration in a round-about manner.

Keeping a multi-cultural Empire together

There is a famous Latin proverb that every Austrian school child learns by heart: “*Bella gerant alii, tu felix Austria nube!*” In German “*Mögen die andere Ländern Kriege führen, Du, glückliches Österreich heirate*”. In English “Let other countries carry out wars—you, lucky Austria, marries.”

This saying probably best describes the Austrian character in a nutshell. They compromise and avoid conflict through

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The charming Austrians

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To keep their large multi-cultural empire together for 640 years, Austrians learned to reconcile different cultural values.



charm and beating around the bush. The origins for this behavior can be traced to what it took to maintain the Austro-Hungarian empire. For 640 years the German-speaking Habsburgs ruled a large territory--consisting of many different ethnic and cultural groups--Hungarians, Romanians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Slovenians and Italian.

unique (and excellent) communicators and explains why they are such successful and subtle negotiators in Eastern Europe and the Far East. They practice a byzantine-like strategy of tipping around firm positions. It's even become official government policy. The Austrian Post Office just recently put out a stamp that proudly states: "Austria is a labyrinth, in which each one finds their way".

The ruling elite found out over time that it couldn't just issue orders and decrees and expect to maintain peace. There were too many cultural frictions and tribal issues. To keep this vast empire together at minimal cost and energy, the Habsburgs turned to multi-ethnic reconciliation: listening and compromise. They essentially became "cross-cultural swingers", working with a dozen competing value systems!

Anybody wishing to integrate and work successfully in the Austrian-Hungarian empire, especially in Vienna, had to demonstrate diplomatic skill. Making compliments and softening the truth became the modus vivendi of Austrians. Through time, and without realizing it "the country drew a good deal of its strength from the idea of the center, of compromise, exhibiting an almost narcissistic love of the middle way and a leveling of extremes".

This last statement is the key as to why Austrians are



This article first appeared in the newspaper "Vienna Review", November 2007.

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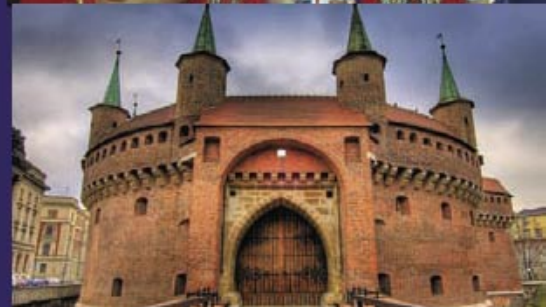
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