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Us and Them

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Master Thesis in Managing People Knowledge and Change

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Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of the study is to try to understand how do international employees (of non-Swedish origin) employed in a Swedish company make sense of the given organizational and social context and what implications does this have on their identity work and identity struggle, in particular in relation to them being placed or casted as different and other.

Methodology: Narrative approach was used for analyzing the collected data.

Theoretical Perspective: In the study three theoretical perspectives are introduced: diversity management theory, postcolonial theory and processual identity theory

Empirical Foundation: Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted during research. Three of them were used for main analysis. Additionally, field notes were taken to provide supplementary understanding of the context of research.

Conclusions: More human and ethical approach to understanding diverse workforce can be introduced if postcolonial theoretical lens is used.
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1 Introduction

This thesis is about international employees of foreign (non-Swedish) origin at a large international Swedish company with a global reach. More specifically, it is concerned with the international employees' differences and otherness in the given organizational context. This thesis attempts to identify how these employees make sense of their positions in the Swedish company and in Swedish society in general, how this influences their identity work and identity struggle, and subsequently, what are or might be the consequences for the particular company that is desiring to utilize and take advantage of their idiosyncratic competence.

Globalization, diversity and multiculturalism are discourses that intensely perpetuate contemporary human practice, and particularly organizational practice. Even though the underlying hypotheses to these terms and concepts are still highly contested and rather ambiguous (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001), the phenomena are generally perceived to be inevitable. The subsequent so-called “time-space compression” and intensification of global interconnectedness generally calls for greater flexibility, accommodation and mobility. In other words, these interlocking discourses create a reality to which organizations need to respond in order to become and remain (globally) competitive, or simply in order to survive. This understanding is in line with the discourse on economic development in the neoclassical economic paradigm with the anticipated benefits of the trade and unrestricted flow of goods and services (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001). One of the many facets of this global movement is reflected in the concept and the promotion of a diverse, multicultural, flexible and mobile workforce. Such a workforce is expected to contribute to the creativity and innovativeness of a company. Subsequently, its global corporate competitiveness is enhanced. This “case of workforce diversity” can, however, also be perceived as a great challenge due to the tensions such a diversity might create in the organization. As a response to this, contemporary organizational practice has started introducing the concept of diversity management. This concept is aimed at both harnessing the challenges and taking advantage of the opportunities a diverse organizational workforce offers. Diversity management is commonly conceptualized as the “means” for successful attainment of organizational aspirations such as higher productivity
and what is every corporation’s primary goal, namely, economic rewards (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000).

Despite potentially benevolent ethical intentions, such as striving to establish an environment in which everyone feels appreciated (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000), diversity management also has a series of underlying unintended consequences. These stem from two fundamental elements of this concept, namely, categorizing people, and managing them. The categorization of people is generally based on their “natural and essential” differences (visible and/or invisible) which clearly set people apart from each other. Although categorization is used by management as a tool to optimize the functionality of the organization, it tends to homogenize diversity.

Contrary to this management technique (particularly favored by organizational practitioners), postcolonial theory sees “fixing people into rigid categories” as social construction (Spivak in Prasad, 2003), and critically questions the consequential implications. As they assert, this “fixing” sustains asymmetrical power/knowledge relations. It perpetuates and naturalizes dichotomies of advanced/backward, developed/undeveloped, and modern/primitive, in which relation of difference from dominant (Western) norm, subordination and repression (of non-Western) are being (re)established (Banerjee and Linstead, 2001). This is observable in terms of the economic, political and cultural influence that the West is exerting over the rest of the world. Such influence nowadays is not exercised through territorial conquests but for example through the control of powerful economic institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the World Bank (Young, 2001 in Prasad, 2003).

In this thesis, we are interested in examining the above-mentioned concepts and their consequences in the context of a contemporary Swedish organization and in relation to its international employees (employees of non-Swedish origin) and their otherness. We will also try to relate this to identity theory to see how this regulates individuals’ identity work and influences the individuals’ identity struggles as they try to make sense of their positions and relations within the Swedish organizational environment. We will scrutinize how these processes unfold in the domains of their working and private lives, examining processes that are both conscious and intentional, as well as those that are more subtle and subconscious.

We will argue that international employees deal with their experienced differences through conscious and unconscious processes. These result in their, equally conscious and unconscious
identity transformations, often resulting in certain forms of ambivalence, hybridization and mimicry (Prasad, 2003). In addition, we will discuss how this influences the international employees’ levels of innovativeness and creativity. This is a central issue as their diversity as a tool for creativity is often the reason for their recruitment and they are often expected to make innovative contributions to the organization. Following Alvesson’s concept of defamiliarization, as presented in Prasad (2003), we will therefore try to move away from the conventional assumptions of the organizational phenomenon of (managing) workforce diversity. Instead, we will try to observe it from a different standpoint, in order to encompass new aspects and meanings. Inspired by postcolonial theoreticians and other authors that follow this theoretical tradition, we will here put an accent on the postcolonial theoretical framework and will try to combine it with identity theory. We thus hope to contribute to the disciplinary field of management and organization studies by approaching and interpreting diversity management and its consequences in a somewhat novel way. We furthermore hope that this study will stimulate further questions for future research projects.

**Research questions:**

- How do international employees (of non-Swedish origin) employed in a Swedish company make sense of the given organizational and social context and what implications does this have on their identity work and identity struggle, in particular in relation to them being placed or casted as different and other?

- What are the consequences for the particular company?

**Key concepts:** diversity management, postcolonial theory, identity work and struggle, othering, normalization

**1.1 Structure of the thesis**

In this introductory chapter we have highlighted context and the key concepts of our study. Research questions have been introduced.

In the second chapter we will present and explain our choice of methodology and describe the research approach, method and techniques we applied. Further on, we will in more detail define the scope of our study, and will reflect upon the potential limitations of the chosen approach.
In the third chapter we will first separately introduce the three theoretical concepts that will construct a frame of reference of our study: diversity management theory, postcolonial theory and identity theory. In the last section of this chapter the three theories will be brought together, compared and contrasted.

The fourth chapter brings analysis. In its first part we will introduce three life stories. These will create a context for a better understanding of collected empirical material, namely the specific stories. In the rest of the chapter we will analyze these stories by applying presented theories.

In the concluding chapter we will reflect upon our research findings, the key concepts and questions and challenges those arose.

2 Methodology

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will present and explain our choice of methodology and describe the research approach, method and techniques we applied. Further on, we will in more detail define the scope of our study, and will also reflect on the potential limitations of it. In examining our research question we have adopted a case study approach and have focused our attention on the stories that emerged during the interviews we conducted. Accordingly, we have used a narrative approach, which we define further on in this chapter.

The principal framework of the data analysis is an interpretative paradigm and social constructionist-influenced approach, which is also the underlying thread of the entire thesis. Contrary to the predominant positivist approach that tries to capture and objectively present “the external truth”, this paradigm argues that social reality is constructed and thus has no ambition to represent or establish truths. Rather, it tries to understand the actions and meanings described and ascribed by the subjects studied, acknowledging the ambiguity of empirical material and the complexity of interpretation (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2007). In this study, the importance of language is emphasized as it is argued that language does not merely represent or mirror reality, but rather constructs it.
This chapter consists of four parts. It begins with the case, continues with the introduction of the narrative approach and then that of the methods we used, and finally concludes with the potential limitations.

2.2 The case

The focal subject of this study is the group of international employees (employees of non-Swedish origin) in the context of a large Swedish company. The company is one of the world’s leading organizations in its field and has market companies, sales offices and production plants all over the world. The setting of our research was narrowed down to the company’s largest research and development unit situated in a southern Swedish city. This department has 4000 employees, 80 of which are international employees of non-Swedish origin.

The particular group of employees that we will focus on in our research is rather diverse. This heterogeneity is due to their different countries of origin, different organizational levels, and the various positions they hold, as well as the varied lengths of time they have spent in Sweden. Some of the subjects moved to Sweden to stay, while others came to live and work in Sweden for a limited period of time (from 3 months to 5 years, depending on the contract type (Global Expatriate, International Assignees, and Short-term Assignees)).

The focus of this qualitative research is on how these employees make sense of their position in a Swedish company and society in general, by examining if and how they have been constructed as different or casted as the Other. Further on, we wanted to explore how this relates to their subjectivity and identity work, and what the implications of this might be to the given organizational context. We were particularly interested in scrutinizing how these processes unfold on several levels and in private and corporate spheres of their lives.

Thus, during the interviews they were asked to discuss, compare and think through their perception of their position in the company, their relations with other (Swedish and non-Swedish) employees, and to reflect upon the existing organizational environment and culture and on how they respond to it. They were also asked about their personal life outside of the company, as this highly determines the way they identify themselves and therefore also influences their working life.
2.3 The narrative approach

What was of particular interest to us were the stories that emerged during the interviews, as they can be defined as a medium through which interviewees ascribe meanings to the occurrences they encounter. Accordingly, we are emphasizing that we are not interested in challenging “the facts” presented in the stories, but more into engaging with their meanings (Gabriel, 1995).

We have also used a narrative approach to (re)construct three life-stories through the interviews we conducted. We selected these three specific stories as they offered us particularly rich narrative descriptions. These life-stories will be used to provide a wider context to, and a more comprehensive understanding of the specific stories they narrated during the interviews. Throughout the study we tried to avoid a narrow focus on the story-as-text. In accordance with Hansen (2006), we consider both text and contexts (such as social and historical ones) to be construction materials, equally influencing the process of giving meaning to what is said. Context does not only frame discourse, it co-creates it.

2.3.1 On narratives

People constantly engage in storytelling, both intentionally and unconsciously, reaching into their repertoires of individual and collective narratives, or spontaneously creating new stories as a conversation unfolds. In this way they make or give sense to past events through retrospective interpretation (Söderberg, 2006), use stories as blueprints to predict future events (Boje, 1991), or simply legitimate their actions (Söderberg, 2006). The influence of stories can also be evidenced on various organizational levels, as they are often used as a means of cultural transmission, socializing, or as a way of disciplining organizational members (Cunliffe, 2002). Furthermore, stories are especially common in situations of greater changes or other irregular or atypical occurrences (Weick, 1996). Storytelling can also be seen as a stabilizing tool (Czarniawska, 2000), aimed at restoring order and providing the narrator with a sense of coherence.

In line with this, stories are sometimes also regarded as “constructing devices” that can impact on multiple levels. On one level, they help construct people’s everyday realities (Cunliffe, 2000). On another level, they also play an important role in our continuous identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). “The narrators’ retrospective interpretations of events and actions are seen as closely related to their shifting constructions of themselves and the groups to which they belong:
“the other” to whom they relate to, marginalize or exclude” (Söderberg, 2006: 400). What is of even greater interest to our thesis and is in line with our research question is Söderberg's (2006) assertion that a narrative analysis allows the researcher to identify the different ways in which individuals themselves actively employ various categories in their talk about themselves, the organization and “the Other”. Hence it can be said that stories influence not only individuals but also social identities. Furthermore, social categories, a sense of difference and otherness are products of social construction and are highly contextual.

2.3.2 About the approach

The development, application and popularization of the narrative approach in organizational studies can be observed and followed within the context of the more noted “linguistic turn” (Deetz, 2003) that led to the “literary turn” (Czarniawska, 1997) and more specifically the “narrative turn” in social science (Czarniawska, 2004). Parallel to this development was a distancing from the positivist’s approach, with its stance of “objective truth” and the mirroring representation of “the reality out there” that typically pervades mainstream social science. What the narrative approach offers is closely related to the school of interpretative social science, as it is based (among other things) on the ideas of social construction and meanings (Muhr, 2009).

What is of importance here is not “the truth” or correctness of the story-version (as two people will never construct an identical story out the same event), but what the narrators themselves consider to be most relevant and central within a specific context and at a particular time. They choose themselves who the focal actors are and which critical events correspond with their own understanding of themselves, the organization in which they act, and the setting it provides (Söderberg, 2006).

The narrative approach thus emanates from the narrator and his/her own choice of particular story. The approach also looks at the way they tell the story, and the way they contextualize their understanding of it. Through this, the researcher enters and engages in the narrator's process of sense making, and of his/her management of meaning and interpretations of specific episodes. These aspects of narratives are what are of particular interest to this methodological approach and to our current research.

When engaging in narrative analyses, many authors (such as Söderberg (2006), Boje (1991), Czarniawska (2000), Deetz (2003), and Hansen (2006)) also emphasize the importance of
context for a more comprehensive understanding of the story and its effects. Boje (1991) distinguishes the “story performance embedded in conversation” versus “story performance embedded in interview”, preferring the first to the second one. We will, however, follow Czarniawska (2000) who contrarily sees an interview situation as an equally potential micro-site for production of narratives (or an opportunity to circulate them) as normal conversation. We do this since in many cases answers given in an interview are spontaneously formed into narratives.

To sum up – the main point of the narrative approach is not to uncover deep structures and offer generalizable laws (that verify, falsify or generate theory), but to discover patterns and to try to grasp ascribed meanings (Czarniawska, 2000). We would also add to this that in analyzing a narrative, numerous methods and analytical approaches can be used, none of which are necessarily “right” or “best” (Czarniawska, 2000).

2.4 Research methods

2.4.1 Interviews

We conducted seven semi-structured interviews each lasting approximately one hour. The interviews were carried out in English, a foreign language to both interviewers and interviewees. They were recorded and transcribed. The interviews took place at the company and in a private setting, according to the interviewee’s preference and/or convenience. Prior to each interview a short introduction on the scope of the study was presented to the interviewees. The names of all interviewees, as well as the name of the company, have been changed in order to secure their confidentiality.

A table of basic information about interviewees is provided in the appendix (Table 1).

We interviewed five international employees, each coming from a different country and holding a different type of contract. We made sure that they were working on different organizational levels and positions in order to ensure a range of diversity. However, for the purpose of this study and due to the space limitations, we have decided to focus on only three interviewees and their life-stories. Still, we find information gathered through the other interviews very valuable and will incorporate them in our analysis.

We are aware that our targeted research sample might appear somewhat limited, but we have nonetheless tried to attain a multifaceted approach. Thus, we also conducted additional
interviews with interviewees that do not represent directly targeted subjects of our study. These additional interviews with Swedes were done in order to examine how Swedes place these international employees within the Swedish organizational and social context and in relation to themselves. We expect this to contribute to more refined interpretations.

Among the Swedes we interviewed was an HR official (International Mobility Service) who deals with international employees and is in charge of different matters that concern them, both prior to and upon their arrival. The other interview was conducted with an external consultant who has been delivering an integration program within the company for several years and has therefore encountered most of the interviewed international employees.

According to Alvesson (2003), interviews in qualitative research can be seen through three basic metaphorical lenses: interview as a tool or a pipeline (neopositivists position), interview as a human encounter (romanticists position) and interview as an empirical situation that should be studied as such (localists position). He also offers, however, an alternative reflexivity-metaphor thinking that suggests seeing interviews in eight new ways (through eight new metaphorical lenses): “as a local accomplishment within a specific scene, as perpetuating a storyline, as identity work, as cultural script application, as impression management, as political action, as construction work, and as a play of the powers of discourse” (Alvesson, 2003; 31). Acknowledging this, we have decided to follow his suggestion by which, in accordance with our inclinations and research project, a combination of listed positions/metaphors is seen not only as possible, but even more as a valuable approach.

2.4.2 Observations, reflections and field notes

Given that one of the researchers fits the profile of our focal subjects of study (international employee in the case-company), our idea was to collect his impressions, observations and private reflections on the given organizational context, related processes and his experiences. He originally comes from an Asian country, holds an International Assignees contract and has been in the company for two years thus far.

Our aim was to supplement and enrich our analysis and to additionally contribute understanding to the true perspectives of the focal subjects studied. Nevertheless, we emphasize here that we separate these collected notes made by the researcher from the narratives compiled through the
interviews conducted with our primary subjects of analysis. We have also decided to present the author's reflections in the form of separate story-like excerpts that complement the main text.

2.5 Potential limitation - the role of the researcher

Given that one of the researchers is the interviewees’ working colleague and has been within this particular organizational context for two years, this may have influenced the research on several levels, as we will explain in more details further down. In addition, the other two interviewers are also of foreign, non-Swedish origin, which also presupposes certain familiarity with the interviewees’ situations. We acknowledge that this might be perceived as a somewhat biased approach, but we also believe that this has created a platform for more insightful access to interviewees and has provided us with a more detailed organizational background and valuable pre-understanding.

More specifically, we believe that this has presented us with more open and honest dialogues during the interview encounters, as it has contributed to the level of trust between the interviewers and interviewees. This acquaintance with the interviewees’ situation also often guided the interviewers questions and steered the interviews, as it sometimes transformed them into more informal conversations.

We therefore refer to the romanticists approach to the interview, as it is defined by Alvesson (2003), which advocates for a more “genuine” human interaction in the interview situation. In this way, we reached for their meanings, ideas and feelings, in order to explore their inner world and the social reality they experienced (Alvesson, 2003).

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will introduce, give a comprehensive overview of, and connect three theoretical concepts that will construct a theoretical framework for our case analysis. The theories are the following: diversity management theory, postcolonial theory and identity theory.

We will start with a review of literature on diversity management, expounding on several definitions and core concepts. We will then elaborate on its challenges and the opportunities it offers, as they are commonly presented in the literature on this subject matter, and will in addition touch upon the social identity theory. Here we acknowledge that this overview is a
somewhat uncritical reflection of prevailing mainstream literature and in line with positivistic ways of reasoning, and as such, is in opposition to the dominant paradigmatic thread of our thesis. In choosing to offer this approach we intend to provide an understanding of the predominant contemporary organizational practice as it is and as it implements diversity management.

With the next theory, the postcolonial one, we will move away from this perspective, and return to the prevailing interpretative paradigm we have adopted for this study. We hope this will shed new light on the understanding of the term “diverse workforce”. The overview of this theoretical part will bring out the main concepts behind the term postcolonialism and will introduce some of its pivotal theoreticians and their contributions.

In the third section, identity theory is introduced in order to extend the understanding of postcolonial and diversity management theories. By presenting this theory we aimed at more closely approaching and comprehending the complexity and dynamics of identity work and struggle, particularly in the context of international employees who are continuously subjected to influences within their organizational and societal environments.

In the last section of this chapter we will use mainly the postcolonial platform to critically examine the diversity management theory.

### 3.2 Diversity management theory

#### 3.2.1 Introduction

The term diversity management first appeared in 1987, when Hudson Institute published the book “Workforce 2000” (Johnson and Packer, 1987). The main focus of the book was statistical estimations of workforce for the 21st century. According to the authors, by the year of 2000, white males would not be the dominant labor force anymore. In fact, they might become a minority. This anticipation forced managers to reconsider the issue of who their future managers would be, as they decided to cast their eyes on other sections of the population, mainly women and ethnical minority groups (Lobriecki and Jack, 2000). The statistical data presented in the given book accelerated the process for managers as well as for scholars and practitioners as they began to provide a broad range of definitions and solutions for dealing with diverse and multicultural workforce.
Modern literature has provided us with various definitions of diversity and diversity management. Thomas (1992), cited in Prasad et al. (1997) defines diversity management as a planned commitment to recruit and retain employers from different demographic and cultural background. Jamieson and O’Mara (1991: 3-4), cited in Kandola and Fullerton, (1998) stated that people can differ in age, gender, education and ethnical backgrounds, and that in order to gain advantage of these diversities it is important to acknowledge and appreciate the fact that differences can create motivating and rewarding environments.

Despite the given definitions, it is still disputed whether or not diversity is beneficial to organizations. As organizations are more frequently operating in increasingly divers markets all over the world, a better understanding of how diversity affects organizational outcomes is of great interest. As Prasad et al. (1997) argue it is very difficult to evaluate organizational attempts to manage diversity since possible outcomes are neither concrete nor easily measurable. Furthermore, in this section we will introduce the opportunities and challenges for multicultural organizations dealing with diverse workforces, as they are commonly presented in literature on diversity management.

3.2.2 Challenges of diversity management

A great amount of research conducted on the issues of diverse workforces suggests that they create both challenges and opportunities in non-homogeneous organizations. According to Milliken and Martins (1996), it is argued that the more diverse the workgroup is, the richer and wider the variety of high quality solutions is. On the other hand, researches have also shown that the greater diversity there is in an organization, the less integrated the group appears to be.

Many authors compare diversity in an organization to a double-edged sword (Cox (2001,), Milliken and Martins, (1996)). In other words, the key challenges of diversity management is thus said to be to minimize its negative impact on organizational development, while maximizing its potential to improve organizational performance (Cox, 2001).

After several studies, researchers and practitioners acknowledged that one of the key challenges in managing diverse workforces is communication. Related to this is the consequence of increased conflict within heterogeneous workgroups (Cox, 1949).

To explore the communication concept further, we introduce the in-group out-group classification. According to Elmes and Connelley in Prasad at al (1997) people tend to classify
themselves according to two main principles “like me” or “different from me”. Research has shown that people tend to favor members of their own group and discriminate against members of the out-groups. In line with this classification, it was noted that communication under certain circumstances might improve relations between individuals, but that communication in other circumstances merely establishes division by confirming negative stereotypes (Elmes and Connelley, 1997).

Literature in general, and Milliken and Matins (1996) in particular, differentiates between observable diversity (such as race, age and gender), and non-observable diversity (such as one based on educational background, values, abilities and personality types). In this study we will focus on challenges that are evoked by detectable differences.

Observations conducted by different scholars showed that the more diverse groups are in terms of gender, age and ethnicity, the higher the turnover is and the less commitment there is to the organization. In addition, workgroups with prominent dissimilarities are generally also less integrated and it is more common for group members to feel discomfort in their interrelations. Research also gives us evidence that supervisors' behaviors are often more negative towards dissimilar employees. For example, they tend to perceive these subordinates less positively and therefore often give them lower performance ratings (Milliken and Matins, 1996).

According to the in-group out-group theory, an individual’s behavior differs in relation to their grouping and classification. Studies by Elmes and Connelley (1997) showed that even when individuals are randomly allocated to different groups they tend to change their behavior towards others, as they accordingly start perceiving them as members of their in-group. They also act accordingly towards members of the out-group. More specifically, individuals will express more feelings of liking and willingness to cooperate towards their in-group members, whereas they will express feelings of dislike and competitiveness towards out-group members (Elmes and Connelley, 1997). This is a challenge for employee management in organizations as it can negatively influence organizational outcomes.

3.2.3 Opportunities of diversity management

Due to the increasing impact of globalization, homogenous organizations no longer appear to be competitive. As organizations operate in the global markets, interactions with foreign employees become more frequent than before (Milliken and Martins, 1996). This has led researchers and
practitioners to pay more attention to the notion of human capital, that is, the people whom they recruit. The theory of human capital suggests that people can be considered as an economic recourse due to their skills, abilities and education that can be of a great value to the employer (Prasad et al., 1997). This is why having a diverse workforce in organizations can also be considered an opportunity.

To start with, diversity can be considered in terms of economic interest. According to Jack (2000), contemporary organizations have become more cautious and aware of diversity issue. Heads of organizations started considering diversity as an asset of the organization, if wisely used. As Thomas (1990) stated in his article, the main issue of managing diversity is not only to acknowledge the fact that it exists, or to control it, but rather to use it to create an opportunity that would benefit the organization. Other interesting aspects regarding opportunities of diversity management are richer problem solving and decision making abilities. Numerous researches have proven that, in contrast to homogenous groups of people, diverse groups of people with different abilities and professional background can provide organizations with a greater variety of approaches towards their problems. On the other hand, Cox (2001) argues that the benefits of diverse workgroups cannot be reached simply by placing people with different cultural backgrounds together. The important thing here is to be able to manage diversity within the groups. Based on research, one of Cox' (2001) suggestions was to conduct special training and assignments within diverse workgroups. His research showed that trained groups demonstrated better results in problem solving than the groups without training.

He came to a similar conclusion concerning creativity and innovation in organizations, where well-managed diversity within a group was seen as an advantage. Analyses of two groups found the ethnically diverse team to outperform the all-Anglo team (Cox, 2001).

3.2.4 Social identity theory

As mentioned before, different authors and practitioners have defined diversity in different ways. According to social identity theory, diversity is an assortment of people with distinctive group identities within the same social system (Nkomo and Stewart, 2006: 522). Social identity theory is a significant part of diversity management, as they both are based on the classification of people. According to social identity theory people tend to classify themselves as well as others into different categories. These categories are often definable in terms of gender, age, ethnicity
etc. According to Ashfort and Mael (1989), a classification has two types of implications. Firstly, it influences the segmentation of the social environment, which consequently helps the individual to define others. Secondly, it also enables the individual to define himself or herself in the given social environment.

In a similar vain, Elmes and Connelley (1997) argue that categorizing individuals into social groups also serves several physiological functions. According to social cognition theory, individuals categorize others into different social groups because it simplifies their sense making and makes it easier to distinguish between people. In other words, categorization at some point helps to predict the behavior of others and accordingly prepares them for the appropriate responses. In addition, Elmes and Connelley (1997) suggest that this kind of social classification in turn helps individuals to define themselves and others by answering the fundamental question regarding identity: “Who am I?” (Elmes and Connelley, 1997).

It is argued that people tend to seek individuals like themselves, as they feel more comfortable working and interacting with them. Organizations also tend to recruit individuals who smoothly fit into their existing environment. According to Schneider’s (1987) Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) framework, it is argued that people themselves are determinants of organizational behavior. Organizations as well as individuals have personality characteristics and individuals tend to be attracted by companies with similar “personality” characteristics. Overall, ASA framework advocates for homogeneity within organizations thereby simplifying the moderation of diversity management.

3.3 Postcolonial theory

3.3.1 Introduction

Recently, postcolonial theory (also termed as postcolonial theory and criticism, or shortened postcolonialism) is becoming a more and more appealing topic among scholars. This is due to the identification of a continuing imprint of colonialism and anticolonialism in a range of contemporary practices and institutions (Prasad, 2003).

According to Prasad (2003), postcolonial theory is considered a radical critique of modern Western (neo)colonialism. It explores anticolonial resistance and investigates the significance of the colonial encounter for people both in the West and the non-west. In this sense, modern
Western colonialism is understood as different, mutually interwoven practices that seek to establish Western hegemony not only through politics, with a military, or economically, but also through nontraditional means such as culture and ideology (Prasad, 2003), in other words, by nontraditional means.

The postcolonial theory is emphasizing the unfairness and injustice of the modern, neocolonial world order, and is fighting for its liberation through genuine (and not only formal) decolonization. Accordingly, this should include all aspects and all levels of human practice. Calling for the “decolonization of the mind”, postcolonial theory is openly on the side of the colonized subjects and anticolonial activists (Thiong’O, 1981 in Prasad, 2003).

Postcolonialism is not a unitary theory, however. Rather, it is an assemblage of theoretical and political positions stemming from a range of scholarly fields, which makes it a fairly heterogenic approach (Prasad, 2003). In addition, postcolonialism can be also understood as a literary critique, referring to the literature written by the scholars of formerly colonized countries, as well as literature produced by the authors from the colonizing countries (Lunga, 2008). In this context, postcolonial theory especially focuses on the colonial discourse and the way Western colonial epistemology creates categories such as rational/modern West and emotional/traditional East, which in turn results in distinctions such as us/them, colonizer/colonized, First world/Third world, and so on. These contrived dichotomies are the central focus of postcolonial critique, as it tries to counter the Western master narrative and its prevailing assumptions of superiority. As postcolonial scholars criticize the representation of non-Western people within Western discourses as “Others”, they fiercely fight against the notion of the “white man’s burden” (Rudyard Kipling) to save the others (non-Westerners) and alter their culture in order to bring them up to a level of European civilization.

In general, postcolonial theorists disregard conventional Western approaches to issues such as culture, power and identity, claiming that these concepts are neither fixed nor stable, but rather continuously constructed and reconstructed. In line with this, they also criticize the dominant position of ‘rational’ Western philosophies over other approaches (Pan, 2008).
### 3.3.2 Key postcolonial scholars

Some of the most prominent scholars of postcolonial theory are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Below, we will review in brief some of the main ideas and insights they contributed, in order to more comprehensively approach the concept of postcolonialism.

**Edward Said** is best known for his pioneering book “Orientalism” (published in 1978), a foundational contribution to the academic field of postcolonial theory. The book introduced the concept of Orientalism, the Orientalist discourse, and the discourse of domination. It drew inspiration from Foucault’s concept of a power-knowledge relation and Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony. Orientalism mainly criticizes how much of Western research constructs the identity of the Orient as an “inferior other” thereby establishing its own self-definition and self-perception as superior. This Western hegemony is clearly noticeable in the literature produced by the West that describes and constructs the West as rational, advanced, knowledgeable, active, civilized, developed and modern. Contrarily, it describes the Orient in the terms of the West’s opposites, namely, irrational, backward, ignorant, passive, savage, undeveloped and archaic. As a result, a dissimilar and separate East and West are created, and therefrom two distinct identities are constructed. By building up the identity of the East as inferior, the need for guidance for its development is implied. Subsequently, this “provides” the West with “the duty and the right”, that is, “moral justification” to help them, regardless of their disinterest in such help (Prasad, 2003). Said emphasizes that these are artificial constructions and tries to change this hierarchical binary view of people and cultures produced and promoted in this way (Pan 2008).

Based on his personal experience, he also introduced the concept of “inbetweenness” into postcolonial theory denoting the feeling of being “out of place”, or not entirely belonging to or being able to completely identify oneself with any particular place.

**Homi Bhabha**, another prominent author, is most commonly associated with terms such as ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry in the context of postcolonial studies. Just as Said does, he also argues that the colonizer creates a distinction and a cultural difference between colonized and colonizer. Still, he asserts that colonial discourse is not as monolithic and a homogeneous as Said presupposes, but also brings to light some contradictions. In addition, Bhabha suggests that the effect of colonial discourse is in fact ambivalent since it constructs the colonized as a social reality which is simultaneously the Other and still entirely knowable and noticeable (Bhabha,
1994 in Prasad, 2003: 20). For example, the West claims that the non-West is weak and undeveloped but at the same time considers it a risk for the Western culture and civilization (Prasad 2003: 20). Because of this ambivalent stance, which also assumes the ambivalent and unstable “boundary” between the West and the non-West, a complete and utter “fixing” of the subjectivity of the colonized is not only untenable, but also provides an opportunity for an anticolonial struggle (Prasad, 2003).

Another concept introduced by Bhabha is mimicry. As the colonized does not completely internalize the colonizers’ values and norms, mostly directed towards the alteration of their cultural and politico-economic settings, an attempt of the colonizer to produce identical colonial subjects fails, or moreover, it results in mimicry (Prasad, 2003), a mere imitation of a colonizer. Closely associated with the concept of mimicry is the notion of colonial hybridity. Colonial hybridity is the consequence of the colonizer’s discourse meeting the colonized subject’s traditions. Through these processes of cultural acquisition, new forms of knowledge and new forms of power are generated (Bhabha, 1994 in Prasad, 2003).

Hence, Bhabha recognizes this ambivalence of colonial discourse and the notion of colonial mimicry and hybridity as giving room for active anticolonial resistance. They lead to the instability of colonial power and the loss of authority and control on the side of the colonizer (Prasad, 2003).

The last author we introduce is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, best known for the introduction of the term and concept of subaltern in the postcolonial theory through her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. The term, initially created by Gramsci, is here extended to encompass the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society (Prasad, 2003). It refers to the inclination of institutional and cultural discourses to exclude and marginalize particular groups. This in consequence prevents non-European subjects from occupying positions as fully human subjects (Muhr, 2008). To fight this injustice, Spivak proposes a temporary strategic essentialism. Spivak believes that this should bring necessary agency, but also calls for caution and internal distancing from a theoretical commitment to essentialism, which she considers undoubtedly dangerous (Prasad, 2003).
3.4 Processual identity theory

The third theory that forms our three-part theoretical framework is the identity theory.

In our thesis we will follow the processual oriented identity theory, within which individual identity is conceptualized in processual terms of identity work and identity struggle. Here, the emphasis is on “becoming” rather than on “being”, as the theory moves away from a fixed and essentialist view towards a discursive and constructivist approach, more in line with poststructuralist orientation (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). This theoretical approach perceives identity not as monolithic and coherent, but as more “open”, temporary and fluid. Individuals can concurrently hold multiple identities that are constantly shifting, being negotiated and being (re-)constructed, typically through processes of identification and differentiation (Collinson, 2003). These coexisting identities can both mutually reinforce and/or contradict each other, as they are continuously evoked and destabilized on different levels and in different (discursive) contexts of social interaction. Thus rarely, if ever, can a unitary sense of self be attained. In the end, this results in increasingly insecure and unstable subjectivities (Collinson, 2003). This can be clearly followed through the three life stories we will present, where each of the individuals is obviously holding several identities that are often clashing and opposing each other.

This on-going identity construction can also be followed through a circular interplay of the concepts of identity work, identity regulation and self-identity (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Each of the three concepts are equally important in one’s identity construction and are evident at an individual level in each persons story. Self-identity can be defined as a reflexive organized endeavor to obtain coherence in one’s everyday life in the search of existential continuity and security (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Identity work, on the other hand, refers to the activity of forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the identity one continuously constructs (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Unexpected and unusual episodes and encounters call for heightened awareness of the constructed self-identity and require more concentrated identity work (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Moreover, it can be argued that the more ambiguous and unstable the social context is, the more active and intense the identity work has to be as individuals try to make sense of the environment they are embedded in, reaching for different (re-)sources of identity stabilization (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). One of such resources is
integrating narrative self-identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003), which is equally continuously being (re-)produced and edited, as to respond the external causation.

Identity work, and thus self-identity, is further influenced by socially orchestrated identity regulations. These include the more or less intentional effects of organizational and social practices. Identity regulation in contemporary organizational practice can also be a means of exerting more subtle organizational control, through, for example, normative and discursive practice, which is of particular interest in our analysis.

This processual view of identity therefore emphasizes the dynamic aspect of it. This encompasses an ongoing perpetual attempt to achieve a more stable sense of self and an at least temporary answer to the question “Who am I?” (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

3.5 Comparison and critiquing

In this section we will compare and contrast the theories presented above. We will mainly focus on the diversity management and postcolonial theories, starting with the former and then contrasting it with the latter. As we mentioned in the section on diversity management above, the main principle behind this concept is recognizing and acknowledging differences (visible and non-visible) between people who are then classified accordingly into neat categories. It is assumed that people are more easily managed this way. This strategic approach is intended to minimize disturbances and irregularities in the organizational practice, thereby leading to increased creativity and productivity, and fulfilling the ultimate aim of every organization, namely, to successfully generate profit and stay competitive (Muhr, 2008).

What makes diversity management so oppositional to postcolonial theory is its underlying positivistic understanding with the fundamental assumption that peoples’ “essential” characteristics are the basis of such a rigid categorization. Accordingly, people are differentiated according to their inherent, invariable or “natural” characteristics such as race, gender or class (Prasad, 2003).

We would like to emphasize here once again that given that most of the writings on diversity management, as well as contemporary organizational practice, are predominantly based on these assumptions, our section on diversity management was accordingly written in the same manner. We therefore wish to use this section to reveal flaws in its underlying postulations and set them into a context with and against the postcolonial theory.
The postcolonial theory, stemming from the diametrically opposed constructivists paradigmatic stance, argues instead that social reality, and thus peoples’ characteristics, categories and the given surroundings, are socially constructed, highly contextual and fundamentally relational. Belonging to a certain group or category, or being “different” is not an essential quality of a person, but is a matter of perspective, context and given relations which continuously change. Being “different” is thus dependent on how other people see you or cast you (Muhr, 2008). This viewpoint thus strongly advocates the untenability of the rigid boundaries between socially constructed categories that diversity management proposes (Prasad, 2003). This is the first and the central point of divergence between diversity management and postcolonial theory from which all other dissimilarities of these two approaches surface.

Another point that postcolonial theory accentuates and fights against is the prevailing influence of the (socially constructed) dominant norm of white male heterosexual. In fact, it is the perception of this norm as dominant that infuses and perpetuates social reality that then acknowledges its domination. Here, according to diversity management those who do not fit this norm are considered to be different and need to be harnessed. What postcolonial theory on the other hand argues is that these “different” people are actually being labeled as “others” and constructed as a minority that then loses its right to be considered wholly human (Muhr, 2008). According to the postcolonial theory, this phenomenon is evidently noticeable in contemporary organizational practice, especially one that is officially applying and utilizing diversity management. Further on, in line with the postcolonial theory, we will claim that the impact of diversity management, notwithstanding the value of its declared attempt to “create the environment in which everyone feels valued” (Kandola and Fullerton, 1998 cited in Jack, 2000), is actually counter effective regarding its proclamations of equality. What is claimed is that by accentuating such categorical differences between people, the “exposed” differences are made more visible and palpable. The set boundaries are however being further fortified and the existing stereotypes and inequalities additionally perpetuated (Jack, 2000). What diversity management is hence trying to accomplish is actually insistent assimilation and homogeneity rather than acknowledgement of otherness. This is the obvious “colonizing moment/discourse” in contemporary organizational practice that postcolonial critique is fighting against. Instead of embracing the non-categorical approach to people and erasing the proclaimed “differences”, which are in any case very fluid and temporal, diversity management is in fact once again
introducing the notion of superiority that leads to the colonization of entities “different” from the dominant norm. They are instead presented as inferior, irrational and weak. This also consequently fosters hostility and antagonism, both against the “colonized different” as well as among them, instead of creating a mutual respect (Muhr, 2008).

To summarize, what postcolonial theory is offering is a distinctly different, non-categorical perspective. Accordingly, differences as such should not be brought to the forefront and thereby be managed and controlled. Instead, the otherness of the others should be respected and valued. One should allow oneself to be interrupted by the others’ otherness. Otherwise, assimilation is the consequence (Muhr, 2009).

In the end we would like to touch upon the processual identity theory to support the stance of postcolonial theory concerning the inconsistency and temporality of categories. Based on the same epistemological and ontological standpoints, this theory, as mentioned above, argues that peoples’ subjectivities are not fixed and monolithic, but are constructed of multiple identities that are in constant flux. People identify with diverse sources of identification and accordingly different identities surface and prevail over others at certain points in time, depending on the given contexts and relations. This also contradicts the social identity theory that is at the core of diversity management. Related to the processual identity theory and in line with postcolonial theory “being different” thus depends on the specific context and lived experience (Muhr, 2008). Following this understanding we will try to identify how international employees switch between the different identities they hold as they shift between the groups they belong to. We are interested in seeing how this defines them, especially in relation to the people that surround them.

In the following chapter we will analyze the stories we came across during the interview sessions by applying the presented theories. Prior to the analysis, we will introduce three life stories based on their interviews. By doing this we intend to create a context for a better understanding of the stories told, as well as of the organizational and social processes that these stories emerged from.
4 Analysis

4.1 Life stories

4.1.1 Julio’s story

Julio originally comes from Latin America. He has been living in Sweden for more than 30 years. He graduated from a Swedish University where his studies were conducted in Swedish. This was his first experience of the Swedish language and interaction with Swedish people:

*When I was studying in university in Sweden, it was not so easy from the beginning. The language (Swedish) was very different and difficult to understand, especially what the teachers were saying and how others responded. I remember that first year I couldn’t ask questions, because I was very scared of saying something wrong. The Swedes don’t like when you say something wrong.*

The next step in his life was his teaching career. It is apparent that he very much enjoyed the interaction with different people that his occupation provided and that he recalls that time with pleasure. Julio also acknowledges, however, the difficulties he experienced in Sweden, particularly in the beginning when language was a barrier and interaction, especially with locals, was difficult:

*Yes, it is always the barrier. I had bad experience with the people in the city, or people who didn’t know who you are or what you are doing here or what you want. They are asking you, you are not from Sweden, or you are a foreigner, so what are you doing here? But according to their reaction or the way they talk to you, there's something more. They don’t like you.*

Julio spoke a lot about the importance of understanding and knowing the local language. In his opinion this is one of the ways in which Swedish people distinguish between foreigners and locals, particularly within companies. Either you speak the language well, or you remain an outsider:
I think they check how you speak the language, and if you speak well, or like them, and they cannot see much difference I think they treat you different, but if you speak bad language, you are out, you have no chance.

Despite this importance, he also told us stories of how foreign people were coming to Sweden with great enthusiasm concerning the language, and yet soon giving up. In his opinion the reason for this is that they fail to form a connection with the country:

They think, “I will not be here forever, I am only here for a couple of months I don’t need it”.

Julio started working in his current company many years ago. This is the main reason why he can see and experience all the differences between foreigners and locals and their interactions at an organizational level. Concerning himself he says:

No, in the company I cannot say I feel like a foreigner, not in KAP.

At this point in his life, and working in KAP, on the one hand, he does not really identify himself as a foreigner, yet on the other hand, he never referred to himself as a local during the interview either.

Some years ago, Julio was transferred to KAP-Spain. He talked a lot about Swedish-Spanish interactions not only at an organizational level, but also within their social lives. He recalls the power relations in the Spanish company and the clash of cultures through their different working styles and nationalities:

The relation between boss and employ was not so easy for the Spanish; it was a black and white relationship. Whatever the boss said it had to be done in exactly the same way. Spanish couldn’t tell the boss “You are wrong” or “I disagree with you”. The boss wouldn't want them to disagree.

I have one example about coffee; the boss has said you cannot drink coffee on your desk. But the Swedes were taking coffee to their desks and it was a problem. Also conflicts during meeting, when the Swedes said "No, it can't be so", or "You are wrong" and the
Spanish were surprised. But Spanish understood it after some time and acknowledged it as another way of working.

Several times during the course of the interview Julio mentioned how Swedes perceive themselves as superior in comparison to Spanish and other nationalities in terms of working and education background:

*I think the Swedes believe that they know all, because they are Swedes, they have better universities and don’t expect others having good qualifications. If you are an engineer from South America, they think you know nothing and your education is very low. The only countries which were more or less acceptable, were US, France, England, and Italy more or less but not so much.*

After several years working on the Spanish side of the company, Julio returned to Sweden. He told us that coming back was easier this time. A lot had changed in Sweden and in the company too, especially in terms of relationships and superiority, which he had mentioned before. Although Julio stated that he was very comfortable in the company and did not feel himself to be a foreigner or an outsider, after being in Spain, he suddenly felt more connection with them than with the Swedes:

*I feel more comfortable in Spain than here.*

It is interesting to follow how Spanish people perceived him:

*The Spanish people told me: you are not Swedish and the Swedes told me you are not Spanish, so I was in the middle all the time.*

Although, it appeared that making Spanish friends was much easier for him than it was for the Swedes. He recalls:

*I was accepted better than Swedes.*
Despite the fact that he obviously enjoyed Spain better than Sweden, he decided to come back. It was difficult to choose and even the company's HR manager was involved in this hard discussion:

_The human resource manager asked me if I was sure to come back to Sweden and would not regret it. I said yes I am sure but I think she was right. I regret it._

During an interview, among other topics, we touched upon the friendship issue. You can see from Julio’s personality that he is very social person. In general he thinks that Swedes are not really friendly or open to foreigners. Especially after work, in terms of social life, Swedes avoid inviting people to their homes for dinner or for other social activities. In company Julio gets on well with foreigners, so he has friends from Columbia, Argentina and some other countries.

_I feel good and open with them I can be who I am, but with the Swedes I cannot be who I am, I have to be different in a diplomatic way._

He was telling us a story about how he went together with Swedish families on a skiing trip. He had positive memories from this trip but also added:

_In a certain point you continue to be foreigner. You are never Swedish._

In addition he also shared with us an interesting story about a Swedish friend, how they were together in Spain and after five years of friendship, went their separate ways. It seems that the experience of being disappointed by someone he though he knew still baffles him. Julio was telling us of how the Swedes changed their identity in Spain and became more open and friendly. However, after coming back to Sweden they lost touch with all the friends they had made in Spain.

Julio is planning to stay in Sweden and work with KAP for at least another two years, in order to be close to his family. He doesn’t have any defined plans for the future.
4.1.2 Narcis’ story

Narcis is originally from what used to be Yugoslavia. He speaks fluent Swedish now. Narcis went to high school and university in Sweden and has only worked in Sweden. When he came to Sweden many years ago, he did not speak any Swedish or English and he recalls the early years as being the most challenging part of his life in Sweden. It got much better, however, after he decided to stay here, learn the language and start a life for himself:

*The biggest challenge was the first year, when overall situation for me was unknown. Then I started to learn Swedish and my aim was to go to the university.*

He was surprised to see that the system works here and that he can get whatever he asks for, and he liked that Swedes follow rules and procedures:

*They have all procedures, how to do some work. Everything is there. Just go and pick it up. Everything is so smooth.*

When we asked him to mention something that did not work so well, he could not think of anything in particular. In the work environment he suggested that if something had not been planned then it was considered best to take time and plan it. This could be more time consuming, but he felt that they could also do things fast if necessary:

*If you have to do something very fast it’s not a problem, at all. They have some kind of drive for that as well.*

Narcis thinks of himself as a calm person and considers the pace of work and life to suit him well. If anybody has a faster pace, however, he can adapt to that too. In general he is fond of the working system.

He also pointed out how Sweden has a lower “power distance” than his home country when it comes to issues such as manager-employee relationships. He enjoys this freedom and likes the fact that jobs “get done” as well.
When discussing if he has any issues in social and business life he answered that he does not have a problem with Swedes, but nor does he have much of a private life with them, his relations with Swedes are just at work. He also considered that people at university (at least during his studies) were more open and friendly:

I am not frustrated at anybody. I mean on, Swedish people. I cannot be frustrated at them. As I said to you before, I don’t have so many Swedish friends. I think the reason is cultural difference and language barrier as well. Because I came here when I was 23 so I missed that period, so you don’t have your friends from the school, for example. So, yes. language and cultural barriers, perhaps.

He describes his private friends as falling into three categories; first his fellow countrymen, then international people, and finally Swedes:

Yes, I spent my time with people from my country, of course there are other internationals and even Swedes as well, but majority of my friends are from former Yugoslavia.

You are in some way closer to foreigners than Swedes, that’s the way.

He participates in the fikas and other social activities at work, and mentions that they all go together at the same time for them. Making reference to his previous experience of working in another company, however, he remarked that if there were more foreigners, then they would probably have their own group:

Because we were very few foreigners but if we were more foreigners than we should probably form a group.

Narcis mentioned that he misses after-work activates and believes they only occur in the form of good-bye parties when you are leaving the company, which is not so often. He would prefer to have more social activities within the workplace:

After work doesn’t exist here (laughter). This is kind of frustrating for me, no after-work happens on our floor [their Department].
He told us of some social activities such as Christmas parties which he believes are very popular, but he did not show any specific interest in them himself. He also wanted to highlight the amount of drinking that takes place at such parties.

Narcis believes that it is possible to make friends with Swedes but that they are usually “colder” than others, at least on the surface. He mentioned once more how people at his university were more open and friendly to foreigners:

*I think they were friendlier, more willing to join you for some parties or so on. I think that’s difference. Here at work, they’re just working and go home directly. But there are some differences, they are a little bit, let’s say, more open for others, I think.*

He continued to explain Swedish people are cold at first and that it takes time to get to know them. He personally has tried to be flexible and to integrate himself into the society. He mentioned, however, that he experienced problems during the first few years. These were primarily language difficulties, and secondarily cultural and traditional issues he failed to grasp:

*Despite you manage the language, I still miss this cultural point and traditions and so on... In the beginning, it’s more language and so on, but later on, it’s more cultural and traditions that are coming in.*

He keeps good contact with his family back home and regularly visits them each year. He is married to a woman from his home country who now has come to Sweden and is learning Swedish. At the beginning, especially during the first two years, it was difficult for his wife to adapt to living here, but after she learned the language it got easier. Currently, as a family, they are well adapted to living in Sweden. They still entertain ideas however of returning to their country when they are older. He also keeps contact with his friend through Internet and by phone and considers this an important part of his social activities. He believes himself to be integrated but would still prefer to travel back to his home country to reunite with his real, childhood friends:

*I do feel integrated. I do. But I miss this traditional and also cultural point. My school friends, from the beginning, you know... You can make friends later on in the life, but,
friends that you are making from the beginning, through the childhood, that I never can get that back so. I have to go to Yugoslavia to meet them (laughter).

Narcis told us that he knows people, mostly from his original country, who get tired of Sweden and the problems they face here of learning the language and finding a job, or just get depressed and feel nostalgic for their home country, but he cannot recall anybody who actually went back.

Answering the question concerning if he had a Swedish passport, he proudly stated that he did and that he is like any other Swede - the same rules and privileges apply for him too:

Yes I do... I’m like any Swedish, as well. That’s the kind of contract.

He remarked, however, on how the social relationships among Swedes themselves are not so strong and that he doesn't find their culture very friendly, which is why he still considers himself to be different from Swedes. Narcis believes that people who are born here and have lived here for a long time are officially Swedish, but then when it comes to their feelings and culture, he does not consider them to be 100% Swedish but rather half Swedish, half foreign. Narcis frequently mentioned that he is like Swedes and similar to them, but sometimes he also mentioned that he did not feel completely at home:

I feel like we are all Swedes, after 16 years here in Sweden, but, perhaps it might be wrong. That’s my feeling at least.

And later:

When it comes to this kind of cultures and traditions you’re not familiar, you’re not that kind, you’re not originally Swede... So, yeah sometimes I can feel uncomfortable then.

During coffee breaks he sometimes feels left out; even though he speaks Swedish, and sometimes he thinks others see him as an outsider. He also feels that not everyone is treated equally when it comes to social life, some people are made to feel left out. He also added that there are differences between official and unofficial equalities. He thinks that one as a foreigner needs to prove oneself and put twice much effort in the work than Swedes. He made many other comments concerning how names on job applications can influence the application procedure,
and how many people change their names from ethnic to Swedish or more European names in order not to be discriminated against and so to get a job.

We asked him to comment on the assertion that Swedes respect you more when you talk with them in English. He believed it to be true, but added that if you speak better Swedish they will respect you even more and that they treat you more kindly then:

> The Swedish people are much nicer to you if you speak a little bit better Swedish language. You can realize that. That they are much nicer back to you.

He mentioned, however, that Swedes have improved and that they are better now. They know more about foreigners and their countries, and they can now distinguish between different countries and nationalities.

In conclusion, Narcis considers himself to be fairly well integrated from a work point of view but not very much from a social point of view:

> I’m thinking much more to work related, than social because social part is more complicated. I have friends from back home but I can say that I am not so integrated in social point, still... (laughter).

### 4.1.3 Gabriel’s story

Gabriel is originally from one of Latin American countries. He arrived in Sweden in December 2005 when he came here with his wife and two teenage children. He has been working in KAP for nine years, four of which have been in Sweden. He holds one of the managerial positions in the company. This is his first long term working experience abroad. He does not speak Swedish although he has attended some Swedish classes:

> I started learning Swedish, I had ten hours, during the first year, but our position here requires traveling a lot. So it’s at some point uncomfortable for me to cancel or change everything because of travel, because of meeting, so it’s not worth it. Even though I would be really eager to learn, it’s great!
Gabriel and his family were prepared for changes and new social and working environments. Gabriel’s first priority after moving here was the integration of his family into the new environment:

For my family Sweden was new atmosphere. Different school, different environment, different challenges, different languages. For my wife especially, she is the one who is going to new stores, buying new things. That was a challenge. So family was the main focus for me, to make sure that they were running without having problems.

Gabriel seems quite proud that he, together with his family, managed to overcome the difficulties and coped well with the changes. He thinks that the reason why it was fairly easy for them to overcome the difficulties and avoid a culture shock was due to his and his wife’s personalities such as, abilities to follow the rules and be very disciplined in this regard.

Helpful in this regard also was the integration program that he and his wife attended. He describes the program in a very positive manner and acknowledges the fact that it was very helpful. Many useful tips for everyday communication as well as norms of accepted behavior in Swedish society were introduced to him at these seminars.

Organizers were aiming to make us understand a little bit of what are the typical differences in between the normal European world or western world and Sweden.

Also, how you behave when you arrive for the first time to a party when someone invites you, you have to bring specific type of flowers and then you take the wrap out, and you give flower to the maid. Mainly focus was on this kind of things.

Gabriel seemed a little bit amused while he was telling us the story about invitations and flowers. He constantly made comparisons to the Latin American culture, where it is much easier to invite someone for a dinner than here in Sweden. During the interview he spoke a lot about differences in terms of social and cultural life, as well as within working life. It appeared that although Gabriel had already worked in KAP in Latin America, he still found the differences to be considerable. This is well demonstrated in the following quotes:
Talking from KAP to KAP, the thing is that, at least the politics game is much stronger back home than here. It’s more like fighting in that case, and you feel it, even though at some levels it doesn’t make any sense.

Another thing is that, because of this planning and planning and planning, the projects in general, the activities in general are very slow. Very, very slow. And probably because we are in the area that requires more planning like engineering. And in Latin America, you are like the front office with the customer, so if the customer asks you for something, you need to do immediately.

Another interesting aspect is also how he refers to the stress level at work, making comparisons between Latin America and Swedish companies:

Talking about the stress, I mean, come on guys! You don’t really know what stress is. Really, and that is something we really need to bring in and probably many of the people working here, coming from the other countries feel the same, because the speed of the things, the sense of urgency is significantly different, from here than to our places, in many respects.

Apart from the stress issues, Gabriel also tells us of differences in regards to teamwork, which is much better in Sweden than in Latin America. He mentions several times, however, how he stresses over the lack of speed in communication and over the service delivery problems. He seems a bit worried about the stress-free environment in the Swedish company, he even says:

It is stressful not to be stressed.

We also were very interesting in what Gabriel thought of the language. He feels quite comfortable in the working environment and one of the reasons is that the company’s official language is English. Notwithstanding that fact, occasionally people switch from English to Swedish. He doesn't consider it a problem if people need to do that:

No, the point is, you need to understand that even for me it is very tiresome to spend a day speaking the language that is not my mother language. So I understand people, being
in your country and in your offices, and speak another language that is not your mother tongue. I understand when they complain. And, when we have a meeting and there is a small group of people, talking in Swedish, whatever, it’s their own business, fine, I don’t care. If they need someone else to understand it, including me, they switch to English, and that’s it.

Gabriel divides people into three categories when he speaks about usage of the English language:

They are asking you:” Do you speak English... Swedish? OK, I’ll speak English to you. Others are “Aah, you are here. OK. Let’s speak English. Fine.” And others like “Ohh.. we need to speak English”. You see? So you have the three levels.

Apart from the working environment, Gabriel shared stories with us related to his social life, inside and outside the company. Because of Gabriel’s managerial position he mostly interacts with top management who are very sensitive to his situation of being a foreigner in a Swedish company:

Once upon a time, most of them have been international, as well. Either in Italy, I would say most of them, but some of them in other countries, like Russia, Ukraine, India, Australia, Singapore, so, they know, they feel what it is like not to be at home. And they understand.

As for other Swedish colleagues, he said the following:

We can work together, it’s fine, we can eat together at lunchtime, have fika together, but after working hours, that doesn’t mean that we will see each other. Normally we do that with international people from China, from Taiwan, from other countries, but with Swedish, it is only group of very specific people and that’s it, which is quite strange, to me. In my opinion it is not normal in the working environment, because you mostly spend your lifetime there, at work, so most of the friends, and especially when you are adult, comes from there. With the Swedish people, I can go and play golf, I can go swimming, I can go skiing, but it is not that whomever you can find on the aisle you can say “Ok!
Let’s go somewhere and have some drink”. You cannot. You cannot do that with a Swedish.

Gabriel is a very family orientated person and he spends most of his free time with his family or with other people from Latin America. He is proud of the fact that he helps his friends with integration into the Swedish society:

Just to avoid them to suffer what we suffered.

Even though Gabriel stressed several times that he does not have any problem with integration into Swedish society and adjusting to their local habits and social rules, he still seemed rather skeptical about the Swedish tradition of coffee breaks, in other words, fika. He was very surprised by how people could have so many breaks during working hours. He respects local traditions to have a coffee several times a day but he prefers not to participate in this particular cultural activity. The reason is because he is busy with meetings and overloaded with work.

Gabriel has left his big family in Latin America. Family is a very important issue for his wife too:

We travel back home mostly because of my wife’s family. I have mother, sister, brother-in-law, and my nephews, but there is no psychological need for me to go. But for my wife, it’s very important to be there in Christmas time.

Apart from family issues, Gabriel shared with us his personal opinions about Swedish society and Swedes themselves:

The point is, they [Swedes] sometimes are very serious. They don’t allow you to go beyond that. I have examples here, probably two or three guys at the very beginning, with very frozen face, but now they are really, really open, more like us. Because, I feel many of them, behind that frozen face, they would like to be us, let’s say funny, open, warm, and as any of us. You can feel it, how they start to laugh and how they refraining themselves to really show it, you know?
Swedes normally ask three questions whenever they meet you for the first time, trying to pull you into leading the conversation. However when you try the same questions on them, it’s just: “No, Yes, Little…” and that’s it, they don’t want you to know more.

Gabriel was told that the reason for this is that Swedes do not like to be known and are very shy. As for integration into the local society, Gabriel distinguishes two different areas. The first is integration within the work environment, and the second, integration with the outside world:

The point is that you need to realize it is one thing to be integrated at work than outside. If we talk about all these things in relation to outside world it would be, completely different story. So in the work environment, I feel ok, integrated, no problems, I haven’t felt anything like pushing out of these things. It’s fine. You can see specific persons that have some troubles in their minds bringing in people from abroad.

In the work, especially the top guys are excellent. They always ask you: ”How do you feel? How is it going? Is everything OK? Just tell us, let us know. My bosses are great. I have had three different bosses and all three of them were excellent, all the time trying to integrate me. I think, in my case, I physically cannot pass for a Swedish. It’s very clear.

Even though he feels very comfortable in the company environment, at the end of our interview he said that he still feels like a foreigner but that this does not constitute a problem for him since it is temporary condition and so it feels like being on vacation right now.

He seems to be concerned about immigration issues in general.

Gabriel does not have any precise plans for his future. His contract is going to end shortly. He said that the company will decide what the next step in his career will be. Either he will stay in Sweden and continue working through a “local” contract, or he will be transferred to another European country.

4.2 Analysis of the stories

In our analysis we will try to go beyond these stories to see how our characters see their positions in their given organizational and social contexts and how they make sense of these. We are in
particular interested in examining how they perceive others’ perceptions of themselves and how this influences their understandings and consequently their behavior. We especially want to observe this in terms of identity regulations and struggle, and in relation to the various processes of othering and normalization they are daily subjected to. More specifically, we will follow a conception of othering as presented by Czarniawska and Höpfl (2002), with an emphasis on construction of everyday assumptions that produce the Other and thus maintain the inequalities, in relation to the problems of alterity, of difference, and of deferral (Czarniawska and Höpfl, 2002).

While engaging in this we will keep in mind the notion of social constructionism, the importance of perception and context, relations, and discourse, which all infuse and consequently create and perpetuate the reality of our characters. We are in particular interested in exploring how our characters are placed or casted by people that surround them, primarily Swedes. Therefore, we will continuously refer to the identity theory, diversity management and postcolonial theory.

Using collected empirical material and previously constructed life-stories, we will now engage in analyzing the cases of these three particular employees as to meticulously examine how the above-mentioned processes unfold and develop

4.2.1 Julio’s case

Julio has been living away from his home country in Latin America for over 30 years. He originally came to Sweden to study, started working, got transferred to Spain and now is back in Sweden again. Having been away for several years, he has noticed that things have changed in many respects. This is particularly evident in the way people, mainly Swedes, envisage and act towards people that come from abroad. Once often openly hostile towards foreigners, Swedes have apparently changed their behavior. He still recalls, however, the times when he did not feel very comfortable in “his own skin”, when he was treated as different, the one that did not fit in, the Other:

But I remember the last days in university; we had so-called “working days in Sweden” when the companies come to universities... Companies that had to do with outside Sweden were OK. But the Swedish companies were not interested in you...
When you asked something about the work they did not respond to you and would say “No we are not interested.”

[Interviewer]: Even though you spoke Swedish?

Yes.

In the beginning I think the Swedes believe that they know all, because they are Swedes, they have better universities and don’t accept others having good qualifications. If you say I’m an engineer from South America, they think you know nothing and your education is very low. The only countries that were more or less OK, were US, France and England, and Italy, more or less, but not so much.

The impression of inferiority (“they think you know nothing and your education is very low”) that was ascribed to those (“from South America”) who did not belong to the West (“US, France and England”) (Prasad, 2003) was so strongly established that it constructed a reality in which the non-Westerners did not have much chance to succeed (“When you asked something about the work they did not respond to you and would say 'No we are not interested.'”), even if they spoke Swedish.

Later he offered us an even more radical example. Here, the virtual wall that was standing between him (a foreigner) and the Swedes was almost palpable:

I remember a long time ago going to the shop, the security were always behind the foreigners when they went inside supermarkets, it was not so nice. Always to be followed. It was not so nice.

He claims, however, that things have now changed:

Being back in Sweden after 10-15 years, I find it much easier. For example in a course about machines, the foreigners’ ideas are accepted and Swedes think they may be right. Before, when they say something about problems or express their opinions, they wouldn’t accept you, but now they think you might be right. The distances between people are shorter, now they value people differently. You see now a lot of
The directors of the company are not Swedish.

[Interviewer]: And this happened both in society and the company?

Yeah.

Further on, however, Julio acknowledges that this is not a general rule, and that foreigners are still being differentiated. The difference now is that the process is somewhat subtler and additional variations have been introduced:

*I think Swedish accept you in different ways. For example, if you come here and speak English and explain you are here for 2-3 years to work or study. I think the position they take is different from the situation when you are moving to stay or find a job in Sweden. It is more like an outsider; those saying why are you coming here, why? *

...but depends on where you come from. If you come here for work, or health or political reasons, it’s difficult. If you have a job and they know you will go back, you have money, and probably you learn a lot so you are not using the social welfare, the situation is different, you earn and spend money here, you pay taxes...

Not only is the immigrant here perceived as belonging to the “category” of foreigners, that is, of different, but these “different” can also be seen as divided into more distinct “classes” such as “more different” and “less different” than “us” that is, the locals. Thus, two people coming from the same country for different reasons are perceived differently. This clearly supports the idea that the perception of otherness and difference is a social construction and is highly dependent on the context and not on the inherent characteristics, or the “essence” of a person (Prasad, 2003).

Julio considers language to be a very important factor in determining the perceptions and reactions of others towards you as well as regulating the level of their acceptance. Even when applying for a job, he claims that one can feel like one is being treated differently, despite the good work qualifications one might have. In this way, the normalizing effect of language is evidently extremely strong:
I think they check how you speak the language, and if you speak well, or like them, and they cannot see much difference, I think they treat you different, than when you speak bad language. In that case you are out, you have no chance... Yes, even if you have a good profile. In some works you are out. That’s my opinion.

Yes, yes, it is always a barrier... with the study and the people.

But even after 30 years in Europe, and notwithstanding knowledge of the language and the possession of a Swedish passport, he does not really feel like he belongs here. In fact, he frequently experiences feelings of discomfort and distancing. Still, it is very interesting how these feelings are evoked by implicit dislike, and never due to a direct confrontation or such like:

I have bad experience with the people in the city, or people who didn’t know who I was or what I was doing here or what I wanted. I think this people don’t tell you: “You are not from Sweden”, or “You are a foreigner, so what are you doing here”. But from their reaction or the way they talk to you, there is something more. They don’t like you.

Othering thus does not necessarily stem from explicit coercive measures or direct discursive practice. Even the subtle aura of one’s behavior can have equally, if not an even stronger impact on making person feel different by casting or constructing him as Other (Czarniawska and Höpfl, 2002). This is further observable in terms of Julio's relationship with his Swedish work colleagues. It is interesting to notice how, even though he repetitively refers to the company as the place in which he feels comfortable, integrated and “at home” (“No, in the company I cannot say I feel like a foreigner... I think I am lucky for working in KAP”), his relations with Swedish colleagues still do not go beyond a formal work partnership confined to working hours:

No, it's very strange in Sweden. No, Swede's don't socialize in this way.

And if you look in KAP, the temporary foreign employees do not hang out and make friends with Swedes, they look for other foreign workers; from Mexico, Iran, Italy and
France. They don’t make many friends with Swedish colleagues, but with foreign colleagues. Why is it so? Since the Swedish people are not open to meet new people. They are not open to you after work and in their house. This is OK when you are working but after work it’s not OK. I meet you after work in the city, we say “Hello how are you, this is my family” and the conversation is finished. So after work on a Friday evening they meet other foreigners… The Swedish do not show any interest in them.

This is something that we might term as “passive Othering”. By not allowing foreigners to approach them, they do not “directly” in words, that is, discursively refer to them as “not the same”, but they still construct a virtual boundary, a separation line that leaves foreigners “outside”. In other words, while they might be obeying the organizational codes of conducts in the company (which is probably why all of our characters feel comfortable in the organization), once the working hours are over, they withdraw into their private sphere in which, generally, foreigners have no access, they are not allowed to intrude. This impression, which is held by all our characters, is clearly demonstrated by the following story Julio shared:

I have 2 friends, from Colombia and Argentina. One I’ve known for 5 months and I know him more than the Swedes I’ve been working with for 10 years. They are more open and when I’m talking to him I am not thinking or worrying about what I’m going to say, so that it is not wrong. We are both open.

For example, I go outside to eat only with people from Colombia and Argentina. I feel good and open with them I can be who I am, but with the Swedes I cannot be who I am, I have to be different in a diplomatic way.

An impact of normalization that is once again evident here is that Julio has to curb himself in order to fit into the Swedish society. His effort to fit in does not however make him a Swede, nor is he anymore “who he is”, but a new, “hybridized”, “diplomatic” form of himself (Said in Prasad, 2003).

How does Julio rationalize this? What is his understanding of Swedes’ behavior? After over
20 years in the country, he perceives this phenomenon as a matter of controlling:

_The Swedes want to know all about you, but they don’t want you to know all about them... since when they know all about you, they know where they have you, where you are strong and weak, and they can finally control you.... This is also the reason they don’t want you to know much about them. So you cannot have control over them._

The idea of control and compliance lies at the core of diversity management. Used as an instrument to gain advantage of a diverse workforce, diversity management exercises control by initially defining and delineating “divers” groups (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). This consequently (re)establishes the power asymmetry. The morally benevolent intentions are thus deemed to fail, as the greatest impact that diversity management brings in is actually a restoring of stereotypes. As these usually have negative connotations they further perpetuate distancing and othering.

In addition, the eight years Julio spent in Spain largely contribute to how he defines himself today and how he perceives things and the world around him. However, it also influences the way others perceive him:

_The Spanish told me you are not Swedish and the Swedes told me you are not Spanish, you live in Sweden! ...So I was in the middle all the time._

It is apparent that for almost the last 30 years of his life he has been strongly experiencing the notion of inbetweenness. Not completely belonging to the Swedish society, or later the Spanish one, he felt he “was in the middle all the time”. He could not identify himself completely with either, which resulted in a continuous and amplified identity struggle (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003), sometimes resulting in feelings of anxiety and emptiness:

_You can live with them and be accepted, but never completely, you see they have accepted you but something is missing._

[Interviewer]: _So you never felt like home?_

_No._
In terms of the notion of otherness, one anecdote particularly caught our attention. It was the story of his friendship with a Swedish colleague that he had spent 5 years with in Spain. He considered him a close friend, but when they came back to Sweden they went their separate ways. In fact, he remarks that his other colleagues have experienced the same thing:

*When they moved back to Sweden they were not together anymore. They lived 2-3 years together and now when I meet them and ask them about the others they don’t know much about them. And they were 100% together. Friendship was something they needed to be able to live in Spain; now that they are back they don’t need it anymore.*

He adds:

*But the Swedish people in Spain were so different, but when they came back to Sweden they changed back to the Swedish way of behavior; there they were more open. And it was something very strange...*

As feelings of difference and otherness are highly contextual and relational (Czarniawska and Höpfl, 2002), we could conclude that the reason for such a reaction from the Swedes might be that in Spain Swedes themselves felt as Others in relation to the local Spanish. This is why they joined the “other foreigners” in their fate. But upon their arrival back home, they did not need them any more “to survive”. They were once again among “their own kind”, they were not the Others any more.

### 4.2.2 Narcis’ case

Narcis has been living in Sweden for 20 years. He started the interview by defining himself as a very flexible person, adaptive to new situations and willing to adjust (“*I mean, I myself as a person, I’m very flexible*”). He holds a degree from a Swedish university, speaks the Swedish language and possesses a Swedish passport. In fact, he does not seem to differentiate himself from other Swedes at all:

*I feel like we are all Swedes, after 20 years here in Sweden, perhaps, but... perhaps it’s wrong. But that’s my feeling at least.*
Further on, it seems like he feels equally comfortable in the organizational context:

\[
\text{At work is no problem at all... it's very easy for me too... so there is no problem at all...}
\]

Even when speaking of the Swedish custom of taking coffee breaks, or to “fika” as they call it, he emphasizes that he has coffee with and feels close to his co-workers, regardless of their nationality:

\[
\text{It's more the room, the working people you're sitting closely to, taking coffee together, often...}
\]

Obviously, he is doing his best to adjust to the prevailing norms of Swedish society as he is subjecting himself to the process of acculturation, the process that occurs when a person from one culture has to learn, or in other words, adapt to another culture (Redfield et al., 1936 in Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2002). It evidently seems like he does not want to be the one who deviates. This is a typical example of the process of normalization where the individual is subjected to the disciplining power of the dominant norms that influence the construction of his or her identity. This process is based on comparing, differentiating, hierarchizing, homogenizing and excluding. Thus, one’s specific behavior, beliefs or appearance are showcased, measured and where necessary corrected. The outcome of normalization is a normalized and disciplined individual (Collinson, 2003). The otherness is erased and sameness is established. Normalization is thus another source of tormenting identity struggle that calls in for a strong and often infinite identity work.

As the interview unfolded he opened up and gave new momentum to the conversation by cautiously referring to the language and cultural differences:

\[
\text{I mean, despite that you manage the language and so on, I still miss this cultural point and traditions and so on... In the beginning, it’s more language and so on, but later on, it’s more cultural and traditions that are coming in.}
\]

He recognizes that there is a distance between him and Swedes, which he discursively defines
as a “barrier”. He again ascribes it to the previously mentioned cultural and linguistic difference:

I have not so many home friends, Swedish home friends... this is perhaps because of cultural differences and language, as well, that’s some kind of barrier between...

But then he continues with the story about his university friend who, even though he was born in Sweden, experiences the same phenomenon:

I mentioned that friend that I had from the university, he was born in Sweden, but I don’t see so much difference... He is from Greece, his parents, at least. But... perhaps, he has a little bit closer connection to Swedish, perhaps.

When it comes to this kind of cultures and traditions you’re not familiar, you’re not that kind, you’re not originally Swede... So, yeah sometimes I can feel uncomfortable then.

It is interesting to follow how he “develops” from identifying himself with Swedes at the very beginning (“I’m like any Swedish”), to a point where he acknowledges that he is “not being that kind”, not being “the same”. Despite all the efforts he has made in the past 20 years to “blend in” (he learnt the language, enrolled at a Swedish university and now holds a contract in a prestigious Swedish company), he has still not managed to entirely internalize the Swedish cultural norms and customs. The normalization process thus did not completely “succeed”, as he “repeats, rather than represents” Swedes, typically embodying both mimicry (Bhabha in Prasad, 2003) and inbetweenness (“you cannot be 100% yourself”).

In addition, he illustrates this identity struggle by a vivid example:

And then sometimes I have experienced something that... when we come to the frustration, and so on... Because if you sometimes talk foreign language for example, perhaps, you cannot be 100% yourself. It is a difference when you, for example, talk in your own language. So perhaps, you have to be 2 or 3 persons, or something like that. At least 2 persons. Native and a foreigner. You understand? That’s a kind of
frustrating.

As usage of particular language is context dependent (mother tongue at home, English at work and Swedish in the society), he admits that this requires a frustrating effort from his side, as it inhibits him from finally answering an insistent question about his identity: “Who am I?” (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). In addition he confesses that this places him interchangeably into two oppositional poles (“native and a foreigner”). Again his inbetweenes surfaces. That this process of identification in accordance with language use is fluid and contextually dependent is obvious even as he jokes:

*In the company I speak Swedish. Most of the time, except of with... [a name of another international colleague] [laughter]... and some other foreigners [laughter].*

Nevertheless, it was more than once that he felt exposed by looks that made him feel different and othered:

*I cannot remember right now, so concrete, but I felt quite many times during the coffee break for example ...In a company, yeah. That you are sitting there, 3-4 people and me as well, and they are talking and you sometimes you can feel they are looking at you. You see at them, OK, they know that I am a foreigner I cannot understand some of what they talk of... that I have experienced that, yeah. Yes.*

Further on, he emphasizes this division even more, as he acknowledges that the matter of proclaimed equality is only a matter of formality: *You are equal regarding your rights and so on. On the paper at least, on the paper at least.*

---

In the official organization every one is culturally sensitive and tries to be politically correct when dealing with internationals. Fika, the Swedish coffee break, is representation of unofficial organization. It is a 20 min break from daily work when people mostly discuss non-work related issues with their friends. It is interesting to observe how non-Swedes that do not speak the language do not go to fika breaks. Fika is a symbol of private life and here, in contrary to work life, language is a barrier and a prerequisite to socialize. Non-Swedish speakers do not participate in fika as they are not involved in non-work related discussions and chats.
A negative consequence of diversity management is once again obvious here - categorizing people and offering “equal” rights and opportunities to everyone actually results in counter-effects, as differences get highlighted and boundaries reinforced (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). In addition, Narcis offers his perspective and personal experience:

But then you have to struggle much more if you are a foreigner... for example, if you apply for a job, a Swedish guy and you as well, there is some discrimination there, as well, and you have to be much better, double. We used to say you have to be double as better then Swedish to get assigned. You have to be really, really good.

He later comes up with new examples:

When you’re sending an application for the job, for example, they are sorting the applications. So if you see “Narcis” and then “Anders Persson”, for example, then...

there are some managers, some people, who're just sorting it.

Such use of authority to secure the power asymmetry results in the (re)establishment of stereotyping and a rational-irrational dichotomy (Prasad, 2003), and is an evident example of colonizing practice in an organizational context.

Job seekers of non-Swedish origin believe that Swedish employers prefer Swedes to non-Swedes. Thus, some foreigners change their ‘exotic’ names into more European names in order to increase their chances to be hired. It was also told by our respondent that nowadays you could send CV without any name to reduce the level of discrimination. As one of my Middle East friends Hossien (having a very common name in Muslims culture,) was joking, nowadays he could not be employed as he has the same name as “Saddam Hossien”. The fact that some foreigners change their very personal “trait” such as the name is an attempt of mimicry. This is done with the intention of facilitating their integration in the society. It is a sign of stereotyping which makes people feel excluded just because of their names.

Narcis also mentioned an interesting incident, once again in relation to language use. This time he acknowledged that Swedes alter their behavior towards people in accordance with their language skills. Again, categorizing is evident here, but this time in the context of using
a foreign language:

I experienced it by myself, for example... the Swedish people are much nicer to you if you speak a little bit better Swedish language, for example. You can realize that.

He even recalled some incidents his acquaintances had experienced:

When they get unemployed and then had to contact, for example, the insurance and so on..., because of the language, they couldn’t perhaps tell them exactly what was the problem... and then they just ignored them. Sometimes you can experience how they just ignore them. That’s because of the language, for example.

It seems as though if one wants to function normally in society then one needs to become the “same”, to homogenize. Otherwise the chances are that one can be excluded by a passive act of being ignored, an other form of othering. This brings to light not only feelings of frustration, but also, once again, the notion of inferiority (Prasad, 2003).

At the conclusion of the interview, when asked if he felt integrated, Narcis answered:

I do feel integrated. I do. But I miss this traditional and also cultural point. My school friends, from the beginning, you know... I’m thinking much more to work-related, than social because social part is more... I mean I have friends from my home country, but yeah... perhaps not so integrated in social point, perhaps, still...

4.2.3 Gabriel’s case

Gabriel's case is a good example of how categorizing people and othering, once again, are contextual phenomena. This perception is in line with the constructionist theory which is based on the idea that reality is socially constructed through a process of externalizing one’s subjective experience as an objective fact and then internalizing the same experience as a “reality” (Jonson Ahl, 2002).

In examining Gabriel’s case, we will particularly focus on the processual identity theory since a pattern of shifting identities and othering is clearly visible in his case (Sveningsson
and Alvesson, 2003). Accordingly, we have identified several identities that moderate his behavior and sense-making. His three most dominant identities can be termed as Latin American, American (that is, North American) and Swedish. The first one is the prevailing one and stems from his Latin American cultural heritage. It is clearly observable in the way he talks, in his mannerisms and gesticulations. It is also particularly evident when he talks about his social life, as he often refers to the Latin customs and compares them to the Swedish ones.

The second identity Gabriel has is a result of his previous working experience in an American company. This strongly infuses his working and organizational behavior, often dominating over his Latin American identity.

*We are more, let’s say, more the USA in that sense, no? We are more Gringo-like...*

The last one is an outcome of acculturation and his attempt to adjust and fit into the Swedish society, but it does not dominate. Still, on occasions, he even disidentifies himself (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) from his Latin roots as if to prove that he can “fit in” to Swedish society:

*My wife and me, we are really on following rules, very disciplined in many, many aspects. Probably a little bit not like the all Latino American people, but anyway. We like to do that.*

As these identities shift depending on the topic and context of conversation, we could observe how his role and position in relation to othering correspondingly changed in the course of the interview. At one point, he was the one being othered, the object. At another stage he was instead the one taking an active stance casting the others. Furthermore, there are also occasions when he subjects himself to the othering, as he consciously distances himself from, for example, his working colleagues during a coffee break.

A similar case is presented by Fournier (2002), where otherness is presented as not always being a passive state of victimhood to which the Others (Italian women farmers) are condemned by a dominant majority. Since otherness and its construction are context-
dependent and not a transcendental quality, those that are at one point othered at another might be othering, for example through discursive and material practice of disconnection.

According to his anecdotes, it appears to be predictable that he is the one who is being othered when he is perceived as a Latin American, but when he feels more American-like, his dominance and feelings of superiority surface. This is particularly noticeable in the working environment, for example, when he refers to the present working style. Identifying himself with the idea of an American management style (Western management practice (Prasad, 2003)), as opposed to a specific Scandinavian one, he claims:

\[
\text{Thinking about the stress, I mean, come on guys! You don’t really know what stress is. Really, really... I mean... And that is something we really need to bring in.}
\]

A notion of neocolonialism and American imperialism by the means of economic and ideological influence can be read between the lines, as he is miming and imitating (Prasad, 2003) what he himself has previously been subjected to. In another example he is even more explicit as he uses a colonizing discourse; “I force them” (Prasad, 2003). Finally, he even offers a moral justification to such behavior (“because in the end, that is the good point for the company”) (Prasad, 2003).

\[
\text{Still a lot of people feel uncomfortable speaking English. Especially if we have a meeting with 15, 20 people and I am the only one not speaking Swedish. So I force them to speak in English, because in the end, that is the good point for the company, English is the official language of the company.}
\]

It is evident here that he is producing a power asymmetry, and that the rest should follow him. In this way, he is in control of the situation and refuses to accept the victim role his Latin origin might entail. Not accepting victimhood is further evident as he rationalizes his (temporary) position in Swedish society:

\[
\text{Yeah, yeah, still... a foreigner. Yes, yes, still like that. But not that I care, it’s something like being on vacations. You see? To be honest... I go here, I go there, visit here, visit there, take photos... And that’s what my family and me do normally.}
\]
Knowing the country, going around, knowing the region around. And that’s it.... We are on the good vacation time.

Still, this is a result of an intense identity work and presents an example of a narrated self-identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) that provides him with a certain feeling of stability and confidence in the given context.

Referring to his American identity that defines him as a busy businessman (“It’s a meeting, after meeting... With management, I mean. Full day of meetings is full day of meetings. Period!”), he defies the Swedish custom of coffee breaks:

Come on, so many pauses in the work! No way! [laughter]. “But everybody needs to have fika!” ...No, no, I cannot...

But as he later tells us a story in which his Latin American identity surfaces as dominant, his position somewhat changes. This position is obviously determined by his appearance and he is fully aware of it (“I mean, I think, in my case, I physically cannot pass for a Swedish. Completely. Right? It’s very clear.”):

Let’s say when going to a car dealer. Something like: “What’s going on with this guy? What are you looking at?”. Whatever. But as soon as they see that you are coming from KAP it’s another story. You see? Which is a shame. After, it’s not a problem at all. But you can feel that reaction from the time they take to attend you to time they get notice of you in the stores. That kind of thing. Something really, really interesting. That is changing I would say.

[Interviewer]: Is changing?

Not for the good, not for the good. It’s getting worse, I would say.

[Interviewer]: Why do you think that is getting worse, or you are paying more attention now then before?

No, I don’t think so. Probably it is more, it is more frequent. Then you can see it, it’s
at top levels, and even with people that you know that are not really Swedish, but are probably second generation that immigrated from somewhere else that’s more reaction into that.

[Interviewer]: They react stronger then...?

Yeah. Oh, yes! By far, by far. Yeah.

It is very interesting to notice how he is being othered by those who have been “traditionally” othered in Swedish society themselves. Again the importance of context-dependency is brought forward, as otherness is also found to be as versatile, underdeterminant and unpredictable (Fournier, 2002).

As in Julio’s case, he also offers us his reflections on how internationals are being passively othered as they are not allowed to cross the line that separates them from their Swedish colleagues and their private life after official working hours:

I mean, we can work together, it’s fine, we can eat together at lunchtime, have fika together, as well. ... But after working hours, that doesn’t mean that we will see each other. Period. Normally we do that with international people. From China, from Taiwan, from other countries, but from Swedish... very specific people and that’s it. I mean, which is quite strange to me. That is something that it is not normal in the working environment, because you mostly spend your lifetime there, at work, so most of the friendships, when you are grown up, come from there.

In the quote you can see him rationalizing and resisting the passive victim role. Moreover, he turns the situation around, by othering Swedes as he now sees them deviating from his norm of normality. He does this by introducing the discourse of normalcy and deviance (“That is something that it is not normal in the working environment”) (Gastelaars, 2002).

Still he is aware that he cannot go against the dominant norm and should alter himself if he wants to fit in:

I mean I think I have changed some of the things, as well. Other things that surprised
me is... one of the things when I came here for the first time someone told me “You never ever should kiss a Swedish lady on the cheek.” I would do it in Latin America. I was “Really?! Ok, I will change that.”

Even when he talks about Swedish culture seminars for the international newcomers in the company, he refers to it subconsciously using colonizing discourse (Prasad, 2003) when saying “they forced us”, but again quickly rejects the role of a victim:

The two of us [him and his wife] came, and they forced us, let’s say not forced us, but they formally invited us, both to attend to this meeting with this speaker, and he told us about different things.

The last two quotations are perfect examples of the influence of normalization and diversity management, as he tries to change in order not to diverge from the dominant norm and ideology of the society (Banerje and Linstead, 2001). According to this reasoning, the final aim should be a homogenized society offering more of the sameness to counter the tensions and disruptions that might be caused by their differences.

Nearing the conclusion of the interview, when we recognize his Swedish identity, we also identify that his attitude and position change in accordance. As he tries to follow dominant social norms he also adopts a new position on the line of power asymmetry, as he becomes the one who is othering. The situation is almost the same as the one he previously described, only this time the roles and positions are swapped. It is now him who is on the superior end of the rational-irrational, advanced-backward binaries (Said in Prasad 2003). He is the one who calls for the necessity to civilize and improve the Others:

I can foresee you, hopefully I will be wrong... When they have had a lot of problems with immigrants...If they don’t really push that, because this kind of thing, I mean, if you are coming to a country opening their doors to you, it should be because you will respect their laws, the way they behave, and you will integrate yourself into that...and, that’s it! Of course, in your house you can do whatever you like. Period. But outside “Sorry, you are a guest of this country!”. And I don’t think these people really understand that. Come on guys! That’s not the way it should be. Not even in Sweden,
or nowhere else. Period. But that’s the way they are. So I think that’s the kind of reaction and this politic stuff. So I think Swedish government needs to put some thought on that and really balance how respectful immigrants are compared to what is allowed in this country or not. Period.

Simultaneously trying to assimilate into the Swedish society and strongly internalizing the American business style and norms, but still identifying himself with his Latin American social and cultural heritage, all consequently leaves a strong imprint. In the end this results in hybridization, as he “translates” influences that he has been submitted to in his own way, and acts accordingly (Bhabha in Prasad, 2003).

4.3 Swedish perspective

We will continue our analysis by scrutinizing the speech of a Swedish person. We will try to detect how our characters, that is, people of non-Swedish origin in general, are placed in his speech. What we are particularly interested in is to examine how he discursively constructs them and casts them as the Other. In this case, we refer to Czarniawska and Höpfl (2002), who define “being cast” as “being cast in a role” with the implications of required or expected performance. They also define “casting” as “being pressed into a mould, or conformed to a pattern” (Czarniawska and Höpfl, 2002: 2).

We will focus on the last few minutes of the interview with the consultant that used to deliver integration programs for international newcomers in the case-company.

4.3.1 The Consultant’s case

It is interesting to follow how the interviewee became more and more open and straightforward in formulating his answers as well as in his choice of words as the conversation progressed. At the beginning of the interview he had been very formal, reserved and mainly focused on the program he used to deliver. Even though he presented us with numerous interesting points, it was not until almost the very end of the hour-long interview that he turned to the subject of immigrants.

Unfortunately, as in all other societies, in Sweden also there are some forms of
racism. We are not an exception. Most people who come from outside of a European context, usually from Africa, not so much from Asia, feel the lack of integration, which is probably true.

He starts by acknowledging that “in Sweden also there are some forms of racism. We are not an exception.”. One would get the impression that he does not include himself in the category of people that are racists, as he clearly terms racism as an “unfortunate” phenomenon. Still, he makes a clear distinction between people from the “European context” (“the West” as in Prasad, 2003) and the others who come “usually from Africa, not so much from Asia”. According to him, those coming from the non-West are not able to integrate. Here, the (neo)colonizing discourse of the West – non-West dichotomy is clearly introduced, underlined by the conception of rational-irrational (Prasad, 2003). This notion of hierarchical binary oppositions (Said in Prasad, 2003) is the principal thread all the way till the end of the interview.

There are some fantastic stories of immigrants coming here during 1970. We have a good welfare integration policy; they almost immediately became accepted here. Look at some of the intellectual elite of Sweden, in music, at universities, medical doctors—they are immigrants. Some of the best-known people in Sweden are actually immigrants.

He continues by projecting an image of Sweden as a good host country (“We have a good welfare integration policy; they almost immediately became accepted here”). Moreover, this image offers immigrants an opportunity to become a part of its “elite”. As he proceeds in creating this desirable image, he underpins it not only by talking about artistic “elite” (“in music”), which is often perceived as more emotional, impulsive or “irrational”, but also about the “the intellectual elite of Sweden... at universities, medical doctors”. Still this image is not without conditions:

You can actually succeed in Sweden, but probably not on your own terms, but on Swedish terms. You cannot expect that you can survive in Sweden on your own terms (you don’t see too many television personalities with their heads covered. There was
a program a few months ago but it wasn’t a major success). You don’t see too many people who argue that speaking really bad Swedish, not learning a proper Swedish, doesn’t hinder you from being accepted. It does hinder you from being accepted.

Once again, as several times before in other interviews as well, the issue of language is brought forth. Here, knowing the language in order to function efficiently in the Swedish society is a minimum precondition. In fact, one should speak “a proper Swedish”, as everything less than that (especially a “really bad Swedish”) will prevent a person “from being accepted”.

This matter is developed even further as the interview unfolds. This time, the issue is transferred into an organizational context.

You don’t want a Mohammad who doesn’t speak proper Swedish in your management team. I want to have a Mohammad in my team who speaks good Swedish and I will give him a preference to Magnus if he’s better. I don’t want to have my company’s face outside of the country if it cannot explain who I am.

Even though he tries to justify himself by acknowledging that he would not mind having a foreigner (“Mohammad”) as a superior, as long as he “speaks a good Swedish”, it is obvious that he does not really want to be associated with him. He believes that such person is not “the same” as he is, and thus could not really represent him. Thus, even though Mohammad might get recognized as doing a respectable job, he will never be good enough in general, as there will always be the color of his skin to support the fence that stands between them. The practice of dividing and separating people into categories on the basis of their skin color or ethnicity is at the very core of diversity management (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). According to Czarniawska and Höpfl (2002) it is the emphasizing of such “essential differences” in an attempt to manage them that affects their stabilization in the society and accentuates such separating momentum.

By now, our interviewee is not as cautious and reserved as he was at the beginning of the interview as he, rather straightforwardly, says:
So the lady who answers a telephone, she should have a very Swedish name, it’s just as simple as that.

He continues by envisioning the reverse situation.

Sweden was never a colonial country, but the thing is that Swedes would say if I come to Georgia I would have no difficulties to accept every single rule of the country even for short term as a tourist.

He emphasizes that Swedes are thus rational as they can recognize when certain rules apply and are necessary to be followed. In fact, he presents Swedes as civilized enough to know how to “accept every single rule of the country even for short term as a tourist”. At the same time, the underlying message here might be that the other way around may not be true – that people coming from Georgia, or any other non-Swedish (or non-Western) country for that matter, are not able or willing to adapt to or accept Swedish rules and norms. This makes them irrational in two ways. First, they are being irrational because they do not have the same, presumably “good enough” rules, and secondly, because they are not able to accept or adapt to those “correct” rules. Once again, the notion of rational West and irrational non-West has surfaced (Prasad 2003).

When you are coming here, we are trying now for 3 decades, saying that you don’t have to adapt to us, we are quite happy if you remain who you are, and we created the rules and borders in Malmö [referring to segregated areas in Malmö].

He again continues to emphasize how Sweden is a very open-minded and supportive country that does not exercise coercive measures in order to change or force people to adapt. Still, in the sequence of the same sentence he is mentioning practice that can be in a certain way termed as ghettoization. Even though Swedes might be content if foreigners “remain” who they were, they have still “created the rules and borders in Malmö” as if to make sure that the irrational “other” (Prasad, 2003) is properly separated, distanced and under control.

In immigrant communities there are people who never learned Swedish, they are still watching television programs from Sudan and Saudi Arabia, and their children are
unfortunately losing out because they will never became a part of Swedish society.

These people then, according to him, are “condemned” to stay “undeveloped” and regress as they still relate to their “backward” roots. Not accepting what is the (by him comprehended and presented) as established (dominant cultural and ideological) Western norm, they are unable to “evolve” and are destined to remain subaltern (Spivak in Prasad, 2003). In addition, even their children, who might have been born in Sweden, will be deprived of the chance to internalize the proper, “modern” rules and norms. Even though one can expect that they will probably transform and develop some form of hybridity or mimicry (Bhabha in Prasad, 2003), the respondent doubts that they will “(n)ever became a part of Swedish society”.

I’m sure there are some Swedish racists, there’s a Swedish colonial mentality probably but it’s about this frustrated young people who never got a chance to make it in Sweden because of our misguiding policy, telling them that you don’t have to become like us, you will be OK anyhow, and its not true. If you don’t become like us you will be OK in a pizzeria, but you won’t be our senior executive at the big company. Maybe you can be a university professor, because the public sector must have a number of immigrants, but I wouldn’t enjoy myself as a university professor knowing that the only reason I got the job was because I was not a Swede.

He is accentuating that it is actually the policy, which he labels as “misguiding”, that sets a wrong example, by not requesting or demanding “others” to “became like us”. According to him, this is not the appropriate way because he believes “it’s not true” that they “will be OK anyhow”. He believes and is pointing out that this deprives them from the opportunity to progress further than working in a “pizzeria”. He believes that if “they” “don’t become like us”, then they are doomed not to become “our senior executive at the big company”. This means that, even though they might presumably be educated enough for the state policy to secure them a job or allow them to work at the University (“because the public sector must have a number of immigrants”), the society in general will not tolerate or support their progress in terms of business advancement. In other words, he acknowledges that the (common) social perception is that these others are maybe not “advanced” or “developed” enough to fulfill the demands of such demanding positions.
In conclusion, he presents himself as possibly morally superior, as he “\textit{wouldn’t enjoy (my)self as a university professor knowing that the only reason I got the job was because I was not a Swede.}”

5 Conclusion

Coming to Sweden 10 months ago set us on a journey that has turned our lives and perspectives on the world around us the way we could not have ever expected, even less envisioned...

Leaving behind the places that were familiar, environments that were close and recognizable, nothing prepared us for what we encountered here - a world so multifarious, with people so unique that they kept challenging our beliefs and assumptions, even some of our fundamental postulations - all the way through to this very moment. We have been invited to make sense, even though we thought the sense had already been “made”...

Studying business studies during these 10 months brought us to this point where we were supposed to apply what we have learned thus far. But what we have learned thus far was not only what has been presented to us in the books or told to us at the lectures – it was much more than that. This is way we decided to put together both our academic interests and these life experiences as to approach the issues that are equally relevant to the organizational practice as well as for the society in general. Our point of departure was a context that was somewhat similar to the one we have been brought into - a multicultural international organization and its international employees.

In the world that is so infused with the discourse of globalization, multiculturalism and unrestricted flow of goods, services and workforce, its most fundamental “part”, an individual, is often neglected. This is why we wanted to examine how these individuals make sense in such an environment, how does this environment in return influences their perception of themselves, and what challenges does this pose to their identities.

We got the opportunity to observe these processes in a context of a large international Swedish company. We talked to five international employees, and each one of them offered us a unique life story. However, throughout the interviews, several issues surfaced with all of the
interviewees. The one that particularly caught our attention was their repetitive referring to the workplace as a place where they felt comfortable and integrated. Nevertheless, they all mentioned that they did not particularly socialize with their Swedish colleagues and that they all had been considering leaving Sweden. These conflicting statements intrigued us to understand how this might be and why this is so. In an attempt to understand, we reached for the theoretical explanations offered by diversity management, processual identity theory and postcolonial theory.

What we realized was that they constantly tried to fit in into the given environment, but at the same time had been referred to as different. This differing constructed them as Others and distanced them from their Swedish colleagues. Many of stories we encountered during interviews also showed us how they had been passively casted as others. This was often in a very subtle way, as they had been ignored, or simply not appreciated, while at the same time were required to adapt. These contradicting messages baffled them in their sensemaking and subjected them to exhaustive identity work (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

Moreover, we realized that this was also closely related to a process of diversity management. It was no surprise to us to find that such a big international company would practice diversity management. After all, the final aim of every multicultural organization is to capitalize on its diversity (Czarniawska and Hopfl, 2002). Through integration seminars and by offering language courses, for example, organizations are doing their best to facilitate the integration of their employees. This way, diversity management helps organization to control people that are seen as different, since this difference is presumed to cause tension and disruptions that hinder the accomplishment of the company’s goals. But in order to create an efficient homogeneous environment, diversity management actually makes these differences visible in a way that stabilizes the perception of separated categories of different people. Consequently, displayed differences get reinforced and instituted and those that are seen, that is, constructed as different end up being othered (Czarniawska and Hopfl, 2002). Thus, even though diversity management by definition may be ethically well intended (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000), it is caught in a paradoxical and vicious circle as it simultaneously tries to help people adapt, while concurrently othering them from each other by pointing at the differences that separate and stereotype them. It
is therefore caught up in a lose-lose situation, in which a (white) privilege is generated and masked (Grimes, 2002).

Accordingly, instead of creating a proclaimed atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000), diversity management leads to a subtle colonization. By emphasizing what is normal, everything else that deviates from the norm is projected, and thus accordingly referred to as undesirable and often inferior (Prasad, 2003). Those who have been referred to or casted as inferior consequently experience anxiety as they try to reach the dominant norm. This resembles a Sisyphus’ destiny where the Other will never be able to reach the point where it becomes the Same, it will always remain in between. This makes it impossible for them to ever fully integrate. In consequence, it is questionable if their potential can under such circumstances ever be fully developed and expressed.

By introducing postcolonial theory we tried to open space for a new perspective. Accepting that reality is socially constructed, and that perception of difference is strongly context-dependent, postcolonial theory calls for reflexive and critical rethinking of the taken-for-granted assumptions that we tie to concepts such as differences, diverse workforce, diversity management and integration. Instead of trying to harness or influence others’ differences we, as individuals as well as international multicultural organizations, should understand that we will never be the same but also that our otherness is an opportunity and not an issue. This opportunity will continue to fundamentally challenge our openness as it calls for nonjudgmental acceptance and appreciation. Ultimately, it is from here that true tolerance and creative synergy stem as diversity and otherness are recognized as a genuine capital for companies as well as for society in general.

In the end, we ourselves here confess that this is not an easy task. We admit that we have encountered numerous doubts and questions that challenged us on our way, both during these 10 months, as well as while writing this thesis. Nevertheless, we hope we have responded to those in way that can be considered as moral and respectful.
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# 7 Appendix

## 7.1 Table 1

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