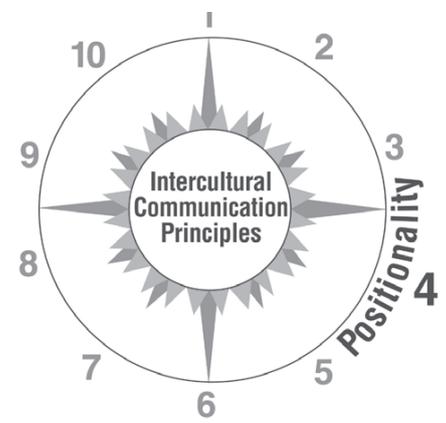


# 4 Positionality Principle

## ‘It All Depends’



**Key Theme:** Specificity

**Problem Question:** What happens to cultural meanings as they are performed and enacted?

**Objective:** To help you understand how every cultural system of knowledge can be seen as unique

**Key Concepts:** Attitude, authority, belief, categorization, cultural appropriation, cultural gaze, cultural maps, engagement, ethnocentrism, ethnocentric reduction, ethnocentric negation, ethnocentric affirmation, folkways, grand narrative, grounding, laws, mores, narrative, norms, perception, values, worldview.

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### 1 Introducing the Problem Question

In the previous chapter, we saw that intercultural communication is a joint effort—an activity performed by Self and Other. As a result, people from

different cultures are able to navigate this world and interact with one another. Let's look in more detail at what happens to cultural meanings as they are enacted.

In this chapter, thus, we take up the following Problem Question: 'What happens to cultural meanings as they are performed and enacted?'

## 2 From Beliefs about the World to the Worldview

Every day we interact with a great variety of people. All our interactions are influenced by **perception**—"the process by which people select, organize, and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world" (Berelson & Steiner, 1964, p. 88).

First, our perceptions are selective. We cannot pay attention to every stimulus in our environment since sensations are too diverse and unlimited. Instead, we select only certain stimuli; for instance, we become aware of people's skin color, their dress, or forms of greeting. Suppose you notice people's dark skin color because it is different from yours: you pay no attention to the texture of their skin, the color of their hair, or their occupations—you select only their skin color.

Second, our perceptions are organized into categories. **Categorization** makes it possible "to structure and give coherence to our general knowledge about people and the social world, providing typical patterns of behavior and the range of likely variation between types of people" (Cantor et al., 1982, p. 34). For example, one may organize all people with a skin color other than one's own into a separate group, such as Chinese, African American, Hispanic, Italian, Irish, and so on.

Third, our perceptions involve interpretation; we may interpret people with a different color skin as beautiful, athletic, arrogant, presumptuous, suspicious, violent, or friendly. Such interpretations influence our interactions with them. For instance, Dutch police officers were found to perceive Surinamese people whose skin color is black as suspicious and tense, which affected their interrogation techniques (Vrij & Winkel, 1994).

Through the process of perception, we become aware of what takes place around us, moving from sensing others in the world to making sense of them. As a result, we are able to navigate this world interacting with all kinds of different people by using '**cultural maps**' that encompass our beliefs, attitudes, values, and norms.

*Beliefs.* Let's look at the Masai culture of Kenya as our first example. They are a nomadic warrior tribe whose life centers around cattle herding. For the Masai, a cow is not simply a source of meat. They drink its milk, use every bit of the cow for clothing and decorations, and even use its dung in the construction of their huts. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Masai believe God entrusts cattle to them, measuring wealth in number of cattle. Also, they believe that blood from the cow, mixed with milk, makes them stronger.

Now, let's hit the Inca Trail, a 25-mile trek to Machu Picchu—the sacred city of the ancient Incas. During such a trip, it is common to leave three coca leaves as an offering to Pachamama. Why? Because Pachamama in the Quechua language means 'Mother Earth,' which is thought to be the giver of life and a source of energy in Inca culture.

Or, take the sandstone canyon southwest of Billings, Montana. To some business companies, this land can be a potential site for drilling oil. To the numerous Native American tribes, this place is known as the Valley of the Chiefs. These tribes believe this canyon serves as a living link to their collective past.

More examples from other cultures could be given, but the main point is clear: whenever people perceive a connection between something and something else, these two things turn it into a meaningful mental construct. A **belief**, therefore, is the attribution of some characteristic to an object, idea or ideology, event or situation. It could be a connection between cow's blood and wealth or strength, or a connection between a river and energy, or between land and a collective past. This way, most Western cultures believe illness is caused by the invasion into our body of malignant micro-organisms; Azande and Navajo people believe illness is caused by witchcraft. Beliefs structures can be quite complex and abstract, especially when the connection between things is perceived indirectly; for instance, how do you deal with beliefs about time, or beliefs about justice, which vary so much from culture to culture?

The influence of cultural beliefs on behavior is beyond any doubt. Obviously, you will treat illness differently, depending on what beliefs you hold. For example, Anglo and Latino women may not share the same beliefs as to whether there is a connection between a regular Pap smear and cervical cancer risk; hence, they will treat visits to a doctor and screening tests differently (Chavez et al., 2001). The practice of female circumcision, now outlawed in Africa but still practiced in secret by many tribes, including the Masai, is based on the belief that women's reproductive activities are seen as a service to the whole tribe. In most other cultures, women believe they should control their own reproductive activities.

Forming beliefs is the starting point of charting out a cultural map. What happens next? Let's take another look at some of the cultures, mentioned above.

The cow is the center of life for the Masai so it is not surprising that they cherish it, almost as much as their own children and plots of land. In fact, these are the three most cherished things the Masai can offer as a gift. Following the September 11 attacks on the United States, the Masai held a special ceremony and blessed 14 cows, giving them to the people of the United States. During the ceremony, the Masai elders chanted in Maa, the local language, and walked in a circle around the group of cows (*Spokesman-Review*, June 3, 2002, p. A2). The significance of giving their sacred animals as a gift cannot be overestimated.

The interaction over the canyon southwest of Billings, Montana ran a different course. For the Anschutz Exploration Corp., the canyon was

designated as Federal Lease MTM-74615; should the company's wells pan out, it could be worth millions of dollars. The Native American tribes revere the canyon for its ancient rock drawings of warriors, shields, and animals. Tribes from the Comanche to the Crow have long used the canyon as a place of worship; for them, the spot is holy and has no price. So when the company's and tribes' representatives met to discuss the fate of the canyon, their arguments were very different; the Anschutz executives invoked their legal rights, while an Arapahoe elder offered a short prayer and invoked an argument around the place's sacredness. At the end of the meeting, no agreement was reached (Kirn, 2001). In both examples of intercultural communication (one successful, the other not), two mental constructs stood out—attitudes and values.

*Attitudes.* An **attitude** is a predisposition to respond positively, negatively, or neutrally to certain objects and practices. The Masai attitude toward cows is positive, and they may have a negative attitude to wild animals that pose a danger for the cows. Similarly, the attitude of the Native American tribes to the canyon is highly positive, while they may develop a negative attitude to the oil executives who want to destroy the holy grounds.

*Values.* Attitudes are connected to **values**—shared ideas about what people consider to be important or desirable. Just as our attitudes are grounded in values, the expression of attitudes invokes and reinforces our values. What people from one culture consider important, people from another one may not; hence, cultures vary in salience or perceived importance of values. The Masai offered as a gift their cows—one of their most valuable possessions. The gift was duly appreciated by the United States, even though a cow itself is not valued as highly by the American culture, and was appreciated as an extension of goodwill. (Because of the difficulty of transportation of the cows, the United States asked that the beads from the Masai culture be sent as a gift, instead.) The interaction between the Native American tribes and the oil company was not as successful because they attached entirely different values to the same land: while for the oil company the canyon's worth consisted in millions of dollars of profit, for the tribes the value of the canyon was sacred, connecting them to their past, and inestimable in monetary value.

Successful intercultural communication requires that attitudes and values be taken into consideration. For instance, if your company wants to market a new commercial product internationally, it will be more successful by targeting such values as peacefulness (Japan), ruggedness (United States), or passion (Spain) (Aaker et al., 2001). Some cultural values are difficult to identify and even more difficult to understand. For example, a group of British tourists pursuing their hobby of plane-spotting, found themselves arrested and convicted in a Greek court on charges of obtaining national secrets (*New York Times*, April 28, 2002, p. A5). The British reacted to the charges with incredulity and outrage. This peculiar British pastime appears incomprehensible to people from most other cultures. In other words, most people do not understand what values lie in spending hours alongside landing-strip fences

at major airports with binoculars and notebooks. The British, on the other hand, appreciate this pastime because it involves patience, precision, deliberation, and the occasional moment of jubilation. Sometimes, ignoring cultural differences in attitudes and values can lead to tragic outcomes. For example, Amanda Rosenberg describes the silent shame of having a mental illness in a Chinese family. Although she grew up in a lively and tight-knit family unit, looking back she realized that the topic of mental health had been rarely discussed and, when it was, it was in a negative light. Having a mental disorder was deemed unacceptable. What later happened to her is summed up in the title of Rosenberg's article: 'Hiding my mental illness from my Asian family almost killed me' (2018).

It is important to emphasize the recursive nature of the relationships between beliefs, attitudes, and values, which affect, and are affected by, one another in the process of socialization and communication. Also, due to their malleability, they can, and do, change, especially in the process of intercultural communication.

What is the next step in charting out a cultural map? The answer should be obvious: if you value certain things and practices more than others, you should try and preserve them. Now the main cultural task is protecting certain meanings; this, of course, is accomplished with the help of cultural norms.

**Norms.** A cultural norm can be defined as a shared standard for accepted and expected behaviors. If you violate a cultural norm, you are subject to some form of sanction. Cultural norms are often divided into three categories—folkways, mores, and laws (Sumner, 1940; Gudykunst & Kim, 1992, pp. 58–59).

**Folkways** are everyday cultural practices that are widely accepted. They include such activities as the way people dress, eat, drive, or keep up their dwellings. For example, to protect their cattle and maintain their huts, the Masai men are responsible for tying the fence branches together, while the women are expected to milk the cows and fetch water.

**Mores** are cultural practices that carry moral connotations and impose more strict constraints on people's behavior than folkways. For instance, the sexual practices of the Masai are quite complex, but they obey a strict morality. The warrior takes a lover who is a prepubescent girl, but he cannot marry until he has served his tribe. When the girl reaches puberty and is able to conceive, she is returned to her mother until she can marry. Before her marriage she will be circumcised. The Masai boys, too, have their coming-of-age ceremony when they reach the age of 15. They make headdresses of ostrich plumes and eagle feathers, shave their heads, are circumcised and become Morani or young warriors. Traditionally, in order to pass into manhood, they are expected to hunt a lion with only a spear. Obviously, the violations of these mores, which may be deemed as cowardly, defiant, or reluctant to serve one's tribe, may bring about more severe sanctions, such as ostracism.

**Laws** are cultural practices that are codified and usually written down. They serve to protect the most cherished values, e.g., freedom, and their violation brings about legal sanctions.

When people from different cultures come into contact, their norms are tested and redefined. For instance, the Masai nowadays boost their income by performing ceremonies and selling beads to tourists. These practices do not appear to affect their folkways; in fact, they often set up separate huts with their cows and traditional dancing, dedicated strictly to tourism, while their real settlements are miles away. At the same time, the exposure to other cultures, and especially the Western values of individuality and human rights, must have an impact on the Masai norms. Today, the practice of female circumcision known in the West as female genital mutilation, is outlawed in Africa. Similarly, the initiation ceremony where the Masai boys are to hunt a lion with a spear has been made illegal by the government of Kenya. These activities, still practiced in secret, show the struggle between cultural mores and laws.

Numerous difficulties arise in intercultural communication due to different norms. For instance, Brigitte Bardot, the French film star and animal-rights activist, has publicly condemned the custom of eating dogs in South Korea. She is quoted to have said, “Eating dogs is not culture, it is grotesque. Culture is composing music like Mozart.” As a result, she has reportedly received 7,000 death threats (*Spokesman-Review*, Monday, June 3, 2002, p. B2).

Another example of intercultural conflict is a letter to the Northwest Airlines from the Council on American-Islamic relations, demanding that the Minnesota-based carrier apologize for allegedly forcing a Muslim high school student to remove her head scarf at an airport security check-point. According to the letter, for a Muslim woman to be forced to take off her head scarf in public is a violation of rights. For some Muslim women, covering their hair in public—essential to being modest—is a mandate from God.

Recently, a young Swedish woman boarded a bus in Malmo wearing shorts and a top with a bow on the front, which she deemed appropriate on a very hot day. In Malmo, where Muslims make up a significant percentage of the population, the driver stopped the woman when she was scanning her ticket and told her that she was ‘showing way too much’ and couldn’t get on the bus dressed like that (Coffey, 2019).

These examples not only illustrate a crucial role played by norms in intercultural communication; they also show how norms are connected with beliefs, attitudes, and values. In one example, we see how different beliefs (‘dogs can be seen as source of food’ vs ‘dogs are living beings, not food’) help to develop attitudes (positive vs negative toward eating dogs), which are linked to certain values (‘eating dogs is an important part of culture’ vs ‘eating dogs should not be valued as something cultural’). And values, in their turn, are protected by cultural norms (‘it is OK to eat dogs’ vs ‘it is wrong to eat dogs’). In the other two examples, different beliefs (‘some Muslim women believe covering up their hair in public is a mandate from God’ vs covering up hair may be perceived as potential danger) give rise to certain attitudes (positive vs negative toward wearing head scarf), which form the foundation for certain values (modesty vs security) that turn into norms

(mores for the Muslim side—women should wear a head scarf, experiencing shame if they do not or are made to take it off; laws for the U.S. air carrier—head scarves must be checked, otherwise there may be a breach of security and calls for appropriate punishment).

*Worldview.* Now the picture of how people from different cultures construct their systems of meanings is almost complete. We must add only one more mental construct, the most complex and abstract—the worldview. Originating from the German word ‘Weltanschauung’ (‘world perception’ or ‘worldview’), it is the fundamental cognitive orientation of a culture (Dodd, 2017; Osmera, 2015). It includes such basic collectively developed constructs as “the interrelated assumptions and beliefs about the nature of reality, the organization of the universe, the purposes of human life, God, and other philosophical issues that are concerned with the concept of being” (Jain & Kussman, 1997, p. 79). The worldview ultimately “helps us locate our place . . . in the universe” (Samovar & Porter, 1991, p. 16).

The **worldview** is the overall way people from a certain culture view themselves in relation to everything else, including other cultures. It is not by chance that, in many languages, one of the meanings of the word ‘to see’ is ‘to know.’ In this sense, the worldview is our overall knowledge of the world and our place in this world. Naturally, this knowledge is broader than beliefs, attitudes, values, and norms taken separately. In fact, the worldview combines all these mental constructs and transforms them into a number of fundamental ideas. For example, the Indian worldview, grounded in Hinduism, is said to be comprised of the following four fundamental ideas: (1) the law of *karma* which binds person to the universe and necessitates the round of transmigration; (2) the concept of *maya* which means that the experienced cosmos is illusionary; (3) the idea of the absolute or pure being which lies behind the world of experience is viewed as the *atman* (the self or soul), the Brahman (the absolute objectively understood), or nirvana (the highest good, peace); and (4) the means or techniques of gaining liberation called *Yoga* (Hesselgrave, 1978, p. 162).

As another example, the Muslim worldview consists of such assumptions that shape reality and therefore influence individual behavior as the belief that a person can cause physical or mental misfortune by placing a curse on another person as a result of envy, often referred to as *Nazar* or the evil eye; beliefs in *jinnns*—beings made from ‘smokeless’ fire that can possess humans and cause symptoms of physical and psychological illness; the concept of *Qadr* indicating Divine will for followers of Islam; the collectivist notion of *izzat*, i.e., shameful or honorable actions by an individual are reflected in the reputation of their family and larger community (Bagasra, 2020). These aspects of the worldview can have important implications as they relate to health, illness and help-seeking behaviors by some Muslims living in Western society. In the same vein, social work services cannot be successfully provided to the African-American communities without understanding their worldview (Graham, 1999), while successful Christian missionary work

in India requires the knowledge of that culture's worldview (Hesselgrave, 1978). It is critical, therefore, that people pay attention to the worldviews when communicating interculturally.

Now we know how every culture develops ideas about the world and its place in it. These ideas may take the form of a simple perceived connection between two things (beliefs), or grand ideas, underlying cultures in their totality (worldviews). It must be emphasized that all these ideas are interconnected. As people establish what they perceive to be true about the world (beliefs), decisions are made as to what is important and what is not (values); they tend to respond to these perceived facts positively or negatively (attitudes); standards for behavior (norms) are developed in order to keep what is of more worth and guard against what is undesirable; finally, all ideas are transformed into a worldview, which underpins the culture, in its entirety.

### 3 Cultural Gaze: Looking Out, Looking In

Every culture develops an understanding of itself and its place in the world by charting out a map of meanings. Such cultural maps allow “us to structure and give coherence to our general knowledge about people and the social world, providing expectations about typical patterns of behavior and the range of likely variation between types of people and their characteristic actions and attributes” (Cantor et al., 1982, p. 34). People from every culture develop their own gaze—a projection beam looking outward into the world. This gaze, of course, is not limited to the visual aspect of our perception; as mentioned earlier, perception is a multi-sensory and full-bodied experience.

Looking out (gazing) is the way we establish our orientation in the world. In various intercultural situations, the visibility of our **cultural gaze** can be quite different; sometimes, we can see more clearly, and sometimes, our gaze is quite hazy. The meanings we bring back home after our intercultural encounters can be very complex or quite simple, accurate or not.

Today, certain interactions are specifically set up for cultural gaze. For example, ethnic tourism is a special practice when people are invited to experience other cultures (Figure 4.1).

Ethnic tourism brings together:

- (1) the *tourist*, who travels to seek an experience that cannot be duplicated in ordinary life;
- (2) the *toouree*, the performer who modifies his or her behavior to suit the tastes of the tourists for gain; and
- (3) the *middleman*, who mediates the two groups and profits by their interaction.

(Hiwasaki, 2000, p. 395)

This way, for instance, one can gaze at the Ainu tourist villages scattered across Hokkaido, Japan, or visit the Tana Torajia culture in Indonesia (McGregor, 2000). In such cases, tourists are exposed to carefully chosen and presented cultural sites; their cultural experience is commodified, and cultural gaze



*Figure 4.1* Example of ethnic tourism *Source: Shutterstock*

structured. Yet, such an experience can still be an important step in the quest for understanding others who are significantly different from us.

We all engage in this quest whenever we come into contact with people from other cultures. We may not think of ourselves as tourists, in the strict sense of the word, but the experience is essentially the same—just less structured. We gaze out at people from different cultures, trying to conceptualize the results of our interactions as fully and correctly as possible. We hope that these meanings are authentic and reflect other cultures accurately.

When every culture looks out at the world, the gaze is reflected back in the form of various meanings: one's cultural gaze, therefore, looks both out and in. The meanings generated by a cultural gaze form a mental space showing what place one's culture occupies in the world. People also create their view of the world (map themselves) literally—with maps. Every map is a cultural artifact—a kind of nonverbal language. Like all languages, maps are mental constructs and serve the same main function of cultural self-identification. Unlike a verbal language, though, which is extremely complex and can hardly be grasped at a glance, most maps reveal a fascinating tendency—cultures tend to map themselves as world-centered, with all others as relatively peripheral. There are many examples of such maps proving that geography is often a function of culture. For instance, an American map centers its east–west axis on the United States, resulting in land-area distortions based on distance from the equator. A map made in Switzerland centers its east–west axis on Western Europe, with a visible difference from the American map in the representation of relative landmasses. A Russian

map centers on Moscow, and a map from the People's Republic of China centers on the Western Pacific, showing a peripheral position of Western Europe and the U.S. Maps, therefore, tend to “share an arbitrariness that reflects their historical emergence in one particular cultural setting at one particular time” (Blair, 2000, p. 32). In other words, what such maps make visible is “the *ethnocentrism* enjoyed by every culture in the world” (Blair, 2000, p. 24).

### 3.1 Cultural Gaze and Ethnocentrism

Two main views of **ethnocentrism** can be isolated—one negative and much more widespread, and the other positive and much less common.

According to the first view, ethnocentrism is presented as a perceptual prism through which people from one culture, with an attitude of superiority, evaluate all other cultures, whose practices are judged as inferior or simply wrong. It is noted, for instance, that people “have a tendency to assume that their own cultural beliefs are the best or the right way to be; this is known as *ethnocentrism*” (Gandy, 2019, p. 118). Ethnocentrism is understood as the “belief in the superiority of one’s own culture” (Jandt, 2001, p. 53) and, by the same token, as “the inability to believe that other cultures offer viable alternatives for organizing reality” (Klopf, 1998, p. 130). In this light, ethnocentrism is presented as “our defensive attitudinal tendency to view the values and norms of our culture as superior to other cultures, and we perceive our cultural ways of living as the most reasonable and proper ways to conduct our lives” (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 157). There are numerous examples of such ethnocentric attitudes. One is the story about Brigitte Bardot, the French film star and animal-rights activist, who had publicly condemned the custom of eating dogs in South Korea. At the same time, many Hindus in India may find it shocking that in some cultures, especially in the West, people eat cows. Examples of ethnocentrism as a cultural bias and its impact on communication range from more or less mundane behaviors (‘People shouldn’t make slurping sounds while eating’) to geopolitical conflicts between countries (‘We must fight and die for what we feel is right’). Of course, wars where both sides feel they are right an extreme manifestation of ethnocentrism.

According to the second view, ethnocentrism is a positive attitude that helps every culture to maintain its integrity, surviving threats of external forces more successfully and taking pride in what your culture represents. Ethnocentrism is here functional, satisfying the needs of people in a certain culture and making it more cohesive (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992, pp. 86–97). Also, “if people view their own group as central to their lives and as possessing proper standards of behavior, they are likely to come to the aid of other group members when they are in trouble” (Brislin, 1993, p. 39).

The two views just discussed share the same approach to ethnocentrism—they put evaluative judgments in their interpretation of this concept

(one negative, the other positive). But what does the term itself mean? It is derived from the two Greek words—‘ethnos’ (‘a multitude of people living together’) and ‘kentron’ (‘center of a circle’). The term ‘ethnocentrism,’ therefore, simply means something like ‘a group of people in the center.’ In a similar fashion, William Graham Sumner, who was one of the first to start using this term in the study of culture and group relations (see Bizumic, 2014), defined it as “the technical name for the view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (Sumner, 1940, p. 13). Notice that the etymology of the word, as well as Sumner’s definition, are devoid of any evaluative component: they simply state that people from every culture put themselves in the center and, from that position, view all other cultures. So, it is important to remember that “culture is of its nature ethnocentric” (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 296). From that central position, every culture makes judgments about all other cultures. Can it be otherwise, though?! It is from within our own culture—from the ‘center’—that our cultural gaze is projected out into the world and it is to our own culture that it comes back.

While interpreting ethnocentrism as a danger to be avoided at great cost (negative view) or as a celebrated standpoint (positive view), we need to think of ethnocentrism, first and foremost, in neutral terms—as an inherent human condition, a necessity dictated by human diversity. Ethnocentrism is a point of reference that every culture needs in order to understand the world and itself. To put it simply, we perceive the world from where we are—a particular location and time period. An interesting example is found in the goodwill messages in the disc left by Apollo 11 astronauts on the moon. The disc, about the size of a half-dollar, contains messages from four American presidents and the leaders of 73 countries. Today, we can see very clearly how

these messages, often eloquent and inspiring, but also self-serving, bombastic, shortsighted and outdated, remind us how difficult it is to disentangle the messy present from the aspirational future, to separate the realization of the potential of the human spirit from the need to appease less noble motivations.

(Liu, 2019)

In other words, we can never separate ourselves from ‘the messy present’ of where we are, we cannot not be ethnocentric.

Thus, ethnocentrism is an inherent human condition; it can actually exist only in a series of concrete manifestations. Like explorers, we travel and come into contact with people from other cultures, setting our gaze on their practices and representing them in a meaningful way, with the hope that these meanings are accurate and authentic. Each time we come across a new intercultural experience, we judge it against our point of reference. If

it is something we like, we may borrow it; if it is something we think Other lacks and should have, we may share it; if it is something we feel we do not need, we may bypass it; and if something gets in our way or presents a danger, we may take flight or fight. In each case, we make a decision as to how new experiences measure against our point of reference—and respond accordingly. With each decision, our frame of reference changes yet remains central (ethnocentric). We try to respond adequately to our intercultural experiences, making sure that our cultural gaze is clear and our travels rewarding. We need to make sure that ethnocentrism serves us—and people from other cultures—well. In doing this, there are two main dangers awaiting us—ethnocentric reduction and ethnocentric negation.

**Ethnocentric reduction.** One such danger was mentioned earlier—the ‘we-are-right-they-are-wrong-so-let’s-force-them-to-be-like-us’ attitude. It is dangerous because one culture imposes its system of meanings on another culture, reducing it to a shadow of Self. Ethnocentric reduction takes place when people from one culture look at another culture, make a judgment about the way things are done there and force people from that culture to change and start doing things according to their own frame of reference. This negative ethnocentric attitude finds its extreme manifestation in such horrors as ethnic cleansing, discrimination, and wars. The danger of ethnocentric reduction can be presented graphically as follows (Figure 4.2).

**Ethnocentric negation.** The other danger is less obvious and perhaps less significant, but nevertheless it cannot be overlooked. Let’s look at the example of the ‘Drunken Indian and the Kidney Machine,’ discussed by Clifford Geertz, a well-known American anthropologist, in his paper ‘The uses of diversity’ (1986). This story is about a Native American alcoholic who got onto a kidney dialysis machine but refused to stop drinking. His doctors became angry because they felt another patient could make better use of the machine. They did not take him off the machine, however, and the man continued drinking until he died. Geertz argues that no side in this story made any attempt to make sense of the other’s position and, as a result, to question

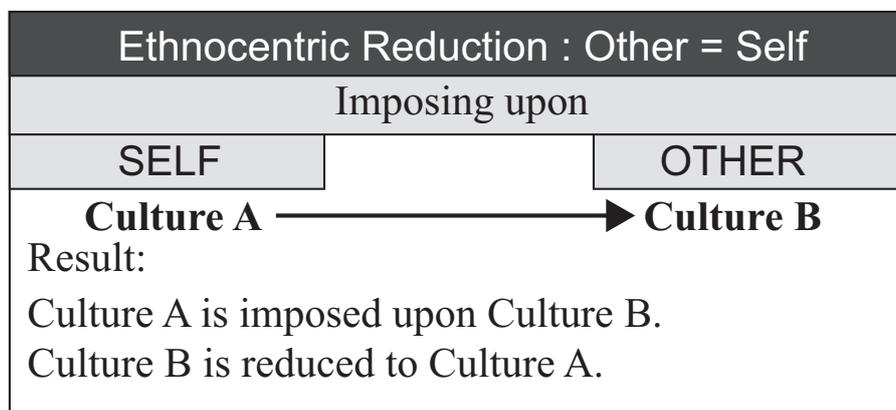


Figure 4.2 Ethnocentric reduction *Source: Author*

its own position. The two parties failed to understand “what it was to be on the other (side), and thus what it was to be on (their) own (side)” (Geertz, 1986, p. 117). Each side was blinded by its own ethnocentrism, and no real engagement with Other took place. This danger, therefore, is the opposite of ethnocentric reduction; one culture does not reduce another culture to Self, but disregards it as simply not self, as negation of Self.

Examples of such an ethnocentric attitude are more common than one might think. For instance, Abdel-Nour has this to say in his article ‘Liberalism and ethnocentrism’:

When European travelers and scholars “produced” and exoticized the “Other,” . . . their ethnocentric lack of engagement with the alienness of the other led them to see others as simply not self, and Arabs and Muslims in particular became imprisoned in Western images of themselves as either “exotic” or “dangerous,” simply *not us*.

(Abdel-Nour, 2000, p. 22)

The portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as ‘dangerous’ has a special significance today when intercultural engagement with them is very challenging.

Another example of ethnocentric negation can be found within the interactions between natives and foreign aid workers in troubled areas of the world. In times of crisis, international citizens, mostly representing the United Nations, may be tasked with the duty of helping a newly established country create its social order. For instance, when the Indonesians pulled out of East Timor, after more than 20 years under brutal rule, the United Nations sent in its administrators, consultants, and policemen. In turn, the Timorese placed all those people in the category of ‘internationals’—a large culture of new colonialists whose very lifestyle “walls them off from the people they serve” (Lee, 2002, p. 35). With expensive cars, air-conditioning, and bottled water, most of the internationals are secluded from the actual environment which “affects the way internationals talk. The locals quickly become *they*. A foreign visitor hears that *they* can’t drive. *They* can’t fix a computer. *They* can’t organize a press conference or march in a parade” (Lee, 2002, p. 36). Because internationals do not stay in such spots long, they do not feel any need to engage in real interaction with the culture they are helping; it is as if they live in a parallel universe.

A most recent example is the town of St. Marys, not far from Topeka, Kansas, which is home to a chapter of the Society of St. Pius X, or SSPX—a conservative-Catholic community. While St. Marys is not completely cut off from modern life, its SSPX members feel that it is not possible for them to live according to their beliefs and continue to participate in mainstream American life, at the same time. It is noted that what

they have elected to undertake what might be termed cultural secession. Katherine Dugan, an assistant professor of religion at Springfield College, in Massachusetts, who studies Catholicism in the U.S., describes

the desire for protected, set-apart communities as “a natural American response to not liking what the cultural context is.”

(Green, 2019)

The danger of ethnocentric negation can be presented graphically as follows (Figure 4.3).

Ethnocentric Negation : Other = Not Self		
Ignoring		
SELF		OTHER
<b>Culture A</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Culture B</b>
Result: Culture A ignores Culture B. Culture B is negated by Culture A.		

Figure 4.3 Ethnocentric negation Source: Author

**Ethnocentric affirmation.** The two dangers of ethnocentrism identified above are negative because they are the extreme manifestations of our cultural gaze. In both cases, one culture’s gaze is distorted with regard to another culture. People from both cultures suffer: one culture is either reduced or ignored, while the other culture deprives itself of external diversity. As a result, both cultures have less or no chance to realize their symbolic resources freely and fully. It is only by avoiding these two dangers of ethnocentrism that intercultural interactions can be made successful. Ethnocentric affirmation can be represented as follows (Figure 4.4).

With ethnocentric affirmation, both cultures have equal power to make decisions on what should happen to their frames of reference as a result of an intercultural encounter. They each defend their positions and affirm each other, e.g., by acknowledging different religious holidays celebrated by other cultures (Oppenheimer, 2019). Such a cultural gaze makes it possible for them to maintain their positions.

Ethnocentric Affirmation : Other = Self/Not Self		
Affirming		
SELF		OTHER
<b>Culture A</b>	←————→	<b>Culture B</b>
Result: Culture A affirms itself and Culture B. Culture B affirms itself and Culture A.		

Figure 4.4 Ethnocentric affirmation Source: Author

## 4 Introducing the Positionality Principle

Let's now formulate, based on the discussion above, the fourth principle of intercultural communication—the Positionality Principle. We will isolate three parts that make up this principle. Each part deals with the nature of positioning in intercultural interactions. First, we will discuss the Positionality Principle in terms of grounding; next, we will show the relationship between grounding and authority; finally, we will present grounding as a process of intercultural engagement. We will discuss each part separately and then formulate the Positionality Principle, as a whole.

### 4.1 *Positionality as Grounding*

When we speak about meanings as our cultural maps, we must remember that our cultural knowledge is situated, i.e., generated in specific situations. These situations are concrete in the sense that they provide physical settings for constructing a cultural mental framework. Based on these settings, every culture defines itself and the world from a certain point of view. Every culture looks outward from its own point of view; reflected back, this look becomes its cultural gaze. Cultural gaze is a projector beam, as it were, which allows people from every culture to navigate the world. With the help of this gaze, every culture looks both inward to its own identity and outward to its relation with other cultures. The better the 'cultural visibility,' the more successful the intercultural encounters.

It must be noted that “the idea of positionality is closely related to *standpoint theory*” (Sorrells, 2016, p. 13). The overall premise of Standpoint Theory is that our cultural background influences the way we perceive the world: this way, different ways of knowing and being are produced, including different power relations (Allen, 2017). People can respond very differently to one and the same message, depending on their cultural standpoint. We find a very interesting example of this in how students reacted to the film *Crash*. Etsuko Kinefuchi and Mark Orbe analyzed these reactions through Standpoint Theory and context-positionality frame. They showed how students' reactions can be examined in terms of their racial situatedness—“positionality . . . attached or detached—with which students viewed, interacted with, and ultimately processed the film” (2008). For instance, the reactions by European American students was of a more detached nature, while African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, and biracial/multiracial U.S. Americans expressed a more attached positionality as they strongly related to the film.

So, intercultural communication is a matter of positionality. As cultures occupy different positions and interact, their cultural gaze makes it possible for them to see the world and their own place in it. In this process, cultural meanings are generated and each culture is grounded. Everything that we experience as a result of intercultural encounters and find meaningful

is framed and becomes part of our culture—our ‘common ground.’ These cultural frames are constructed as a product of our perception and can be presented in terms of ‘figure/ground’ effects. You may be familiar with these terms from Gestalt psychology (Koehler, 1969) where the distinction between figure and ground is usually illustrated by a visual example. For instance (Koch, 2001, p. 203), one and the same figure below can be perceived either as four black squares (=figure) on a white surface (=ground), or as a white cross (=figure) on a black surface (=ground) (Figure 4.5).

The figure/ground distinction is not limited only to the visual realm; one can experience this effect using any other senses. Whatever senses people use, the nature of the figure/ground distinction is the same: experiences are grouped together and form either a foundation or stand out as a figure. Ground is a culturally accepted system of meanings, which is shared and seems so natural it is often taken for granted. Its significance, however, cannot be overestimated; it is highlighted as soon as it comes under threat; just think of such expressions as ‘To stand one’s ground’ or ‘To defend one’s ground’ (both figuratively and literally!). Ground is what holds cultures together; being ethnocentric means being grounded.

**Grounding**, therefore, is a process of establishing a cultural system of meanings. What meanings? Recall the main cultural constructs we discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Grounding of meanings begins with a perceived connection between two things—this way, cultural beliefs are developed. Then, cultural ground becomes more complex and takes the form of attitudes, values, norms, and worldview. As a result of developing these dispositions, people from different cultures position themselves.

In intercultural encounters, one and the same experience can be categorized as ground or figure, depending on cultural positions. If an experience is perceived as different from your own cultural system of meaning, it is a figure that “stands against everything else (ground)” (Roth, 2001, p. 31). For example, the sight of someone riding a motorcycle in the day with the headlights



Figure 4.5 Figure/ground distinction Source: Author

on is interpreted differently in Australia and Laos (Enfield, 2000, p. 40). In Australia, this sighting is part of cultural ground because its traffic authorities recommend that motor cyclists put their headlights on at all times for reasons of safety. In Laos, this sighting is part of cultural figure because headlights are to be put on only in emergency situations when the right of way is needed. It is easy to foresee how an Australian biker might be stopped by Laotian traffic authorities and fined when riding with headlights on because of the difference in figure/ground perception. In this example, grounding takes the form of different values (safety vs emergency) and norms (folkways vs laws).

In another example, grounding finds its manifestation in cultural attitudes. As reported by Mitchell and Wood (1998), the state authorities in Brazil have a negative attitude toward Afro-Brazilians who are perceived as potentially more criminal and so more likely to be assaulted by police. Afro-Brazilians suffer discrimination because they stand out, as figure, mostly due to their color.

All new experiences appear to us as a figure; if accepted, they become part of our cultural ground. Intercultural communication can be seen as a process of trying to figure (*sic!*) out new experiences.

It must be emphasized that, even though cultural meanings arise and are grounded in concrete situations, they are never set in concrete. What is perceived by a certain culture at a certain point in time as figure may become part of its ground, and vice versa. For instance, in the previous two examples, people in Laos might decide to make it a norm that headlights be put on by motorists at all times, or the state authorities in Brazil might change their attitude toward Afro-Brazilians and stop their discrimination, treating them like all other citizens. The negative attitude toward Afro-Brazilians might be more difficult, yet more necessary, to change: no one likes to be discriminated against, and so Afro-Brazilians will fight for these practices to stop. In the case of headlights, changing a cultural position may be less pressing; it is possible to imagine, though, how safety might become a priority and the traffic regulation could change accordingly. In all cases, people from every culture must establish their position on this or that issue. If people feel that they are unable to establish a desirable position, it will make an effort to bring about a change, whether it is a traffic rule or a new policy in the criminal justice system. Grounding, therefore, is a dynamic process; it is driven by relationships between cultures and their constant search for authority.

This brings us to the second aspect of the Positionality Principle, which deals with the issues of power and control.

#### **4.2 Positionality and Authority**

Every culture tries to establish its own position in the world, or grounds itself, claiming authority upon its vision of the world. **Authority** can be equated with the ability to lay claims that are accepted. In this sense, “authority is ultimately a matter of power” (Fleischacker, 1994, p. 84)—the ability to make decisions as to what a cultural position should be. In the example of East Timor, discussed earlier, the ‘internationals’ basically create a new order;

their power, or their authority, compared to that of the Timorese people, is much greater. These administrators, consultants, policemen, and soldiers made most decisions and had a huge impact on what the culture of East Timor shall be in the future.

Positionality, therefore, is not simply a matter of cultures establishing their specific positions, but also a matter of power relationships between these positions, cf.: “self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than of essence” (Clifford, 1988, p. 14). In other words, cultures are not stable categories (essences), but shifting positions, determined by complex relations of power and enacted by verbal and nonverbal means (matters of rhetoric).

Every culture claims authority over its vision of the world by using its cultural map in order to create stories or narratives. A **narrative** “refers to a recounting of a sequence of events that is told from a particular point of view” (Hall, 2002, p. 71), i.e., from a particular position. In a way, every culture tells its own story of the world or creates its own narratives. Take the example of an excerpt from a guided tour of one of the so-called ‘heritage museums’ in Israel:

I’ll tell you a story, do you remember the story about the Patriarch Abraham? Oh, he was quite a man! Phee (Wow), he had lots of cows and sheep and lots of people working for him, and he used to wander from place to place, and he lived in the desert. He was the first Bedouin, the Bedouins weren’t there yet, but he was there already. He was sitting in a tent, what was his wife’s name? Sara, Sara sat with him in the tent, and three angels are coming, they are going around in the desert, and they see some old man sitting with a young and beautiful woman, so they say: “Let’s go visit them,” so they come, and Abraham says to them: “Tefadalu, please, come in and be our guests,” so he says, what does he say to Sara? He whispers a loud whisper in her ear: “Go get three measures of flour (seot kemah).” Here are the measures (pointing to the wall), from the Bible straight here on this wall. You see, this is what they used to measure in, imagine, the Patriarch Abraham in his time. How many years already? Oh, it is impossible, I wasn’t there, you weren’t there, your parents weren’t there, and he was already using this to measure with this.

(Katriel, 1994, p. 14)

The cultural authorities clash as a certain segment of the world is narrated from two very different positions. To Jewish audiences, this kind of story sounds like a playful elaboration of a well-known biblical tale, while to Arab audience the strategy of re-naming Abraham as the first Bedouin and endowing a familiar agricultural object with a biblical career is an act of cultural appropriation.

There are different ways to understand the main functions of narratives. For instance, four teaching functions of narratives in intercultural communication are identified: “narratives function to teach us how the world works, our place in the world, how to act in the world, and how to evaluate what goes on in the world” (Hall, 2002, p. 73). Also, there are different ways to

categorize narratives—from everyday conversations with friends to **grand narratives**—“stories that can give us certain knowledge of the direction, meaning and moral path of human ‘development’” (Barker, 2000, p. 21). In a way, every cultural worldview can be seen as a grand narrative; for example, Jewish culture “is incomprehensible without the supernatural history in which it is embedded, while Christianity (perhaps Buddhism as well) is virtually all story” (Fleischacker, 1994, p. 71).

Regardless of how narratives are categorized and how their functions are understood, two criteria for narratives can be isolated—coherence and fidelity (Fisher, 1987). First, for cultural stories to be meaningful, all parts of a narrative must fit together; then, a narrative meets the criterion of coherence. And, second, a narrative must resonate with people’s beliefs, attitudes, values, norms, and worldviews; then, a narrative meets the criterion of fidelity. When both criteria are met, a narrative turns “into a tradition, something passed down from one generation to another” (Fleischacker, 1994, p. 80), meeting the needs of, and making sense to, people from that culture. For instance, the Danish TV programs are very popular at home and abroad, their success determined to a large degree by their talent for storytelling. Louise Vesth, a well-known Danish film producer, notes that the success of telling stories about people and relationships goes all the way back to Nordic mythology. At the same time, as Adam Price, a well-known Danish writer, notes, it is important to write the story that is based on your own locally based existence. “If you aim for too big an audience,” he says, “you might find yourself with no audience at all” (Abend, 2019).

As we can see, “authority is a position” (Fleischacker, 1994, p. 82). Every culture claims its authority in the vision of the world by projecting its gaze, charting out a cultural map and creating narratives. Every culture claims authority over its understanding of the world by creating narratives; for people from all cultures their own stories are authentic. Every culture collectively claims, so to speak, that the world is thus and so. In this sense, all cultures can be viewed as ‘just so stories.’ Overall, the story of the world is told in many tongues.

For people from any culture, their cultural maps and their narratives appear true, authentic, and natural (central). It might seem that people from every culture have the best knowledge of their own position, speaking with authority about the world and their place in it. This ethnocentric view, though, is constantly tested in intercultural encounters. When a culture’s gaze is blind to other cultures, that culture fails to understand what its *real* position is, and how much authority (power) it *really* has. Therefore, the best way for cultures to determine their positions and power dynamics is through interaction.

### **4.3 Positionality as Engagement**

The ‘cartographic metaphor’ (Munshi & McKie, 2001) sees the world as a number of cultural maps occupying different positions. These cultural maps are dynamic, though, and so the essence of intercultural communication

can be better represented by the ‘kaleidoscope metaphor’ that sees cultural positions constantly changing through the process of **engagement**; in this process, people from different cultures present their narratives as claims of the true vision of the world.

People can define themselves—in the form of cultural or geographical maps—only by interacting with one another. Only this way can every culture check the accuracy and power of its narratives. In this sense, intercultural communication can be viewed as a process of “continual awareness of the necessity to check the map against the territory” (Rapoport, 1973, p. 35), i.e., checking how adequately reality (‘the territory’) is manifested in its symbolic abstractions (‘the map’).

Cultural positions are situated (grounded), not given; they are developed through intercultural communication as complex dynamics of authority or power relations. When people from different cultures come into contact, their positions are engaged. For instance, the U.S. position on its role in winning the Second World War is seen differently when the British or Russian perspectives are engaged. The United States might see its position shift, as if in a kaleidoscope, from playing a crucial role to being a minor player in the last phase of the war.

In intercultural interactions, culture’s authority as a position of power depends on being accepted or rejected by other cultures. What a culture presents as its authoritative knowledge of the world depends on acknowledgement by people from other cultures. Hence, the more they accept a culture’s system of meanings, the more authority the culture has—the more ground it covers, so to speak. As a result, its position becomes more powerful. People from a certain culture may not accept another culture’s position, denying its authority on something. They may feel that their core values are undermined by foreign influence, such as advertising. As a result, resistance may become one of their main rhetorical strategies.

The strategy of resistance comes into play when a culture feels that its authority is threatened or weakened by other cultures. A culture starts losing its ground, as it were, to other cultures whose position may now become central, establishing new ground. An interesting example of this is found in the practice of self-labeling when people from a certain culture are asked to identify themselves through various verbal labels. For instance, one study revealed resistance of white Americans to self-labels (Martin et al., 1996). The most common were such ambiguous labels, such as ‘White’ and ‘Caucasian.’ Many subjects mocked the survey, and a high number of unusable responses was generated. These results illustrate that white Americans occupy a privileged (central) position, which for them is situated as ‘natural.’ They have more power as they make more decisions about how things should be done. They resist looking at themselves from another (peripheral) position because that suggests other cultures might see them differently, which would challenge their central position. In other words, white Americans do not consider, or refuse to consider, that their whiteness (as ground) may lose its

central place and may be replaced by another color (another culture). Hence, resistance as a strategy of keeping undesirable cultural positions at bay and reinforcing one's own cultural position. (We will discuss the nature of resistance as a strategy of intercultural communication in more detail in the last chapter of the book.)

Earlier, we showed how every culture aims to establish its authority on the vision of the world by creating narratives. It is now clear that different cultures engage in interaction with one other to claim their own visions of the world. Overall, "no one narrative can capture every possible aspect of a series of events, so what is told and how it is told inescapably express a point of view" (Hall, 2002, p. 71). It is not surprising to find any grand narrative claiming universal truth to be attacked or deconstructed by exposing its hidden internal contradictions and subverting its claims (Young, 1996).

It must be clear by now that "positionality is thus determined by where one stands in relation to 'the other'" (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411). It is impossible for a culture to determine its real position without engaging other cultures' perspectives. Of course, it is easier to deal with positionality as engagement when intercultural encounters are successful, and people from all interacting cultures feel good about themselves. It is more difficult, yet more important, to engage other perspectives when relationships between cultures are very asymmetrical. For example, Richard Rorty, a well-known American philosopher, reminds Americans how important it is for their national pride to remember the horrors of the past, such as slavery, massacres, segregation, discrimination, and wars, also found in many nations' histories. He advocates that Americans should never engage in such behaviors again (Rorty, 1998). However, this laudable approach must be taken further; in addition to promising never to do it again, the United States should engage the perspectives of other cultures, e.g., the descendants of the enslaved and the massacred tribes or the survivors of Vietnam because "without the help of the face of the other (the victim) . . . the latter's perspective cannot begin to comprehend the enormity of the act" (Abdel-Nour, 2000, p. 223). In other words, people from different cultures must engage one another's perspectives if they truly want to understand their real positions.

Speaking of engagement, an analogy can be drawn between learning to communicate interculturally and learning foreign languages. It is noted (Blair, 2000, p. 33) that a second language is easier to learn than the first one, and the reason for that may have less to do with the structure of a particular language and more with a change in our relation to the native language. We come to realize that our native language is only one way of looking at the world, and not 'the key' to reality. It turns out there are other views of the world, reflected in other languages. Once we come to terms with this fact, it becomes easier to learn and appreciate other languages. The same goes for interacting with people from other cultures. Intercultural communication is a matter of multiple positions, and ours, no matter how natural and authoritative it may seem to us, is just one of many. If we want to learn

more about the world (and ourselves), we need to engage in intercultural communication.

The Positionality Principle is important because it highlights the nature of ethnocentrism as an inherent human condition, while also revealing its dangers for intercultural communication. The Positionality Principle helps us to look at intercultural communication in a more relational way. It is important to understand that our cultural knowledge is specific and relative to a particular point of view; in a way, in intercultural communication ‘it all depends!’

So, now we know what happens to cultural meanings as they are performed and enacted: they are grounded, helping cultures to position themselves in the world.

## 5 The Positionality Principle Defined

Let’s now give a more concise formulation of the Positionality Principle, based on the above discussion of its three parts.

First, our cultural knowledge is situated, and people from every culture look at the world and their place in it from a particular point of view. The process of establishing a specific cultural position is called grounding.

Second, positionality is not simply a matter of cultures establishing their specific positions; it is a matter of power relations between these positions. When cultures establish their positions (ground themselves), they claim authority on their vision of the world. What a culture presents as its authoritative knowledge, depends on being accepted or rejected by other cultures.

Third, it is impossible for a culture to determine its real position without engaging other cultures’ perspectives. When people from different cultures come into contact, their positions are activated, and changes in their systems of meanings take place.

In a nutshell, the Positionality Principle can be formulated as follows:

*Intercultural communication is a process of engagement whereby people from different groups claim authority on their vision of the world.*

## 6 Case Study: ‘The Kosher Phone’

This case study is based on the article entitled ‘What hath God wrought? Considering how religious communities culture (or kosher) the cell phone’ (Campbell, 2007). As usual, it is recommended that you read the article in its entirety; below, you find its summary.

Be ready to identify and then discuss the following topics:

1. Can you identify and discuss two cultural maps in this intercultural situation?
2. Do you find the result of intercultural engagement successful?

3. What are your thoughts on cultural (religious) beliefs guiding the evolution of technology?

In 2005, the launch of a phone designed for the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Israel was announced by MIRS Communication, a wireless company. The ultra-Orthodox community of Israel has been described as a ‘culture of the enclave’ because of its strict religious rules and an isolated lifestyle.

Before the launch of the kosher (approved or acceptable under rabbinical, religious law) phone, a special committee was formed, made up of religious authorities and rabbis, to discuss the cell phone in light of economic aspects of the community’s life and its cultural practices. The committee consulted various technology experts to make sure the use of the kosher phone can avoid certain dangers while serving as a symbol of communal affiliation. In other words, the community wanted access to communication capabilities of the cell phone, but, at the same time, they wanted to make sure they could still live a kosher life, including religious study and prayer, the wearing of the dress and head coverings of their ancestors of 18th-century Europe, etc.

It was important to keep the phone in line with the beliefs of the ultra-Orthodox community that were clearly challenged. Without any modifications, the phone was seen as a conduit of unacceptable content into the community. In some discussions, the cell phone was described as a ‘dangerous weapon’ with the potential to undermine the morality of the community. Characterized by its rejection of the values of modernity, the ultra-Orthodox Jews associated those values with secular media-entertainment culture and saw cell phone providers as purveyors of corrupting influences. With their concern for personal purity, they desired to keep clear boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Some community members saw the battle for kosher communication as an existential battle for the soul of their culture. For the ultra-Orthodox Jews, it was a moral imperative to make sure the cell phone is modified to provide a protected channel of communication.

The concern for the soul of their culture and personal purity was the subject of strict guidelines and lawmaking. The article cites a Jewish phrase—‘Setting a fence around Torah’—that describes the setting of strict limits in relation to innovations making sure they do not violate Torah law until fully understood. In this light, the committee evaluated the kosher phone and issued official regulations for its design. It is important to note that such regulations served to tighten the boundaries not only around the technology but also the community itself. Through discussing and evaluating the cell phone technology, the ultra-Orthodox community reaffirmed its beliefs, values, and standards of practice. As a result, the kosher phone came to indicate religious commitment, its ownership seen as a way to affirm community affiliation.

MIRS was the only company in Israel that met all the needs of the ultra-Orthodox community. The initial kosher phones were first-generation

Motorola handsets modified to disable Internet access, SMS text messaging and video and voice mail application. MIRS agreed to create a distinct community network and provide the community phones stripped of all content services, set a block on numbers for phone sex, dating services, and other dubious secular offerings. The phones were marked with a stamp signifying approval by rabbinical authorities and would begin with the same dialing code and prefix.

The creation of the kosher phone is similar to the Amish engagement with the phone and are two examples of the interaction of religious groups with technology, what is sometimes called ‘cultured technology.’ They show that religious communities, like other groups, evaluate and monitor their members’ use of technology. Also, they highlight how religious culture can serve as an important factor in technological innovation, prompting new features, designs, or forms of use. So, the case of the kosher phone can be seen as a story of culturing a technology, i.e., reshaping it in line with the needs of the group.

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1. Can you identify and discuss two cultural maps in this intercultural situation?

The two groups discussed in the article are the ultra-Orthodox community of Israel and the secular media-entertainment culture, each with its own ‘cultural map.’ The latter culture, only briefly mentioned, is associated with the values of modernity that usually include scientific rationalism and liberalism, human equality, secularization, free market capitalism, technology as the main driver of change, etc. The article dwells on the cultural map of the ultra-Orthodox community as a ‘culture of the enclave.’ Its members believe that the cell phone is a conduit of unacceptable content into the community and a ‘dangerous weapon’ that can undermine the morality of the community. Their attitude toward the cell phone is mostly negative, although they do want to gain access to its communication capabilities. Such beliefs and attitudes go hand-in-hand with their sacred values, such as religious commitment to live a kosher life of personal purity. These cultural beliefs and values find their manifestation in norms as shared standard for accepted and expected behaviors. They can be codified into strict norms in line with the Torah law with clear punishment for behaviors of crossing boundaries between the sacred and the profane.

2. Do you find the result of intercultural engagement successful?

There was clearly a process of engagement between the ultra-Orthodox community of Israel and the secular media-entertainment culture represented by the wireless company MIRS Communication. The

ultra-Orthodox community committee consulted various technology experts to make sure communication capabilities of the cell phone are accessed, while their kosher life style is not negatively affected. MIRS met all the needs of the ultra-Orthodox community, such as creating a distinct community network, setting a block on numbers for phone sex, and dating services and other dubious secular offerings. Also, the phones were marked with a stamp signifying approval by rabbinical authorities to indicate religious commitment. At the same time, MIRS became the first company in Israel to launch the kosher phone. Intercultural engagement in this case, therefore, can be seen as successful.

3. What are your thoughts on ‘cultured technology’?

‘Cultured technology’ is a positive trend in several respects. It allows cultural groups to examine and reaffirm their beliefs, values, and standards of practice. This way, cultural boundaries can be seen more clearly. For instance, the kosher phone came to be seen as a way to affirm the cultural affiliation of the ultra-Orthodox community. At the same time, how various cultures see and evaluate technology can prompt its innovation in terms of features, designs, and forms of use. In this light, ‘cultured technology’ is a positive factor in the evolution of both culture and technology.

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## 7 Side Trips

### 7.1 *Positive Cultural Appropriation?*

The term ‘**cultural appropriation**’ is usually understood as the act of adopting elements from other cultures without truly understanding or respecting the original context. At the same time, we read that “in the 21st century, cultural appropriation—like globalization— isn’t just inevitable; it’s potentially positive” (Avins, 2015). It is argued that, were it not for cultural appropriation, some cultural products would fade away (Scafidi, 2005). Also, by adopting aesthetics from other cultures, people are “finding beauty in cultural appropriation” (Wang, 2019). In this sense, cultural appropriation is seen as an exchange of ideas, styles, and traditions in today’s multicultural world. Some authors, though, note that cultural exchange suggests you give something in return for having taken something; also, exchange is about teasing out points of conflict, while “appropriation suggests a significant amount of self-satisfaction and a desire to show off” (Galchen & Holmes, 2017, p. 27).

\*\* Do you think that cultural appropriation is/can be something positive? Is it the same as cultural exchange? When addressing these questions, should we consider such things as power, credit, authenticity, and respectfulness?

## 7.2 *Women's Ability to Travel in Saudi Arabia*

Saudi Arabia is planning to loosen restrictions on women's ability to travel without a male guardian's permission (Said, 2019). The plan would allow women over 18 years old to leave the country and travel internationally without the consent of a designated male family member. At the same time, the laws requiring a guardian's consent for women to marry, leave prison, or exit a shelter for abuse victims will be left in place. The plan continues the efforts undertaken by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to modernize his kingdom. Earlier, a ban on women driving had been lifted, and women no longer need to wear traditional neck-to-toe dresses called *abayas*. The plan follows the complaints by a number of young Saudi women who fled the country and sought asylum because the customs made them slaves to male relatives. There was an outcry of human-rights groups saying the guardianship laws turn women into second-class citizens and deprive them of basic human rights.

\*\* What else do you think needs to be done to improve interactions between people from Saudi Arabia and people from other cultures?

## 7.3 *'An Introduction to Dating' Course in South Korea*

In South Korea, college-level dating classes are proliferating (Ryu, 2019); one example is the course 'An Introduction to Dating' offered at Dongguk University. These are regular academic courses, down to professors, grades, and college credits. According to Lee Myung-gil, a dating coach who charges \$275 for an hour's consultation, "It is no surprise those kids have no sense at all about dating when they go to college." After taking a number of initial lessons, students are assigned to go on fake dates with classmates, paired up by lottery or similar interests. Students can flunk such courses through low test scores, not turning in papers describing their fake dates, or missing too many classes.

\*\* What are your thoughts on this form of communication engagement?

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