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**Review of the Book: Adam Komisarof and Zhu Hua (eds.)
*Crossing Boundaries and Weaving Intercultural Work, Life,
and Scholarship in Globalizing Universities* (= Routledge
Research in Higher Education). London and New York
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Abstract

The aim of this article is to present a review of a book edited by Adam Komisarof and Zhu Hua entitled *Crossing Boundaries and Weaving Intercultural Work, Life, and Scholarship in Globalizing Universities* which is a collection of articles from various research disciplines and approaches to the field of intercultural studies such as cross-cultural and acculturation psychology, communication, sociology, cultural anthropology, applied linguistics, language teaching, and multilingualism studies. The editors point out that auto-ethnography is the method employed for the purposes of the volume, as it is both researcher- and reader-friendly and allows the connection of personal experiences to broader socio-cultural contexts. As the editors promise, the book provides the reader with a variety of perspectives on intercultural communication and gives an overview of how intercultural academics combine their work, life, and scholarship, and how they juggle between various perspectives, cultures, and languages.

Keywords: intercultural communication, acculturation, communication studies, sociology, interdisciplinary research.

This book, edited by Adam Komisarof and Zhu Hua, is a collection of articles composed by “transnational, intercultural scholars... [who] work in the field of intercultural communication” (p. 2) and reflect in their texts on how their work, life, and scholarship inform each other. The book starts with an intriguing quotation by Milton J. Bennett who highlights a unique characteristic of the contributed texts, in which “the politically correct self-absorption” is avoided for the sake of “showing us how various concepts of

cultural adaptation can bring meaning to the profoundly liminal experience of becoming intercultural” (p. i). The table of contents (pp. xi–xii) and list of figures (xii) are followed by the list of contributors and their affiliations (p. xiv), which shows that the authors of the collected texts derive from various parts of the world. In addition to geographical difference, the authors represent various research disciplines and approaches to the field of intercultural studies (such as cross-cultural and acculturation psychology, communication, sociology, cultural anthropology, applied linguistics, language teaching, and multilingualism studies (p. 1)). This points to the fact that the contributors have crossed a number of boundaries in their intercultural experiences, as aptly captured in the title of the book.

The intriguing character of the volume is well articulated in the foreword (pp. xv–xviii), written by Fred Dervin, in which the interdisciplinarity and various profiles of the contributors are highlighted. In addition, it points to the unique character of the field of intercultural studies, in which “reflexivity is unfamiliar” (p. xv). It visualises scholars’ challenges and successes within the field of intercultural studies, by providing metaphors of a tightrope (they walk a tightrope without a net held by the host country) and hedgehog (adapting in a different country is like trying to embrace a hedgehog). Above all, the foreword is a harbinger of the personal touch, felt throughout the entire volume. Indeed, the contributors eagerly share personal experiences and reveal personal secrets concerning living and researching in environments culturally different from the countries in which they grew up. This is undoubtedly a great asset of the publication.

This personal nature of the book is explicitly indicated in the preface (pp. xix–xx) and introduction (pp. 1–20). The editors point out that auto-ethnography is the method employed for the purposes of the volume, as it is both researcher- and reader-friendly and allows the connection of personal experiences to broader socio-cultural contexts (p. 12). Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the editors left the authors room to apply further methods in their enquiries (p. 13). In the introduction, the editors discuss aspects of globalisation and its influence on mobility in the academic landscape, in addition to acculturation. Most importantly, they provide the reader with a brief, though informative explanation of the “four schools of thought regarding culture in intercultural communication studies” (p. 4). This part of the introduction is especially helpful as it makes it clear that there are various understandings of culture, with their limitations and advantages, and thus when it comes to approaching culture “an open mind” (p. 9) should be preserved. At the same time, the editors hold that culture does not always suffice to fully analyse interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds. Non-cultural aspects may also be of significance. This demonstrates the great deal of awareness that the book’s editors, and the contributors of the book, employ.

In the first part of the book entitled “Acculturation dynamics” (pp. 21–88), the authors present how they attempted to adopt the culture of their host country and those organisations within which they pursued their academic career. Adam Komisarof, a native American, explains his experiences in Japan with the help of a model, which he developed based on literature on the subject and enhanced with his own experiences throughout the years. The framework devised explains four acculturation profiles within organisations, *i.e.* Marginalised Outsider, Alien, Assimilated Member, and Integrated Member, which are determined based on the acculturator’s perceptions. Interestingly, the author felt himself shifting between these profiles during his work, depending on the situation he was in. Gracia Liu-Farrer, born Chinese, also reports on her organisational life in Japan. Taking a sociological approach, in particular Luhmann’s systems theory (Luhmann 2013) and Swindler’s theory of culture as a toolkit (Swindler 1986, 2001), she searches for potential reasons of discriminatory perceptions by immigrants at work. She also explains

how the use of Japanese provided her with a sense of ownership within the organisation in which she was employed. Another researcher of intercultural communication (and psychology), Anita Mak from Hong Kong, discusses how her experience as an academic in Australia helped her to devise a training programme, called EXCELL (Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership), aimed at developing immigrant and international students' sociocultural competencies when living in a host country.

The authors of two further texts in Part 1 present how the turn of events in their lives influenced their career and scholarship. David L. Sam, who was born and grew up in Ghana but pursues his career in Norway, discusses selected events – which he calls critical incidents – that significantly influenced his personal learning. Personal experiences related to feeling inferior due to his poor language skills and ethnic background led him then to choose an academic career in cross-cultural psychology. He refers to concepts of culture shock and acculturative stress, and demonstrates how personal crisis may also present opportunities for personal growth and development. The process of acculturation in the host country, with relation to ethnicity and based on selected incidents from one's own life, also applies to Deepa Oommen, who specialises in communication studies. Her Indian origin and brown skin gave her a sense of inferiority on a daily basis when being among “White Americans.” It was only when she started receiving support socially in the new organisational environment that she developed a bi-cultural identity and started feeling comfortable in the United States. Therefore, she provides advice for organisations to socially support new employees and develop a culture characterised by dialogue in order to gain a global outlook (p. 86).

The second part of the book is called “Negotiating identities” (pp. 89–130) and it consists of three papers. The first text is composed by Regis Machart, a Frenchman, who used to teach French in Egypt and pursues his career as an international foreign language lecturer in Malaysia. He reflects on his experiences in these countries as well as Germany, where he used to be an exchange student for some time. He argues that it is essential that interculturality is included in teaching and learning foreign languages. He attempts to avoid stereotypes and instead promotes the concept of fluid interculturality and contextualisation of every intercultural experience. In addition, reflecting on his experiences, Machart discusses the liquid character of individual (cultural) identities and points to identity changes developing over time. Maryam Borjian, an Iranian professor in the United States, specialising in educational linguistics and dealing with the politics, economics, and sociology of language, also tackles the hybridity of identity, with a special focus on the self-image and ascribed identity, by taking into account her ethnical and religious otherness. Interestingly, she includes the use of language as helping to overcome the difficulty of being immersed in two different (“seemingly incompatible and contradictory”) cultures and retaining both. Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich discusses the construction of identity through specific rituals. A German academic pursuing her career in New Zealand in the field of cultural anthropology, she discusses how a mono-ethnic scholar may expand their horizons and build self-awareness through auto-ethnographic fieldwork aimed at exploring campus cultures. She also provides advice on how universities may become more successful at importing scholarly excellence.

The third, final, part of the book is devoted to “Language and interaction” (pp. 131–200), in which its authors refer to multilingualism and its role in dealing with cultural issues. Jean-Marc Dewaele, a bilingual speaker of Dutch and French, is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Multilingualism at Birbeck, University of London. In this chapter, he shows how linguistic capital influences social and cultural experiences. When crossing various geographic boundaries and experiencing cultural shock and

reverse cultural shock as part of the acculturation process in the L2 and L2 environment respectively, the author claims to have developed a hybrid self, as his cultural and linguistic practices shifted in various directions. Similarly, Zhu Hua, a Chinese applied linguist pursuing her career at the University of London, presents in her paper how linguistic capital may be a source of cultural and identity deliberations by an individual. Zhu provides a number of examples from her personal and professional life pointing to the fact that by employing various linguistic and discursive practices, *i.e.* in interactions, an individual may negotiate the level of alignment between his/her self-oriented identity and other-ascribed identity. It may be viewed that by referring to so-called nationality and ethnic talk (NET), as Zhu (2014) terms it, and to the concept of membership categorization device (MCD) introduced by Sack (1972), she provides advice to people with ethnicity, race, language *etc.* different to that of the community in which they live, work, study *etc.* on how to handle autobiographical talk and resist cultural identities chosen by other people. Elise S. Ahn, a Korean-American dealing with global studies in education, refers to her experiences in Kazakhstan. Like Zhu, she vividly demonstrates, on the basis of selected examples from her own working life, how various boundaries related to identity are negotiated through interactions. In the final chapter, the editors of the book eloquently wrap common themes of the book. By asking five questions and providing the answers with reference to the previous chapters, the editors make the insights explicit and easy for the reader to comprehend and remember. These insights oscillate around five themes, *i.e.* (1) the main factors for inclusion and exclusion of transnational academics in their workplace and by local residents, (2) coping strategies that transnational academics may employ to acculturate smoothly and thrive socio-professionally in their faculties, (3) “best practices” for universities to support transnational academics by facilitating their socio-professional integration into their organisations, (4) the role of connection between work, life, and scholarship in transnational academics’ boundary crossings, (5) the possibilities of employing various approaches to researching intercultural communication and their complementary function when examining the work, lives, and scholarship of transnational academics. This part of the book provides concluding thoughts in a very systematic manner indeed, and as such, is very useful in bringing the most important aspects to the readers’ attention. It is worth noting that every article finishes with a short note on the author’s profile, which gives information on where the author comes from, their career path, and their research interests. I found each note of great help in order to better understand the authors’ experiences and how they shaped their research perspectives. The publication finishes with an index of the most important terms and names used (pp. 201–204).

As the editors promise, the book provides the reader with a variety of perspectives on intercultural communication and gives an overview of how intercultural academics combine their work, life, and scholarship, and how they juggle between various perspectives, cultures, and languages. Nowadays, in the light of ever growing globalisation and mobility of academics, and other professionals, this is a very important topic that has hardly been dealt with previously. This makes the book particularly interesting. Additionally, the very personal style of each article makes the book stand out among publications concerning intercultural communication. Worth noting is also the straightforward and uncomplicated manner, in which the contributors share their experiences.

The articles collected showcase that for the intercultural communication researcher it is greatly beneficial to work and live, at least for a time, in a culturally and linguistically different environment from his/her own in order to truly reflect on the aspects of intercultural communication and develop theories applicable in practice. I found it very useful that authors related their experiences to specific models and theories, thus giving their experiences a general undertone, which may help other transnational

employees/professionals comprehend the situations in which they find themselves. In such a way, the contributors show that research and practice in the field of intercultural communication go hand in hand.

All in all, the book edited by Adam Komisarof and Zhu Hua is a great read and a valuable publication for everyone, not only transnational academics, who would like to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of boundary crossing and of working and living abroad: intercultural trainers, employees working in culturally different environments, students interested in intercultural communication, *etc.* It brings to the forefront the complexity of the processes of boundary crossing and of working and living abroad, forcing individuals into unexpected situations, experiencing unknown feelings, *etc.*, which further influences individuals and their lives to a great extent, in various respects. Ultimately, it leads to identity changes. The papers gathered here help one to take a critical look at one's own experiences and better comprehend the range of difficulties and benefits that may be encountered when living and working abroad.

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