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# Native Narratives: Hybrid Plots? Emergence of new Self in Multicultural Organisational Context

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**Abstract:** This work-in-progress paper presents the initial findings of a pilot study aimed at testing the validity of the methodology chosen for PhD exploratory research: narrative inquiry, storytelling, life-story interview, with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as analytical approach, and template analysis and In Vivo coding as analytical tools. The overall aim of the research is to establish an understanding of and determine the impact of a colonial past in the individual's identity formation, and assess its further impact on "postcolonial" identity performance in the western organisational context. The theoretical approach draws from Critical Theory and Postcolonial Theory, which allow for questioning the prevailing western ontological perception of the 'other'. The pilot study comprised four semi-structured and open interviews. The initial findings show that the selected methodology is the most appropriate, as it gives space and voices to the marginalized 'other'. Preliminary analysis of the narrative accounts reveals that cultural identities of the participants are formed by the values firmly grounded in their native cultures, and are still linked to their colonial past.

**Keywords:** narrative inquiry, life-story interview, IPA, critical theory, postcolonial

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## 1. Introduction

According to Statistics Finland (2015), Finland's annual migration gain from abroad, between 2016 and 2065 will be 17,000 persons. This inevitable increase of the skilled labour force necessitates the re-evaluation of human resource management that fosters collaboration in multicultural teams. Therefore, the understanding of the value of cultural identities is essential to this process and still remains "an unexplored dimension of organizational control" (Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002). This paper presents the initial findings of a pilot study, undertaken as part of PhD research aimed at establishing an understanding of the consequences of a colonial past in the individual's identity formation and its further impact on "postcolonial" identity performance in the western organisational context.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework draws from critical theory (CT) and one of the philosophical approaches that stems from CT: postcolonial criticism. Postcolonial theory places emphasis on cultural identity being rooted in power and privilege (Said, 1978) where biological components (race, ethnicity, gender) confer privilege on some, thus making others marginalised. It sees cultural identity as hyphenated (Bhatia, 2002), temporal and in constant "double movement of containment and resistance" (Hall, 1990), inscribed and imposed by hegemonic structures (Shin and Jackson, 2003). Positioned within the narratives of the past (Hall, 1993), it becomes diasporic (Bammer, 1998).

The research takes the theorisations of mimicry and ambivalence (Bhabha, 1984), and draws on Prasad & Prasad (2000, 2001) in the field of management and organizational research. The research explores the processes and dynamics of identity and self-development drawing on a model proposed by McAdams & Cox (2010) which conceptualizes the self across the life span.

## 3. Methodology

The methodology employs narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) using the life-story interview, adapted from Atkinson (1998). The life-story interview approach lends itself to bringing forth the voice and spirit within a life-as-a-whole personal narrative, and is built on respect for the individual voice of the storyteller and the meanings he/she brings into the story. The study was further tempered by Kohler Riessman's (2008) approach which asserts an importance of developing a state of mind as well as conversational sensitivity.

For the pilot study, a purposive sample of four participants was selected. They were non-white male professionals, educated at university level from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and St. Lucia. The average age of the participants was 48, and the average time spent in Finland was 15 years. The interviews (1.5-2 hours) were

carried out between February 2016 and June 2016. All interviews took place in the participants' homes, were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

#### 4. Analysis

The analytical approach was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Firstly, the thematic analysis identified emerging themes, as shown in Table 1, which also shows the values ascribed by the researcher to the corresponding themes. Secondly, interpretive poetics (Rogers et al. 1999) was adopted to investigate story threads, the divided "I", the address, language of the unsayable, and the signifiers of the unconscious. Thirdly, disruptive life events (Reissman, 2000) were also identified. Finally, drawing from King (2014), template analysis was adopted as a tool. The researcher used the interview topic guide, the questions and the probes to create the structure of the template. The main questions served as higher-order codes and the subsidiary questions as well as probes as lower-level codes. The themes were coded first in the first cycle coding using In Vivo (Saldana 2009), where the codes were participant-inspired rather than researcher generated.

#### 5. Findings

The themes revealed in the interviews are located within the structure of McAdam's (2010) three layer theory of identity development, as shown in Table 1, where these themes are associated with the values and core dispositional traits at different stages of the self through the life-span.

Table 1: Themes and values

<b>CHILDHOOD (an actor)</b>	
<b>THEMES</b>	<b>VALUES AND DISPOSITIONAL TRAITS</b>
Education Peers Respect for teachers Role models: parents, grandparents, white male mentors Freedom Sense of justice/fairness Being accepted	Learning Ambition to achieve Creativity Collectivism, group awareness, acceptance of others, Sharing Hard work Respect for authority Justice
<b>ADOLESCENCE (an agent)</b>	
<b>THEMES</b>	<b>VALUES</b>
Education abroad Lack of financial means Inability to pursue dreams/ goals Hard work Role models: strong male leaders/achievers Skin colour Confusion about own identity Future: fear/uncertainty	Learning Ambition to achieve Awareness of own limitations Awareness of being different Racial differences
<b>ADULTHOOD (an author)</b>	
<b>THEMES</b>	<b>VALUES</b>
Education as means of personal and professional development/ improvement Self-development Hard work Perseverance Sense of contributing Comparing Finland and own country Acceptance of own predicament Changing own behavior to fit in Keeping own values at home Skin colour Unfair treatment Trust/acceptance issues Collaboration attempts thwarted Feeling of not being welcome Feeling of being an outsider	Learning Ambition to develop Ambition/Will to contribute Adaptation Compromising own values Adopting other values

The initial analysis of the themes (Table 2), revealed that the identities were very much shaped by the values connected to and influenced by the values of the native cultures of the participants. Family, education and sense of community play pivotal roles in the actor stage of identity formation. Skin colour, awareness of being different, uncertainty and inability to achieve own goals were the main themes identified during the agent stage. Sense of unfairness and injustice, lack of being accepted, and alienation were most predominant at the author stage.

**Table 2:** Interpretive poetics analysis

Story threads	Identification of what is remembered, what emerges, what is not mentioned.	Very detailed descriptions of childhood memories in present tense
The divided "I" and the address	Acknowledgement that the subject's discourse engages more than one voice, even if one pronoun construction is used. The address is closely related to the divided "I". The narrator often addresses Other when telling stories.	WE when describing childhood memories in native countries THEY when referring to the native country in present tense YOU when referring to what was taught or expected of them US when referring to tribal belonging I when describing adult memories and experiences in Finland.
The unsayable	Examination of silence, negations, revisions, and smokescreens reveals a lot of unconscious layers in a narration.	Paralinguistic utterances: long and short pauses, false starts and interruptions Repetitions of themes at different stages of life Smokescreens Juxtapositions, such as freedom vs discipline and pressure of performing well at school, childhood education was fantastic vs inserting "big" pressure Comparisons between own country/culture to the western culture
Signifiers of the unconscious	Exploration of repeated words, sounds reoccurring in the narration gives clues of the unconscious.	Concepts: lack of security, lack of structures, things are not there, what is the next step for you, big pressure, transition, discontinuity, stop gap, something missing, something broken, Adjectives: unhealthy, hard, bad and difficult, tough, scary, challenging, fantastic, good, Nouns: fear, uncertainty, Verbs: have to, you don't know, you have to work, you have to get there, appreciate Opening and closing phrases: What I remember... And that is how much I remember of her.

Consequently, the values and core dispositional traits identified in childhood were compromised or altered when clashed with the western cultural values encountered in adolescence or in adulthood. The participants tended to adjust or cloak their cultural values and substitute them with western values in order to fit in better in western societies and work environments. The participants' colonial past is still present in their narrative accounts.

## 6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the pilot study revealed that the theoretical and methodological approaches are appropriate and valid for the PhD research because they gave space and voices to the marginalized 'other'. The analytical approach and the analytical tools demonstrated their suitability in identifying themes in the emerging stories. Therefore, the next step is to interview a larger sample to obtain more data for analysis in order to further explore the phenomena.

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