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## How to overcome grave misunderstanding when different cultures meet?

*When different cultures meet it is usually the members of the other group that are considered rude because they do not behave in a way the first group would expect its own members to behave. Because the strangers' behaviour is strange and not in accordance with local expectations, it cannot be prognosticated what they are up to, so the locals will grow reserved and suspicious with the strangers. It is undoubted that tensions experienced more and more often in culturally and ethnically increasingly diverse societies of the 21st century pose a great responsibility to educational science. Luckily educational science can effectively contribute towards a peaceful coexistence of rather different cultures. Besides imparting an empathic knowledge of one's own and the other culture's traditions it can establish a concept of humankind that recognises the fellow human, even despite different values and habits, and even if their ideology or behaviour appears strange to us.*

*A Native American Indian goes to a New York bar. The barman asks him: Well, how do you like life in our grand old city? The red man answers him with a question: And you, how do you like life in our ancient homeland?*

When different cultures meet it is usually the members of the other group that are considered rude because they do not behave in a way the first group would expect its own members to behave. Because the strangers' behaviour is *strange* and not in accordance with local expectations, it cannot be prognosticated what they are up to, so the locals will grow reserved and suspicious with the strangers. The results of social- and evolutionary psychology (e.g. Hejj, 2010, 2011, 2017a, 2017b) shed light on the development and possible conditions of overcoming xenophobia and ethno-hostility – i.e. repugnance to strangers (Süllwold, 1988). Let us see a few examples the present author experienced in the course of his international career.

### **A life-saving bargain – A bishop who had 150 wives**

The Tiwi tribe that lives on Bathhurst Island north of Australia did not have a high reputation in the 1920-s. Chinese traders who wished to establish commercial relationships with them did not always return to their homeland. Many a time they themselves were consumed instead of

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their products. After a few attempts that failed for similar reasons, Christian missionaries gave up, since the Tiwi took the sacrifice formula of the Holy Mess too literally: „*Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you*”.

But Father Gsell was not carved out of the kind of wood that these threatening circumstances could have dissuaded him from his missionary work. He noticed that not every stranger who set foot on the island landed on the Tiwi's table. Under divine inspiration he formulated the hypothesis that strangers did not receive the death penalty for their pure presence, but only if they put their hands on something the locals considered a vital resource. As an enthusiastic anthropologist he ventured to test his hypothesis under empirical conditions.

Father Gsell arrived in the land of the Tiwi equipped with all he would need during the next few months. He argued, if the locals would see that he is not using their valuable resources, if he managed to learn the Tiwi's language quickly, and if he could offer medicine to their sick, they would accept him and gradually they would become interested in his teaching as well. As it turned out, the missionary argued correctly, it was not the stranger by himself that outraged the Tiwi, only if he wanted to get his share of the locals' goods. Since Father Gsell avoided doing this, after some time he was not looked upon as a stranger, but a generous helper with excellent tools. They got to like him. More and more of their young ones attended his school.

One of his favourite students was 11 year old Martina. One day an old warrior came to the mission along with his armed escort to take Martina with him, as she had been promised to him, according to local tradition, before her birth. Though Martina was crying and insisted on staying in her familiar surroundings and was not at all seduced by her old husband's severe countenance, Father Gsell could do nothing to prevent her getting taken away. And because Martina didn't prove to be a tender wife even in her husband's house, the old man stabbed her leg with a spear, so that she could not escape. But the wound healed, and Martina limped 70 kilometres through the jungle to return to Father Gsell's protection. However, the old man appeared with his warriors and insisted that Martina be handed out to him immediately, if necessary, at the cost of a fight.

The only thing Father Gsell could achieve, was, that after treating the warriors to a rich feast they agreed to postpone taking Martina in the morning. In that night projecting the danger of a bloody fight Father Gsell continued praying that God help him save Martina and the mission. His prayer was heard. The following morning, he produced an offer to the husband so eager to restore traditional order. He offered him tools – a Swiss army knife and a sharp axe – and luxury items – a pipe and tobacco – that the Tiwi could not acquire from elsewhere. His offer was: The husband should sell him Martina in exchange for these precious goods. After a

long discussion with his counsellors, the armed negotiators accepted Father Gsell's deal on one condition: The missionary must keep Martina as his wife.

In the following years he „purchased” several more of his students. Father Gsell, who probably holds a singular record in Christian history, had 150 „official” wives when he was ordained bishop (Gsell, 1955).

### **Why do South-Africans sit down? – The case of the „cheeky” Xhosa**

The language coercively prescribed for journalists how they should “politically correctly” (pc) program their readers according to the interests of the group that owns global press, goes far beyond the “Newspeak” language in Orwell's utopia (Orwell, 1949). According to pc humans are normally black, and only those differing from the norm are to be labelled as *melanin impoverished*. In this manner there are no *black* Americans, only *African* Americans. The author of this contribution, who grew up and went to school in an independent black African state, learnt from his teachers that they were proud to be “negroes”. This author is wondering how soon local newspapers will start writing about *African Austrians/Hungarians/Poles*.

But before the enforced language of political power that consciously caused the decay of our ability to think clearly could irreversibly prevent us from seeing the obvious, we would like to state in black and white that to see existing differences, to get to know them, in order to be able to be tolerant with them are inevitable conditions of peaceful coexistence. Otherwise we are bound to get caught in the vicious circle of misunderstanding, tension and violence. These cultural differences between the Boers, who arrived in the 1600's and later founded the South African state, and the mine-workers, who immigrated from Central Africa two centuries later, led to the concept, that each should live with their own kind, since this would lead to far less misunderstanding. This was the social psychological basis of living apart, *apartheid*. Because of the mutual anxiety of what each side considered strange, both sides thought that, the other behaved in a very strange manner, and it was not possible to understand what they were up to.

Let us take an example that called for considerable complaint on the side of white South Africans. In the culture of the Xhosas – both Nobel-laureates Bishop Tutu and the late President Mandela belonged to this tribe – unless we are close friends I have to look up to my senior. It is an elementary sign of respect. Thus, if I enter the house of such a person, I have to take up a position, from which I can look up towards him: I sit down. But the whites didn't know about this. They were shocked, how the “impertinent” Xhosa dared make himself comfortable in the arm-chair, not even waiting for the host to offer him a seat.

The white misunderstood in a similar way that the black always pushed to be the first ones to get out of an elevator. They never even thought of the “politeness” to let a lady get out first. What the whites, stuck to their own culture, forgot to consider was, that the generous Xhosa was brought up to take the risk of stepping into a new, potentially dangerous situation himself, to remember that even at the cost of his life the task of the pioneer is his. But of course, experiencing dislike, rather than grateful acknowledgement of the “arrogant” white time and again, the chivalric hero, the Xhosa started to feel that it was not possible to live together with these „unpredictable creatures”, let them do what they want, let them rush to their deaths.

To be able to appreciate the nobility of the intention and the action of the other, we need to learn that he really is different from us in his thinking, his up-bringing, his life experience.

### **Friendly fire - When to kiss the miss?**

During the Second World War Trans-Atlantic allies crossed the ocean to Britain to prepare for the occupation of a Europe united violently under Hitler. Since Roosevelt’s soldiers faced no language problems in Churchill’s country, soon alliances at the personal level started to develop between GI-s (this is the abbreviation of „Government Issue”, literally meaning that the soldier was considered to be the property of the government of the United States) and the daughters of England. Surprisingly the latter complained that Americans were starved sex-maniacs; at the same time the Trans-Atlanteans considered the young ladies to be pushing maniacs of love-making. Both groups thought the other one was mischievous, what can hardly be true at the same time. It was the authority on cultural anthropology of the time, Margaret Mead, who investigated the case (Mead, 1944a, b). She found out that approaching the other sex from the first eye contact to the fulfilment of intimacy consisted of approximately 30 consecutive behaviour types. The order of these behaviour patterns is well defined in each society (you cannot rush into the house together with the door). It is important to note that differences in this hierarchy do exist between societies, and this was also the case with the Anglo-American encounters. According to Mead’s investigation *kissing* was at rank 25 of the British hierarchy, while it was at rank 6 in the American one. So, what happened? The English girl and the American boy gazed at each other, they smiled, they chatted, one “accidentally” touched the other’s shoulder or arm, and then the GI did what appeared the most natural to him: he kissed the girl. However, this degree of intimacy appeared unimaginably distant to the young lady, as it skipped about 20 stages of the approach-pattern natural for her. She had to take a quick decision. Either she stays an iron lady slapping the invader of her intimate space, but then she

will have to put up with staying alone, since British boys were engaged elsewhere, or else she accepts that she and her new acquaintance got so far and continues the way her own culture would dictate in such a case. Now it was the American's turn, to be in for a shock, since he considered himself to be at the beginning of their relationship, and he would not have expected such an outgoing seduction.

What Mead and the science of communication have made explicit is a good example, showing that the behaviour of the representatives of two cultures accusing each other might result from the differences between these cultures. Anyone threateningly pointing his index finger at others is pointing towards himself with three fingers at the same time.

### **Suckability – Why do Bavarians ridicule „Prussians” with a white sausage?**

Until the pulling down of the Berlin wall – and, as we shall see, even since then – citizens of other nations who meet a German are eager to know whether he is from the East or the West. The Germans themselves classify far more according to the North-South polarisation. It was Willy Brandt who said that even clocks run differently in Bavaria. And indeed: Bavarians consider themselves very different from their Northern-German fellows, who they refer to with some contempt as “Prussians”, even if the person concerned happens to be a Westphalian or a Hanoverian. And while the Bavarian keeps his traditions, his traditional costumes, social ceremonies and language in high esteem, he looks upon the “Prussian” as one who has betrayed his cultural heritage, lost his roots and has become “degenerate”. He has no idea even of the simplest natural things.

On the other hand, it is the Northern-Germans who hold Bavarians to be boorish fossils [the English word “boorish” resembles, how Bavarians pronounce the adjective Bavarian: boarish]; yet “Prussians” enjoy spending their holidays in the mountains and on the lakesides of Bavaria, and for nothing in the world would they do without Bavarian beer, with its constitutionally guaranteed cleanness of chemicals ever since 1516. They have the impression that up North they are Germany's brains, but the heart and the centre for pleasure lies below the head, down South. (Germany's soft porn industry that spread in the late sixties chose the scenes for their not-too-complicated plots typically on peasants' land estates in the Bavarian mountains.) And since Northern Protestants brought up with strict morals despise and look down on “primitive” catholic Bavarians irredeemably finding their rapture in baroque pleasures, the latter like pulling the leg of the “highly educated” Prussians, wherever they can. An excellent occasion for this is white sausage that has such a Bavarian ritual that the „white

sausage equator” is a synonym for Bavaria’s northern border in use throughout Germany.

A Bavarian never orders this speciality in *pairs* but in *pieces*. It is served with sweet mustard, salt pretzel and constitutionally clean Bavarian beer. According to tradition our Bavarian will suck a white sausage strictly before noon. Yes, suck, since Bavarians know that the white sausage must be sucked [Zuzeln]. But what can you expect from a Prussian who approaches everything with his intellect, one, you even have to explain that sucking the sausage means „taking the cylindrical object between your lips and by forming a vacuum incorporating its contents”?

### A case of borderline? – An Austro-Bavarian affair

In order to be able to uphold a positive image of ourselves we tend to project our negative properties upon the members of a neighbouring group (Freud, 1896). Bavarian-Austrian neighbours are an example for this. Bavarians, who resemble Austrians both in their language and their mentality far more than Northern-Germans, discover those of their properties unacceptable to their own expectations in Austrians in an exaggerated way. So Bavarians laugh heartily at jokes that make fun of silly, heavy-handed, boorish creatures. Funnily enough, people in Austria enjoy these jokes just as much, but in their versions the one who is made fun of is a Bavarian. Just one example, here in the Bavarian version. That takes us back to the happy days when we still used German Marks and Schillings. A Bavarian arrives at the Austrian border. The Austrian border guard asks him for his car registration and his drivers’ licence. The guy realises that his registration book is here, but he left his licence in the pocket of his leather jacket at home. He figures he can make up for his mistake with a 10 Mark banknote (see fig. 1), so he puts one in his registration book and hands it over to the officer. The Austrian keeps looking at the banknote for a long time, then he says: „Your long hair fitted you very well, a pity, you had it cut. The only problem is I asked for your driving licence, not your sailing certificate!”



**Fig. 1: Old 10-Mark banknote**

### **Germany in terms of a Banana-Republic: Wessies and Ossies**

To realise a centrally ruled European Union it was necessary to eliminate socialist dictatorships. Before however the Central German territory earlier referred to in Western Germany as the “Soviet Occupational Zone” would join Western Germany, it had to be bought by the “rich candy man”, before it fell into the dependency of Western banks. The sweet little gifts were to be taken quite literally, since those coming from the Eastern side of the wall not only received a 100 Marks “welcome-money”, but the monkey trainer of the “civilized Christian West” was handing out generous quantities of the symbol of the supply shortage they suffered under socialist rule, bananas. Bingo! The propaganda’s prediction turned out to be right: In exchange for the (tropical) fruits of Globalia, Saxons and Thuringians willingly sacrificed their independence. Of course, emotionally they still haven’t digested this banana-„Anschluss”: Even today, three decades later, the communication of „Wessies” and „Ossies” is still not undisturbed. The earlier are convinced that they had to pay for the modernization of a ramshackle state, while the latter feel that they were delivered to the arrogant will of Wessies. They think of Wessies as cold and calculating egoists.

Of course, there is another side to this coin. Shortly after the breaking down of the wall the present author conducted research at the East Berlin Humboldt University and asked a young colleague to explain why they thought East Germans were more compassionate and helpful than West Germans. He gave an example. „When walking home from work at 9 P.M. I see that there is a crate of bananas delivered to the food-store, I will run to my colleague’s home to inform him, that if the following dawn he joins the queue waiting for the shop to open, he might be able to surprise his family with a few bananas. But you Westerners only think of yourselves.”

It would have been difficult to explain to him, that if a Munich colleague visited his fellow lecturer after 9 P.M. asking him to join a queue to await Aldi’s opening the following dawn to acquire bananas, this poor man would probably be rushed to a mental hospital.

Evolution has prepared every human – even West Germans – to cooperate, but only under circumstances where success depends on the cooperation of all members of a group (e.g. hunting). If, on the other hand, success does not make it necessary for others to participate (e.g. collecting food), evolution has rewarded the diligent effort of the individual. What the Eastern colleague explained with the character of Wessies was in reality a result of the difference in availability.

**Pizza in Southern Tyrol – The difference between freedom fighters and terrorists**

If one visits the grandiose mountains of Southern Tyrol as a tourist, one will have no idea of the emotions of the German speaking indigenous inhabitants towards the Italians who have ruled over them ever since the Versailles Treaty. After all they will not confront everyone seeking to relax in tranquillity with how humiliating they found that, several years after the conquest of Italy's fascism, state authorities would still beat up natives if they used their German mother tongue at school. And they were not even allowed to discuss why they could not be police officers in their own country, why *carabinieri* could only be Italians settled into that homeland.

The present author arrived in Southern Tyrol in 1998 as a contracted professor of the newly founded University of Bolzano. Not aware of these historical tensions he entered a pizzeria to alleviate his hunger. When the innkeeper addressed him in Italian, he apologised explaining that he was the professor of the German language faculty and that he did not speak Italian. He was surprised by the innkeeper's outburst of joy: "Thank God, we thought you were Italian!" Probably it was the author's dark Turanian complexion that misled the owner of the trattoria. This is where the author began to understand why locals refer to the pioneers of Southern Tyrol's autonomy in the 1960-s as "Freedom fighters", while Italians name the very same people „terroristi”.

**OK – Why a gesture will cost you 500 Euros**

Though Darwin (1872) postulates and Ekman & Friesen (1975) convincingly prove that the mimics of basic emotions are not culture-dependent, this certainly doesn't apply to gestures used within a cultural community. Forming a circle with the thumb and index-finger of the right hand towards another person is an issue of basic security in the international community of divers. The person asking wants to be reassured that the other person is OK. It is compulsory to reiterate the sign if the other has no problems – I am OK! (Obviously different gestures would signalise if he did have any difficulties, e.g. if he could not equalize the pressure on his eardrum).

However, if a well-meaning scuba-diver visited Germany and used this sign to offer his assistance to a car driver whose engine would not start – rather than a grateful smile, based on a legally binding court ruling, in return he would receive a 500 Euro penalty. In Germany it is taken for evident that the sign was shown with an offensive purpose, after all, everyone will



know that the sign reminds of the sphincter; Alas! In an anally oriented German culture it is a grave offence to be degraded to be the terminal point of the digestive channel.

### **Meeting at eye-level – Educational science and human dignity**

It is obvious that in the ethnically and culturally increasingly mixed societies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we often encounter strange, unpredictable, sometimes even scary behavioural patterns. The resulting social tensions pose an enormous responsibility for education. The above examples demonstrated the formation of xenophobia based on the results of depth-, social-, and evolutionary psychological research on projection, in-group-out-group-treatment and altruism. We demonstrated how important a founded knowledge of the roots of one's own culture was, so that members would have no reason to idealize their culture, what would prevent them from seeing their negative characteristics. Instead they would project these behavioural patterns and make fun of, scorn or even prosecute them in another cultural group. Depth psychology makes it clear, that in order to uphold a positive self-image, an individual insecure of himself will project all the characteristics he considers negative onto another group. It is important to become consciously aware of these characteristics we are not happy about, and to accept them as part of us for the time being, in order to be able to gradually substitute them with more favourable behavioural patterns. Gestalt therapy names this process the integration of the shadow and considers it to be the basic task of a balanced personality, accepting both towards himself and others.

Fortunately, educational science has all the prerequisites to effectively contribute towards the peaceful coexistence of various cultures at its disposal. The first one to mention is to let pupils get acquainted with the traditions of their own culture, to promote respect and love for it, so that it can become an organic part of pupils' lives. Both formal and non-formal education can offer substantial help with this, once we are ready to accept that so-called key-competencies are of little use if the self-identity of the „educandus” in Erikson's (1971) sense has not been formed and stabilized. For Hungarians the year-cycle is an excellent possibility for this from spring-greeting popular customs of Easter, over the Midsummer solstice celebrations and the cultural heritage of autumn harvest and vintage to nativity play and expecting light as we approach winter solstice. Our spring-greeting customs could be discussed centring on the revival of nature in an environmental knowledge or a biology class, or even a history class treating the “March Youth” of the 1848 revolution. This is where pupils can become familiarized with the art of egg-painting and the role of the egg in the genesis mythology of a

large number of cultures [including the Federal Eagle]. Ancient and present-day symbolism on painted Easter-eggs will acquaint the eagerly seeking intellect of our pupils with the answers of our tradition to the most important questions of life. After striking secure roots into the culture of their own home-country, pupils will show respect and curiosity towards customs, behaviour and symbols of other cultures as well. With this foundation we are able to educate our young ones towards forming a conception of the human being that helps to see the human person with a beating heart in his chest even in someone with a very different religious, political or value system, thinking and behaviour, which we might not agree with at all. The educational system discussed here is not limited to family and school in the broader sense. An important role is played by programs organized by youth-, music- and cultural clubs as well as virtual communities. These are the channels that enable educational science to accomplish one of its most important tasks, to prepare a cultural group for a peaceful coexistence despite the global challenges of future society. To make sure that strange traditions, very different from our own will trigger benevolent curiosity instead of fear and aggression, the best foundation is, if educational science sees to it, that our young generation knows and lives the tradition of their own society and that they learn to accept their own limits and shortcomings as belonging to them.

### **How school can foster creativity**

Let us take a look at the history of the genius-concept. “*The Ancient Greek word δαίμων daimōn denotes a spirit or divine power, much like the Latin genius. Daimōn most likely came from the Greek verb daiesthai (to divide, distribute).*” Source: Wikipedia Demon.

As opposed to this traditional approach of the kiss of the muse being responsible for creative activity, humanism puts a significant burden on creatives (novelists, playwrights, composers, etc.), for if there is no spiritual world, they themselves are the sole sources of their creative productivity. American poet Ruth Stone [1915-2011] strongly disagrees with the despiritualized explanation of creative activity. “*As [Stone] was growing up in rural Virginia, she would be out, working in the fields and she would feel and hear a poem coming at her from over the landscape. It was like a thunderous train of air and it would come barrelling down at her over the landscape. And when she felt it coming . . . 'cause it would shake the earth under her feet, she knew she had only one thing to do at that point. That was to, in her words, ‘run like hell’ to the house as she would be chased by this poem. The whole deal was that she had to get to a piece of paper fast enough so that when it thundered through her, she could collect it*

*and grab it on the page. Other times she wouldn't be fast enough, so she would be running and running, and she wouldn't get to the house, and the poem would barrel through her and she would miss it, and it would 'continue on across the landscape looking for another poet.' And then there were these times, there were moments where she would almost miss it. She is running to the house and is looking for the paper and the poem passes through her. She grabs a pencil just as it's going through her and she would reach out with her other hand and she would catch it. She would catch the poem by its tail and she would pull it backwards into her body as she was transcribing on the page. In those instances, the poem would come up on the page perfect and intact, but backwards, from the last word to the first.”* (Source: Wikipedia Ruth Stone)

This brings us to the question if creativity is a mental disease? There was a young girl, Gillian Barbara, who struggled in school. She had a hard time focusing and fidgeted a lot. Had this happened in our days she would inevitable be diagnosed with an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). But luckily for her, Gillian Barbara Lynne was born 1926, and so she was able to become a world-known dancer, member of the Royal Ballet, choreographer of Cats, Phantom of the Opera, and much more. The doctor her parents took her to was sensible enough to leave her alone with a music channel in the radio turned on to see her parents “privately”. Left alone, she immediately started to dance, and the doctor pointed out to her parents that far from being mentally ill she was a very talented dancer. So, she received all the support and training necessary to make the most of her talent. (Source: Wikipedia: Gillian Lynne).

To sum up this keynote message, the present author would like to conclude with his favourite creative poet’s *Ars poetica*

*“I say that man is not grown-up yet  
but, fancying he is, runs wild.*

*May his parents,  
love and intellect  
watch over their unruly child.”*

(Source: József Attila: *Ars poetica* (translation: M. Beevor))

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