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Critical Cross-Cultural Management: Outline and Emerging Contributions

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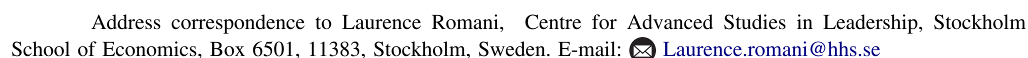
Abstract: Critical perspectives on cross-cultural management (CCM) are increasingly present in our research community; however, they are spread over multiple research fields (e.g., international business, International Human Resource Management (IHRM), diversity, and gender and/or race studies). Critical researchers tend to have agendas and foci that address topics others consider beyond CCM's scope, such as gender in intercultural training, religion in the multi-cultural workplace, or the relationship between CCM knowledge and the military. We intend to sketch here the contours of this stream of research we call *critical CCM* and to clarify the broadly shared research studies' agenda. By using Burrell and Morgan (1979) matrix and stressing critical studies' inspirations in two paradigms, radical structuralism and radical humanism, we propose a paradigmatic positioning of the studies. Subsequently, we articulate Critical CCM research agenda around denaturalization, reflexivity, and emancipation. We conclude by asserting a critical performative agenda in a dialog with practitioners. In brief, our ambition is to specifically outline Critical CCM research and show its emergent contribution to CCM research.

Keywords: Cross-cultural management; critical management studies; denaturalizing; reflexivity; national cultures; emancipation; race; ethnicity; language; religion; gender

INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural management (CCM) has come a long way from its inception in comparative studies. Early researchers, such as Hofstede (1980/2001), intended to show that culture does



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indeed matter in management and organization studies. Today, this insight is part of the managerial body of knowledge and considered commonplace. However, the contexts wherein CCM takes place have become increasingly complex: instead of a single expatriate manager serving as the international buffer for an entire department or even company, employees are now facing global virtual communication, exchanging data in shared-server environments, or interacting in multi-national and dispersed teams: CCM has become part of everyday corporate lives. Meanwhile, in management disciplines, researchers have experienced a critical turn: they reflect upon the body of knowledge and their research practices, and the power implications of both (Alvesson and Deetz 2000). Critical international business (e.g., Cairns and Śliwa 2008) tends to critique and address power effects on the macro level. Conversely, critical CCM can contribute to fairer treatments on the interpersonal and micro levels, based upon an investigation of power and status differences in context (e.g., Primecz, Mahadevan, and Romani 2016; Mahadevan 2017).

Our focus is the critical turn in cross-cultural management, especially in today's intermingled forms of intercultural interactions. By employing Burrell and Morgan's (1979) matrix, we first position these studies in respect to other CCM works. Subsequently, we articulate the distinctive features of critical CCM research, particularly its research agenda around denaturalization, reflexivity, and emancipation and its emerging contributions to CCM. We conclude by asserting a critical performative agenda in a dialog with practitioners.

In our opinion, establishing critical CCM in its own right serves two goals: first, it gives a similar status to mainstream CCM studies and those dealing with inequalities and power dichotomies, deeming them equally legitimate, yet inspired by different research paradigms. Consequently, raising paradigmatic awareness contributes by including additional topics and concerns that are currently often dismissed as not CCM research. Thus, the CCM research domain enlarges. Second, sketching this first portrait of *critical* CCM enables us to begin a discussion about specific contributions critical management studies can bring to CCM, to the concepts of culture, or to the idea culture(s) influence management. This may lead CCM research down new avenues.

POSITIONING CRITICAL CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT (CCM) IN TWO OF THE FOUR MAJOR RESEARCH PARADIGMS

We speak of Critical CCM in the tradition of Critical Management Studies initially formulated by Alvesson and Willmott (1992) and inspired by various critical theory authors (e.g., Habermas, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Adorno) and Marx and Engels, Hegel, and Dahrendorf. To clarify these studies' characteristics within the major research paradigms, we first briefly present how they are positioned in relation to other CCM works. In speaking of a paradigm, we broadly refer to a research community's shared ontological assumptions and epistemology and its scientific production.

Various taxonomies have attempted to develop meta-classifications of the available range of CCM studies (e.g., Sackmann and Phillips 2004; Lowe, Moore, and Carr 2007; Primecz, Romani, and Sackmann 2009; Patel 2016; Mahadevan 2017; Romani et al. 2018). As part of

the larger field of management and organization studies, CCM theories can be organized in the taxonomy of the Burrell and Morgan (1979) matrix, which appears to be the most cited despite different paradigmatic labels and delimitations (see Deetz 1996; Tsoukas and Knudsen 2003; Guba and Lincoln 2005).

Looking at organization studies through a sociological lens, Burrell and Morgan (1979) differentiated paradigms based upon two dimensions: (a) objective versus subjective ontology, epistemology, human nature, and methodology; and (b) the sociology of radical change versus the sociology of regulation. Regulation theories accept the social status quo and existing social system (e.g., the society of consumption, capitalism, or the existing world order). Conversely, radical change theories have inner assumptions about contemporary societies being problematic, unfair for most people, or even inhuman. Consequently, they include a conscious attempt to change the existing social order to a better one. Burrell and Morgan (1979) identified two paradigms on the radical side: radical structuralism and radical humanism. Both can be said to have critical dimensions, although there is some debate in the critical management camp about whether both are the home of critical studies (see Burrell and Morgan 1979; Alvesson and Deetz 1996, 2000; Alvesson and Willmott 2012; Hassard and Cox 2013; and a review by Klikauer 2015). We will discuss Burrell and Morgan's (1979) functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist paradigms and illustrate each paradigmatic stance with CCM studies to progressively position critical CCM studies in both of the radical paradigms.

The functionalist paradigm

The functionalist paradigm (labeled "objectivist" in Patel 2016 and "positivist" in Mahadevan 2017 and Romani et al. 2018) combines an objectivist philosophy of science with theories of regulation that primarily study underlying unity and cohesiveness. Functionalist CCM studies tend to define culture as self-contained, separate, and stable phenomena comprised of distinct characteristics that can be observed, measured, and manipulated. Culture is typically understood as value systems mapped by cultural dimensions (Hofstede 1980/2001; Schwartz 1994; House et al. 2004), which can involve comparing national scores on these dimensions and management practices across countries. Thus, these kinds of studies have been called *cross-national comparisons* (Sackmann and Phillips 2004) or *comparative CCM* (Mahadevan 2017). Multiple contextual variables for national analyses have recently received attention (e.g., Tsui, Nifadkar, and Ou 2007; Vaiman and Holden 2015). Still, the implicit assumptions underpinning functionalist CCM studies (the most contributed to studies [Patel 2016]) suggest that culture has clear demarcation lines and is internally homogenous on the macro level, thus creating distinct and presumably stable national or societal cultures (see Morris, Chiu, and Liu 2015).

The interpretive paradigm

The interpretive paradigm is also concerned with cultural unity and homogeneity; yet, it adopts a subjectivist philosophy (see the section *Subjectivist Cultural Studies* in Patel 2016).

This approach focuses upon shared meanings or symbols that render the world meaningful on the level of the (individual) subjects' experience. Cultures are not viewed as objective categories; rather, they are seen as interpretive frameworks, to a certain extent, shared within a group or by those with a common socialization, while also allowing for different interpretations based on perhaps social positions and opinions (Berger and Luckmann 1966/1991; Geertz 1973; d'Iribarne 2009). Interpretive researchers, inspired by the interactionist school and communication studies (e.g., Bateson 1972; Hall 1959), focus upon intercultural interactions, preferring the label "intercultural management" (or "intercultural interactions" in Mahadevan 2017; Sackmann and Phillips 2004). They tend to use diverse qualitative methods, such as ethnography (Primecz, Romani, and Sackmann 2011; Gertsen, Søderberg, and Zølner 2012). These studies also address multiple levels of interpretations and meanings (e.g., in organizations, see Patel 2007, 2014) and cultural identities (thus, they also cover "multiple cultures," as in Sackmann and Phillips 2004). The interpretive paradigm is the second most prominent perspective in CCM research (Primecz et al. 2009).

The radical humanist paradigm

The radical humanist paradigm also adopts a subjectivist philosophy and focuses upon how individuals experience the world; however, this is in combination with a radical change theory. It is essentially concerned with people's emancipation from the modes of domination and systematic oppression that limit their development: "It is concerned with what is possible . . . with alternatives rather than with acceptance of (the) *status quo*" (Burrell and Morgan 1979, 17). Radical humanism builds its argument upon ideology critiques (e.g., Habermas, Fromm), as people often do not question the ideology arriving from different sources (e.g., the media, schools, influential members of the society, leaders, or their managers). These sources have an immediate interest in maintaining the existing society; consequently, they communicate fairness of the existing system and its lack of alternatives. These ideologies might serve the powerful members of the society and organizations; at the same time, they might be oppressive for the masses. For example, one ideology claims competition is the best and most desirable economic driving force and everybody, including consumers, benefits from competition. Still, this may not always be the case.

There are some overlaps (and much tension) between the radical humanist paradigm and postmodernism (see Alvesson and Deetz 2000; Deetz 1996; Tsoukas and Knudsen 2003). Studies from a postmodern perspective are more concerned with language, texts and discourses, and deconstruction (see Derrida 1967; Foucault 1977). Their aim is to resist and deconstruct grand narratives (Lyotard 1979) and single explanations and replace all-encompassing explanations with "small stories," local explanations, and attempts at micro emancipation.

Studies inspired by radical humanist thoughts in CCM tend to challenge the concept of national culture, which they view as a grand narrative (Vaara 2002; Tienari et al. 2005) and a construction that promotes a stable and rather homogeneous understanding of culture(s) (McSweeney 2002, 2009). When linked to postmodern thought, they reveal hybrid, changing,

and mixed cultural identities, depending upon the contexts (see Barinaga 2007; Magala 2009; Tukiainen 2015), influenced by power-effects (Mahadevan 2017). They also put cultural diversity, fluidity, and dynamism at the center of the investigation. These works are currently among the least visible in cross-cultural management (see Primecz et al. 2009; Romani et al. 2018).

The radical structuralist paradigm

The radical structuralist paradigm links the sociology of radical change to an objectivist philosophy. In contrast to the radical humanist paradigm, these theories are inclined to draw upon all-embracing theories (e.g., Marxism), which postmodernists might label as grand narratives. They examine how power structures−-social, economic, military, or political−-influence management (see Jack et al. 2011). Culture and its conceptualization focus upon outcomes of structural inequalities or power imbalance, which might be manifested in discursive construction (based on Said 1978; see also Lowe 2001; Ailon 2008). This is often to the advantage of some and the potential oppression of others (Hartt et al. 2012). Studies may approach culture as a place of tensions and struggles between different cultural groups in a relationship of unequal power (Sorrells 2013; Özkazanç-Pan 2015) and investigate dynamics at play and hybridity (Yousfi 2014; Boussebaa, Sinha, and Gabriel 2014). In the radical structuralist paradigm, the number of CCM studies builds upon post-colonial theories, for example; yet, they remain underrepresented (Mahadevan 2017).

DELIMITATING CRITICAL CCM

The previous section highlighted approaches to CCM research in four different paradigms, which perceive, conceptualize, and study culture in specific ways. In the functionalist and interpretive paradigms, inspired by the sociology of regulation, studies tend to presume cultures are stable and homogeneous and have fixed demarcation lines between them. In contrast, the sociology of change involves perspectives on culture that treat the concept as heterogeneous, changing, and involving blurred boundaries. This is illustrated by studies in both radical paradigms.

Critical CCM and its sensitivity to power unbalance finds inspiration in both the radical humanist and the radical structuralist paradigms. Both these paradigms share an emancipative ambition: they aim to develop alternative modes of (management) operation or redefine existing concepts in a less oppressive way. Despite being different, these critical works exhibit shared general preferences: for instance, they adopt a critique of instrumental reason, positivism, and managerialism. They also pay attention to historical-empirical specificities, consider the performativity of language, and are reflexive in their methods and authorial positions. Finally, they tend to be committed to intervening in relation to oppression (Parker 2002).

CRITICAL CCM'S RESEARCH AGENDA

Drawing from the previous outline of what constitutes a general critical approach, we highlight three aspects that we consider to be particularly important to a specific and critical cross-cultural management research agenda. This involves denaturalization, reflexivity, and a goal of emancipation with the development of alternatives that relate back to critical management studies (see Fournier and Grey 2000; Grey and Willmott 2005; Alvesson, Bridgman, and Willmott 2009).

Denaturalizing the concept of (national) cultures

Denaturalization touches upon the status quo or the established order because it questions what seems natural and, thus, has been taken as unchangeable. For example, cultural differences between countries might seem natural; however, the history of the notion of national differences is linked to European colonial ambitions. Cultural differences are not natural at all; they are linked to power discrepancies and emerging national ambitions that first culminated prior to World War I (Bayly 2004). Likewise, many associate culture with shared values, and values as being core to culture. This builds upon Kroeber and Kluckhohns' strategic positioning in the post-World War II North American social sciences discussion (see Kuper 1999) and is debated (Morris 2014). Therefore, by unveiling how current concepts of culture may silence certain views that are not value-based or nation-based, denaturalization can take part in the development of alternatives.

The main purpose of early research in CCM was to propose that culture was measurable (on a national level, using cultural dimensions) and influenced organizations, business, and management (see Kirkman, Lowe, and Gibson 2006; Taras, Kirkman, and Steel 2010). This led to taking for granted that national culture exists (essentialization), can be presented through value scores discrepancies, and has a tangible impact upon management.

Researchers have challenged the idea that national culture is the only relevant category for studying culture (McSweeney 2002, 2009). What also should be doubted is whether culture can be measured in a value-free way (Ailon 2008) (i.e., neutral objective way). These studies reveal the concept of culture used in research and practice builds upon the ideology of the supremacy of universalism and objectivity of macro-comparative analysis (Lowe 2001). This reflects the positivist science view that reigned supreme in 18th century Europe, but is not linked to a "truer" science or better rationality (Westwood and Jack 2008; Jack and Westwood 2009); it is coupled to the economic preeminence that Europe gained due to various state policies, among other things (see Bayly 2004; Parthasarathi 2011). In other words, establishing objectivist and nomothetic criteria for the definition and global study of culture equals using "ethnocentric" (Lowe 2001) criteria from one part of the world on the rest. This does not mean that cultural dimensions are best suited for Western cultures; there have been continuous additions of cultural dimensions, for example, to Hofstede's framework since 1980, based on the Chinese Value Survey or the World Value Survey[2] (see Hofstede and Bond 1988, Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). Rather, the very aim of studying culture

as being universal and comparable across country complies with the positivist, and potentially culturally relative, view of science. Therefore, it is only one possible option (Mahadevan 2017). In many bi-polar dimensions, however, the one option perceived as the most desirable (e.g., individualism or low power distance) tends to fit the Western self--perception of modern management (see Holliday 2011; Primecz, Romani, and Topçu 2015; Mahadevan 2017). When speaking of the West, it is with an awareness of such issues in this imagined geography (Said 1978).

This insight invites us to turn toward emic, so-called indigenous, or even poly-cultural views on culture (Morris et al. 2015). The linguistically inspired emic(s) and etic(s) concepts remind us that divergent inside (emic) and outside (etic) perspectives are negotiated in interpersonal interactions across cultures (Mahadevan 2017). On a broader level, international management and business studies speak of Western and indigenous management theories. For CCM, however, this view is problematic: it presupposes that Western knowledge is globally relevant, whereas indigenous knowledge is only applicable to its local context (Jackson 2013, 2014). Consequently, critical CCM researchers acknowledge the wider imbalances of power wherein these interactions emerge, such as the dominant understanding of Western and indigenous managerial knowledge, rather than focus solely upon emic and etic perspectives in interactions. For instance, they might differentiate the purpose of research conducted upon non-Western cultures as being control versus resistance or reflect upon researcher positioning in these terms (Smith 1999; Jackson 2014).

In sum, critical CCM studies have started to denaturalize the taken-for-granted concept of (national) culture and present alternative conceptualizations that encourage studying emic concepts in their own right, rather than as local (read: limited and unmodern) forms of management.

Reflexivity: Whom does CCM knowledge serve?

Reflexivity is the second theme that CCM studies share. Critical researchers must be attentive to various (implicit) elements guiding what is studied and how it is investigated because they may have a personal interest in the subject or follow a political agenda. Knowledge produces forms of violence (e.g., the violence of essentialization [Said 1978]), which requires the researcher's reflexivity in its production (see Gabriel 2015). With reflexivity, researchers "interrogate the assumptions and routines upon which conventional knowledge production is founded" (Alvesson et al. 2009: 11). This requires investigating the assumptions upon which our views on culture are based, how it is measured or defined (McSweeney 2009), and the role that researchers play in the production of cross-cultural knowledge (Jack and Westwood 2009). It also involves the understanding that a Critical CCM cannot exist independently of the practice of those involved; this includes the researcher (Mahadevan 2017).

Many cross-cultural researchers enter the field and assume CCM has a nonpolitical agenda and is mostly about understanding others, developing better intercultural communication, and perhaps even making the (corporate) world a better place (Dahlén 1997; Jackson 2014). Critical researchers, however, tend to adopt a more suspicious stance (Deetz 1996) regarding

CCM knowledge development; they investigate the basis of its assumptions (Jack and Westwood 2009) and how it is distributed (Szkudlarek 2009). Originally, CCM was concerned with knowing non-Western people and developing control mechanisms for Western expatriates, militaries, diplomats, or companies to better perform abroad. The roots of cross-cultural communication theories sometimes plunged directly into U.S. military services with E. T. Hall or R. Benedict (see Pusch 2004). Sackmann and Phillips (2004), as well as Westwood and Jack (2008), reviewed the emergence of CCM knowledge and insisted upon its connection to the growing economic, political and military influence of the United States abroad. "Knowing" of cultural others was central to European countries' colonial agenda to define and thereby control "how indigenous they are" and how to relate to them (Jack and Westwood 2009). Today, scores on cultural dimensions are used. Thus, CCM knowledge and practice can also be considered instrumental to the first world's project of management, and the corporate intercultural training business is there to help; it simplifies and otherizes (Fougère and Moulettes 2012), it overstresses the difference of those who are considered *the non-Western other*, presenting them "through Western eyes" (Jack and Lorbiecki 2003; Szkudlarek 2009). In this context, *othering* is a process of "making others more culturally alien than they actually are" (cf. Mahadevan 2017, 29). CCM knowledge (e.g., the bi-polar character of cultural dimensions) contributes to such othering; the economically relevant non-Western cultures, such as China, India, and Japan, are routinely presented as being traditional, exotic, and "unchanging" in business textbooks and intercultural training activities (Tipton 2008; Mahadevan 2017).

Overall, critical studies invite researchers to become reflexive and to question the (implicit) assumptions and routines upon which CCM knowledge production is founded. They point to foremost managerial concerns rather than, perhaps, intercultural empathy and understanding in the knowledge developed in CCM. This enables us to problematize (in Alvesson and Sandberg 2011) CCM knowledge and thus propose alternative research questions, such as those more focused upon the respectful inclusion of cultural differences in a work setting, rather than their management.

Emancipation: Exploring alternative views on culture

The critical management project aims to unveil and critique oppressive regimes (e.g., in the form of organizing, managerial trends, or concepts) and to advocate simultaneously for alternative and more benevolent forms (Parker 2002; Clegg, Kornberger, Carter, and Rhodes 2006; Kelemen and Rumens 2008). The critical CCM project is specifically interested in unveiling oppressive regimes by using notions of culture, cultural difference, or diversity. Consequently, critical studies have started to shape a different understanding of the concept of (national) culture using critical diversity markers or cultural differences such as race, ethnicity, religion, language, or even gender. They reveal that cultural interactions are indeed filled with implicit power elements, which influence how cultural differences are perceived and considered. Critical CCM scholars insist that cultural differences cannot simply be studied as a (neutral) difference in values or sensemaking.

World order, race, and ethnicity

CCM has long researched the topic of expatriates and, from the onset, have made a clear distinction between expatriates and migrants (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry 2013). In practice, however, expatriates who are nonwhite (or perceived as ethnically different from the local majority) are associated with being inferior and are treated as such. This recalls a similar logic as the colonial discourse that depicted the "non-Western" person as inferior (Muhr and Salem 2013). If ethnic minority belonging is combined with a lower social capital, this discrimination can lead to very different career opportunities and developments in international organizations (Goxe and Paris 2016). In the latter case, the opportunities of nonwhite self-initiated expatriates rejoin the ones of "migrants" (Aten, Nardon, and Isabelle 2016). Having a non-Western country of origin and belonging to a different ethnic background than the dominant one is, thus, part of intercultural interactions because nonwhite self-initiated expatriates from developing countries are perceived as inferior and treated and managed as such.

Holgersson et al. (2016) also illustrated that race matters. They showed that for a nonwhite person, "having a migration background" is not seen as being international, global, or even bicultural, and cosmopolitan (raising concepts in cross-cultural management: see Brannen and Thomas 2010). Rather, they are seen as being "non-Western," are ascribed inferior migrant status, and are presented as being deficient in recruitment processes.

In brief, the outcome of cultural interactions is interlinked with the perception of the status of the country of origin in the world order; it is also often linked to race. The study of cultural differences for critical scholars, which is central to CCM, needs to take into consideration the status differences imbricated in the racial and geo-political background of the persons interacting.

Religion

CCM scholars are also focusing upon religion. Currently, Islam can be understood as one of the most prominent markers of "otherness" in current western discourse (Golnaraghi and Dye 2016); those that practice Islam risk raising suspicion (Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin 2017). In the Western world, Islam is regarded as a traditional and, consequently, implicitly "backwards" religion. Being identified as Muslim can, thus, affect employees' treatment in organizations.

Golnaraghi and Dye (2016) showed how veil-wearing Muslim women are generally portrayed as powerless and inferior and in need of saving; the veil is seen as a traditional (backward) symbol of religiousness and a form of inequality between men and women. What is not heard is women's argument based upon the Islamic values of modesty and dignity (Metcalfe 2007); veiled women maintain that the veil desexualizes the female body, thus emphasizing their intellectual contributions to the workplace. In Europe, when the experience of face-veil wearers is studied, the women strongly express notions of devotion and worship (see Brems 2014). However, this argument of spirituality is systematically ignored in public opinion, and other discourses are imposed (e.g., laicity and secularism equals modernity and professionalism). In summary, those showing a presumably non-Western religious affiliation

risk being interpreted within dominant and hierarchical categories of "the modern West" and "the traditional non-West": a practice that fails to take alternative standpoints and interpretations into consideration (Mahadevan and Mayer 2017). Therefore, critical CCM needs to reflect upon these issues and differentiate between implicit cultural dominance and actual cultural research on religion in order to be fully inclusive.

Language

Language and the way it is used (e.g., fluency, sociolect, accent) continues to receive increasing attention in CCM (Lauring 2008; Brannen, Piekkari, and Tietze 2014; Mughan 2015) and provides another illustration of the interplay of the dimensions of power and culture. Vaara et al. (2005) revealed how using a new corporate language leads to the empowerment or disempowerment of certain employees, whose competences are then perceived based upon their language proficiencies. Research reveals that bi-cultural individuals access distinctive status and networks by being language and culture savvy and thus possess a different power base and sources of knowledge (Neeley 2013; Hinds, Neeley, and Cramton 2014). In other words, language is interconnected with cultural differences and managerial power dichotomies; it creates, reproduces, and affirms power inequalities (Halualani and Nakayama 2010; Bjørge and Whittaker 2014, 2015). For example, Sambajee (2016) stressed that the former colonial languages in Mauritius (English and French) are judged over the common language (Creole); higher status and career possibilities are given to those who master them.

By investigating the interconnections between language and culture, critical CCM research may unveil intercultural interactions' power dichotomies: the mastery of one language gives access to other organizational power bases, thereby influencing how intercultural interactions *can* take place.

Gender

Organization scholars have long shown that organizations are not gender-neutral places (Mills 1988); rather, these often-patriarchal societies' values and norms support men not women and make organizations (potential) "inequality regimes" (Acker 2006). Functionalist studies of gender across culture tend to define masculinity and femininity in an etic way (see Hofstede 1980/2001; House et al. 2004) by studying variations in gender role differentiation. However, critical scholars have emphasized that the categories of masculinity and femininity are culturally defined. For example, Moore's (2015) comparative study of two factory environments in Germany and the U.K. revealed how local, or "native categories," differed in both the expected presence of women on the assembly line and how some job stations were seen as being feminine (to be avoided by male workers). The native categories built upon historical dimensions and a masculine gender order. The local cultural environment is, thus, a defining dimension of masculinity and femininity, insisting upon the need to consider local cultural interpretations of gender (see also Claes, Hanappi-Egger, and Primecz 2012).

Gender intersects with several other categories on the privilege line (Mohanty 2003), and Wells, Gill, and McDonald (2015) concluded that the intersections of gender, ethnicity,

nationality, and religion shape how professionalism is perceived in organizations; thus, it is a structural cause of inequality. For CCM, these considerations are relevant as they challenge the “white, heterosexual, western, middle/upper class, able man” who constitutes the implicit point of reference of managerial theory and practice (Zanoni et al. 2010,13).

In summary, the study of cultural differences involves many more dimensions than a discrepancy in values or sense-making. Implicit hierarchy (e.g., race, gender, and language) and order positions and countries of origin of the persons interacting are all intertwined with (national) cultural differences. Critical CCM can unveil how diversity markers shape intercultural interactions and facilitate emancipation, enabling us to revise the concept of culture by considering how it encompasses status differences. This way, the mechanism of oppression of those lower in the rank order (of race, gender, religion, etc.) can be first made apparent and then subsequently addressed.

AN OPEN-ENDED CONCLUSION: CRITICAL CCM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The previous text has outlined the contours of critical CCM research, its positioning in view of other CCM studies, and its research agenda. This current section contemplates how CCM researchers might engage with practice in an applied field, such as CCM, and relates to another major distinctive critical management research dimension namely, performativity or rather anti-performativity (see Fournier and Grey 2000; Grey and Willmott 2005; Alvesson et al. 2009).

CCM might draw from Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman’s (2009) concept of “critical performativity,” which embraces the principles of managerial effectivity, yet not at the price of oppression. Rather, it encourages scholars’ critical and reflexive engagement with practitioners to develop alternative and emancipatory discourses and practices at work. This engagement could come through collaborative research (Shani et al. 2008) and regular meetings to develop their understanding of a phenomenon. Discourses, behavior, practices, and materiality are all intertwined by the performativity of language: the way we speak about and conceive of reality on the language level will bring it into existence. Consequently, infiltrating, and thus altering, managerial discourses is one of the possible engagements of critical researchers with practice and a way to intervene against forms of oppression. For instance, Moore (2015) studied an automotive company whose managers believed in creating a more inclusive and diversity-conscious organization across cultures. However, managers failed to move beyond their own cultural blind spot, the assumption that, to perform on the assembly line, employees need a strong physique (i.e., an implicitly “male” body). Consequently, the female employees’ competencies and capabilities were undervalued based upon their physique. However, as Moore discovered (by reflecting upon her own female body), other elements, such as class and ethnicity, shaped intercultural and intracultural interactions. We believe a critical CCM’s contribution is to make managers aware of a potential inequality regime (Acker 2006) to possibly move beyond it.

Engagement with practitioners through collaborative research and a sympathetic dialog (Wickert and Schaefer 2015) can thus contribute to (micro) emancipations. Nonetheless, by

at least creating spaces of exchange, critical scholars may contribute to the creation of more reflexive and ethically informed managerial behavior. However, this also requires that we, as CCM researchers, do not become too sure of our critical categories, which might result in just another mission to "interculturally enlighten others" (Szkudlarek 2009), and recognize that CCM knowledge may also be used to defend one's own interests and marginalize others in management and organizations.

This open-ended conclusion is, therefore, an invitation to consider critical performativity in interaction with practitioners as one means to reach emancipation, even if critical performativity's impact is still debated (see Cabantous et al. 2016; Fleming and Banerjee 2016). This agenda of emancipation, along with the ambition to unmask naturalization and promote reflexivity, is the most distinctive aspect of critical research in the field of CCM.

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