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UNDERSTANDING LIVED EXPERIENCES THROUGH AN INCLUSIVE LENS OF INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA) AND INTERPRETATIVE POETICS (IP)

ABSTRACT

The paper describes the inclusivity of two methodological approaches, applied in PhD study, completed in 2021. The study combined Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and elements of Interpretive Poetics (IP). The study focused on understanding the lived experiences of educated professionals from selected African countries, living in Finland.
The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten participants, five females and five males from Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Zambia and Ghana. At the time of the study, they were employed by Finnish companies. The data were analyzed by adopting phenomenological analytical tools and elements of interpretative poetics (IP).
By incorporating elements of IP into IPA, the study created an additional analytical perspective within IPA, thus enriching it as a methodology. Adopting this additional narrative tool (IP) within IPA demonstrated that IPA can be successfully utilized by researchers from outside such fields as psychology, health psychology and medicine, where IPA is primarily adopted. It further showed that experiences other than those connected to illness and health can be successfully investigated. It proved of value in this cross-cultural study, where a close analysis of the spoken words at the textual level, reinforced and confirmed the findings of the phenomenological (IPA) analysis, thus providing additional validity to the findings.
The findings of IPA correlated and were supported by the findings of IP analysis. The identified personal experiential statements (PETs), that were clearly expressed through the *form of address,* and *divided I*. Additionally, *the story threads* added a deeper layer to the meaning of the PETs. The sensemaking of the lived experiences in the host culture was deeply rooted in and influenced by the values of the native cultures of the participants.

Keywords
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; Interpretative Poetics; Inclusive Methodology.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context to the Study

Since the late 1990s, Finland experienced an influx of foreign students and workforce from African countries. As a result, the demographic scene of so far homogenous and predominantly white Finland changed; the country became culturally diversified. With this diversification, the cultural scene created not only opportunities, but also challenges. Finns as well as foreigners experienced multiculturalism firsthand, both within organizations and in everyday life. The foreigners from African countries brought with them their cultures, but also had to adapt to the demands of their new host culture in Finland.

This influx of the African workforce called for reinventing work practices within organizations that became more global than ever before. The Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends report of 2019 stressed the need to reinvent business concepts with the focus on organizations shifting their need to develop social enterprise, encompassing such matters as diversity leadership, flexibility, teamwork, and mobility both within organizations and geographical locations.

In view of the above-mentioned demographic changes in Finland, as well as the global demographic trends, some studies concerning the changing profile of the Finnish population were conducted: a study of experiences of Rwandan immigrants in Finland (Banyanga, et al., 2020); on inclusive education (Saloviita, 2020; Yada & Tolvanen, 2018; Moberg et al., 2020), and on immigrant entrepreneurship (Paolo, 2018). Despite these studies there is still scarcity of research exploring lived experiences of African professionals in Finland.

In my qualitative, exploratory doctorate research, I investigated the experiences of black, educated professionals living and working in a host culture in Finland. The participants (five females and five males) of the study were from Ghana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Nigeria. The research questions I posited were: 1) How do black educated professionals, from selected African countries, understand and make sense of their experiences of life and work in a foreign host culture in Finland? 2) To what extent do their native cultures inform this understanding and sensemaking?

This paper outlines and describes my methodological path. In the Introduction above I briefly described the context to the study. In section 2, I describe and justify my methodological approaches. In section 3, I describe the inclusivity of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and selected elements of Interpretative Poetics (IP). In section 4, I discuss the findings of my study. Finally, in section 5 I provide final methodological considerations and conclusions.

1.2 Interpretative and Phenomenological Perspective

My research investigated human experience through human perceptions, thus acknowledging multiple versions of reality, truth, and knowledge.

Therefore, qualitative and interpretative approaches were the most appropriate ones when trying to understand the sense and meanings that participants made of their experiences. Furthermore, I was interested in human lives, and understanding of the experiences of human lifeworld and its phenomena within particular temporal, situated frame through an interpretivist epistemology (Suddick et al.,2020).

As I wanted to grasp the lived experiential meanings and understanding of the lifeworld's, as well as being itself, from an ontological perspective, my research was informed by the phenomenological hermeneutic perspective (Coltman, 1998).

1.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA brings together the focus on exploring the phenomenon itself and its hermeneutic interpretation. It considers the relationship between people and the world as operationalized at the individual level (idiography). As this individual sensemaking and understanding of experiencing was the focus of my study, IPA (Smith & Osborne, 2008) was the most suitable methodological choice.

Phenomenology meant for me being aware of "what the experience of being human is like" (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p.7), and what mattered to the participants in their unique life world. Hermeneutics, an interpretative activity (Smith & Nizza, 2022) not only uncovered meanings of the phenomena, but also moved my investigation beyond describing the essence of a lived experience. It revealed an additional layer of understanding of the narrators (participants) (Schleiermacher, 1998). Idiography engaged my exploration in the detailed examination of an individual experience of each participant, case by case. It followed by examining convergence and divergence among the cases within small homogenous sample of ten participants (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

In addition, IPA's reflexive component acknowledged both my participation as a researcher and my own conceptions. This required the application of a double hermeneutic perspective. In the analysis it also meant a two-stage interpretation process within the hermeneutic circle (Smith, 2007). This entailed that, on the one hand, the participants made sense and created interpretations of their experiences, and on the other, through my analysis, I interpreted the participants' accounts.

As I moved back and forth whilst looking at the data in the iterative manner, and as I approached the narratives from various levels (not necessarily in a linear fashion), I discovered new meanings and nuances. I kept noticing, or "hearing" themes in the narratives that were present between the words and sentences. This not only provoked my curiosity but also called for analytical tools that would render a different, deeper perspective of the analysis, yet still allow me to remain at the textual level without attempting psychoanalytical analysis.

1.3.1 Interpretative Poetics

As I reread the transcripts, I noticed broken utterances, stops in the narratives, seeming contradictions, and metaphors. I also noticed that the participants expressed certain content in similar ways: the syntax of their sentences changed according to the contents of their utterances. I became aware that these forms of expression conveyed additional and deeper meanings hidden behind words and sentences. My observations were supported by Willig's (2008) concerns about the representational validity of language, and the assumption that language provides participants with the necessary tools to capture their experiences. I realized that my interpretations of experiences were shaped, limited, and enabled not only by language (Tindall et al., 2009), but also by what was "unsayable" (Rogers, 1989, as cited in Clandinin, 2007).

As I searched for possible analytical tools to tap into the unsayable, Interpretative Poetics (IP) (Rogers, 1989, as cited in Clandinin, 2007) provided the additional analytical perspective I needed. I was aware of the five interpretive layers of reading a narrative, as suggested by Rogers (1989): *story threads, the divided "I", the forms of address, languages of the unsayable, and signifiers of the unconscious*. However, in my analysis I decided to apply only the first three (*story threads, the divided I, and the forms of address*). As I was neither equipped nor qualified to tap into the participants' unconscious minds, I decided not to include the languages of the unsayable and the signifiers of the unconscious.

To provide as rigorous level of analysis as possible I adhered to IPA's commitment to rigor (Tindall et al., 2009) which I demonstrated throughout the research process: from selecting the sample; commitment to engaging with participants with sensitivity and respect, to attending closely to participants' experiential claims.

2. Inclusive Methodology

The marriage of IPA and IP, with their shared intellectual commitments and complementary qualities, rendered a perfect combination of methodological tools. The interest of my study was people's understanding and sensemaking of their experiences (RQ1). I was also interested in the extent to which the native cultures of the participants informed this understanding and sensemaking (RQ2).

In my study the participants emigrated from their respective countries, leaving their native cultures behind, and started life in a foreign host culture. Their cultural backgrounds were unique, as well as their career paths in Finland.

IPA aligned with this uniqueness as it offered a methodological approach that considered the individual in context specific situations. It therefore allowed broad-based knowledge to be contextualized within a social and cultural context, producing relevant findings. Both IPA and IP allowed for the individual voices of the participants to be heard and acknowledged as valuable data.

Adopting the three analytical layers of reading of IP rendered an additional analytical perspective, whilst allowing for openness; IPA allowed for an understanding of the meaning and interpretations of the lived embodied experiences, IP allowed for an analysis of the lived experiences expressed through the hidden and the unsaid in the participants' narratives. Figure 1 below shows the connections and complementary aspects of IPA and IP.

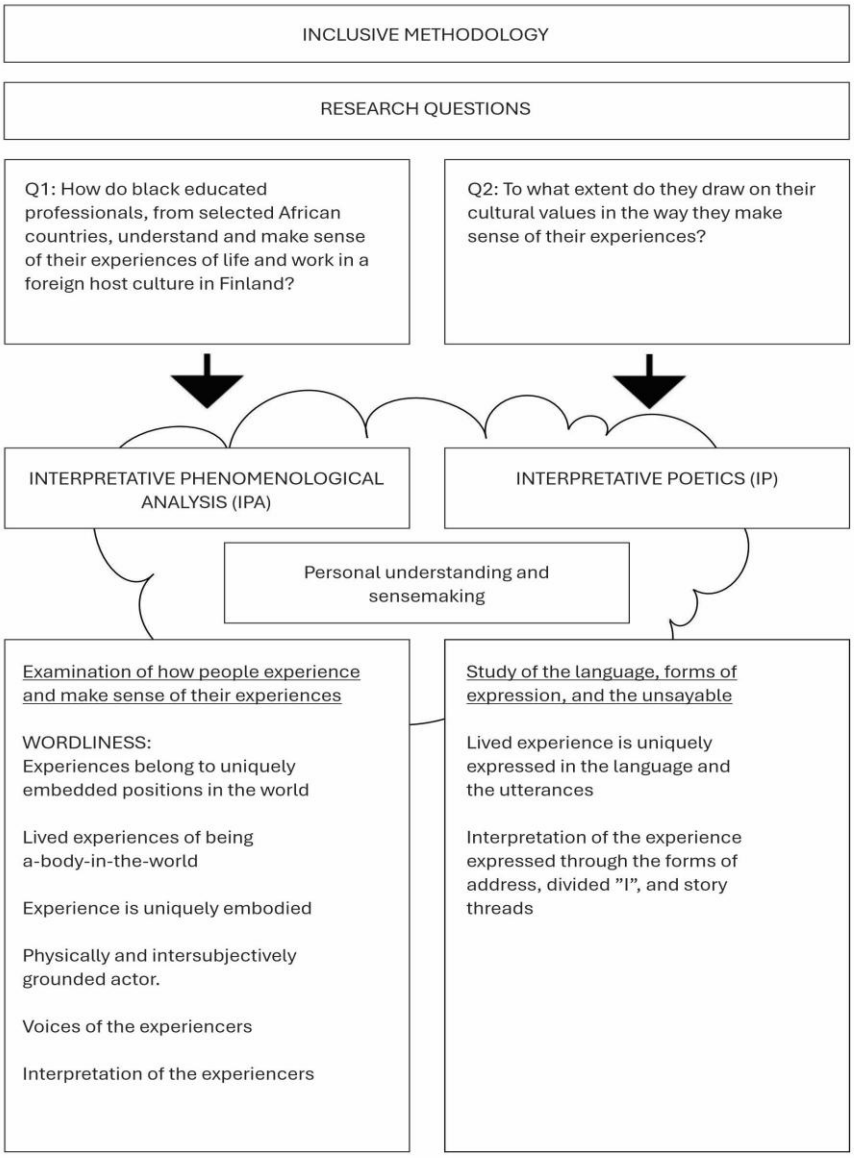


Figure 1. Complementary aspects of IPA and IP

2.1 Participants

I followed the premise of IPA research projects and collected qualitative data from a small and reasonably homogenous group of participants, familiar to me, who shared a common contextual perspective on the phenomenon. I decided to select this purposive, cross-section sample to identify potential differences and similarities among their accounts. The participants were professionals, educated at university level. The average age of the participants was 48, and the average time spent in Finland was fifteen years. I assured confidentiality by signing consent forms prior to the commencement of data collection.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

I collected "natural language data" (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015, p. 129) by conducting life story semi-structured interviews. A life story narrative is a qualitative research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life. It also provides answers to the question of WHO ONE IS, which was crucial to addressing the interest of my study and to finding answers to my research questions.

I drew here on Dilthey's concept of life (Das Leben) (Atkinson, 2007, as cited in Clandinin, 2007), which refers to life as it is experienced by an individual in day-to-day life. Dilthey sees an individual's experience of his/her own life both as unique (not like anyone else's), and at the same time as universal (like others). The life story interview brought both these perspectives of lived experiences into clear focus. This understanding of one's life as lived experience formed a grounding for my narrative and interpretive approach through which I looked at people's lives as whole persons whose cultural identities were developed and molded during their entire lives. The life story interview allowed me an insight into the spectrum of the participants' individual experience in their entireties. The life story interview also focused an understanding of single lives in detail (Cohler, 1982), which I saw as the first step to understanding one's identity and a sense of self.

To design the structure of the interview as well as the approach of the interview questions I borrowed from McAdam's concept of life story (1990, as cited in Clandinin, 2007), a way to understanding personal history. I found this approach suitable as it provided me with a psychologically validated view, also useful later during the data analysis stage.

To ensure validity and reliability of the data I considered the following aspects: articulateness of the participants, integrity and honesty of the accounts, the role of tacit knowledge in a research participant's ability to reveal their thoughts or beliefs. I was mindful that the interviews would bring forth only what had overall salience to the participants at the time of the interviews. My role, as an IPA researcher was to create avenues for the participants to share their lived experience stories without fear of distortions or modifications. It was also important to understand the "underlying dynamics of the experience" of the participant (Moustakas, 1994, p. 135).

Following Moustakas (1994) I strived to bracket myself away from the issues I was investigating, by trying to set aside my prejudgments, or biases. As much as I tried, some aspects of my identity were not possible to bracket away. One of them was my cultural background. I discuss this in the final section of this paper.

After transcribing the interviews verbatim, the initial stage (Phase 1) of the analysis, I noted down my initial exploratory notes (with pen on paper) on the transcripts of the participants' narratives. This allowed me to "come close" to the narratives and capture the themes that I found most significant to the participants (Smith & Nizza, 2022). At the end of this initial stage, I conceptualized my tentative understanding of the main themes (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This was followed by the next stage where I reread the transcripts to elicit "dense and rich" (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p. 39) experiential statements for each participant. The following step involved a further reading to identify connections and patterns across the experiential statements. This resulted in creating clusters of personal experiential statements.

Phase 2 resulted in compilation of clusters of personal experiential statements (PETs) into smaller and more focused clusters. Finally in Phase 3, I grouped the clusters, compiled in Phase 2, into group experiential themes (GETs). I oscillated back and forth to the transcript and the idiographic analysis and was able to name the emerging patterns of similarities and differences among the individual cases. Figure 2 below illustrates the stages of IPA data analysis.

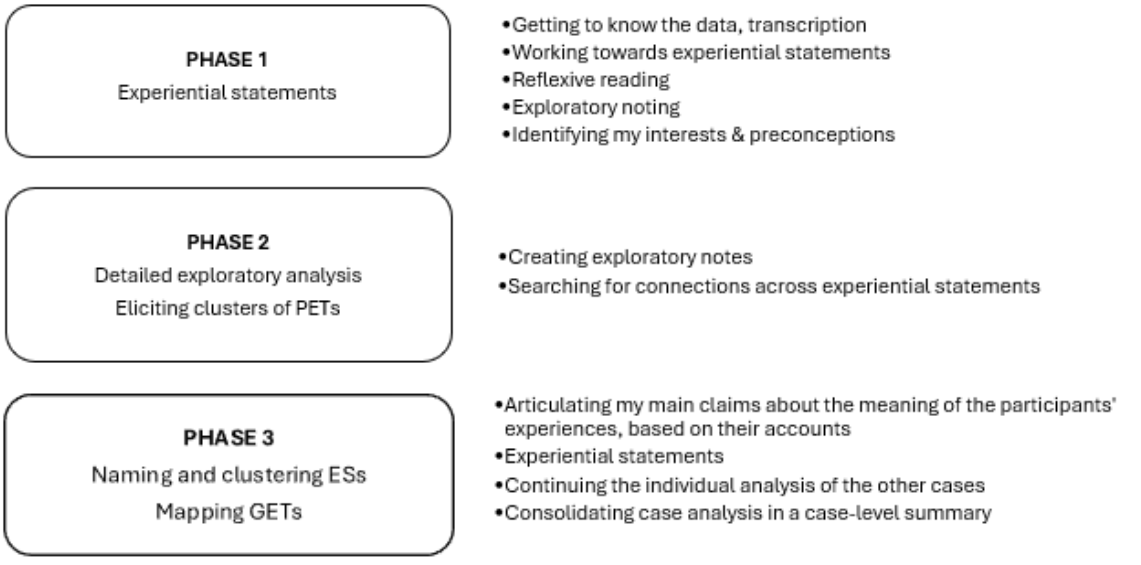


Figure 2. Stages of IPA analysis

After the three initial stages of my analysis, I continued with reviewing the case-level summaries and identified the reoccurring themes across the cases.

I elucidated the group experiential statements (GETs) salient in all narratives. They were as follows: Disassociation, Need to Belong, Feeling Disconnected, Feeling at Odds, Navigating between Native Values and Host Culture.

To tap into and investigate what was at play deeper and beyond the written text, I continued my analysis adopting a textual method of analysis: interpretative poetics (IP) (Rogers et al. 1999, as cited in Clandinin, 2007)). I read into and beyond the textual transcripts by applying three interpretative layers of reading a narrative: story threads, the divided I, and the forms of address in the narratives. (See Table 1)

3. Findings

The findings of my study were different for the females and for the males.

The sense making and understanding of all participants' experiences in the host culture in Finland, was strongly informed by the cultural values, and the influence of their role models of their respective home cultures.

In the process of understanding and sensemaking of their experiences in a foreign host culture the females drew from strong adherence to the identity of an archetypal strong black woman, who presents an image of strength and who suppresses own emotions. The archetype of the Strong Black Woman (SBW) schema (Abrams et al, 2014) whose beginnings can be traced to the times of slavery, was especially salient. The processes of socialization, in combination with the principles and traditions of the SBW schema rendered the distinctness and uniqueness of the way the females experienced their identities as black women.

The females in my study grew up in large families where the role models were strong, single self-reliant mothers in families where fathers were absent. In families where both parents were present the role models were passive mothers and strong, supportive fathers. In both types of families, the girls followed the role models of the parent who demonstrated strength, confidence and self-reliance. In some cases, it was the mother and in some cases the father. The females in my study went through a process of socialization that equipped them with a confluence of personality attributes, commonly associated with both female and male characteristics. This, in combination with SBW schema, resulted in reinforcement of their strong sense of black woman identity in the host culture.

The narratives of the males, on the other hand, provided accounts which served as counter narratives to what Ilmi (2011) described as the Black Sentiment, and what Bell Hooks (2000) referred to as the white man supremacist thinking, and subordination of a black man. The parental advice and support, underpinned by an awareness of the unequal hierarchy within "the world out there" instilled an understanding that getting an education and excelling at school was crucial, and equated with succeeding in life. This form of parental advice and support paved a path in a specific direction, a trajectory that demanded persistence, and promised rewards.

Apart from the influence of the parents as the role models, also the communities where the male participants grew up were sources and foundations that formed their perceptions of the world. The values instilled in them formed their identities, which embodied spirituality, and collective communal way of life rooted in their indigenous African identities.

The indigenous, intergenerational knowledges (Wane, 2005) generated and passed down through storytelling, observations, and traditional ceremonies became instrumental to their selfhood, and produced culturally grounded knowledge. The spaces where the indigenous knowledges, that Semali and Kincheloe (1999) described as embodied knowledges of the colonized, formed their cultural identities. The clash of these embodied knowledges with the realities of life in the host culture in Finland resulted in tensions, and in development of compromised sense of identity, especially in the work environment.

Table 1 below illustrates elucidation of the group experiential statements (GETs) as well as story threads (STs), divided I (DI) and forms of address (FA) which highlight the underlying deeper levels of the textual layers of the narratives.

Table 1. Findings of the study

SELECTED EXCERPTS FROM PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES	PERSONAL GROUP EXPERIENTIAL STATEMENTS (GETs)	STORY THREADS (ST) DIVIDED I (DI) FORMS OF ADDRESS (FA)
*Finnish people… no **you** cannot even knock at their door when **you** are sick, to say hey, help me out. No neighbor will help **you**, … as a foreigner, it is not easy. **We** come from a society which is open.* *"**We** believed in our culture, that **you** have to work hard* *My culture has enabled me to survive in Finland. That spirit of working hard has helped me survive here"* *The most unpleasant for me is when people show it into your face that you are not welcome.*	Disassociation Need to Belong Feeling Disconnected Feeling at Odds Navigating between Native Values and Host Culture	**STs**: Sadness Importance of severed connections with home culture Acceptance and adjusting Resilience **DIs**: Shifting positions of the narrator by changing personal pronouns **FAs**: Addressing an imaginary Other Distancing Oscillating between the values of his native culture and the host culture

The themes elucidated through IPA analysis were clearly highlighted by the analysis carried out by the elements of IP, on a textual level. For example, the themes of The Need to Belong, and Feeling Disconnected were expressed through the FAs as well as DIs.

In addition, all participants changed the forms of address (Fis) in their narratives, thus becoming what Parker (as cited in DelConte, 2013) coined extradiegetic narrators; they employed second-person narration to distance themselves from events or situations that were difficult to deal with.

They also demonstrated their Disassociation by addressing an imaginary other. Finally, they represented themselves as divided. This suggested their navigating between their cultural identities (Feeling at Odds) to fit into the host culture. Finally, the STs (Sadness, Importance of Severed Connections with Home Culture, Acceptance and Adjusting, Navigating between Native Values and Host Culture,) further supported the meaning of the GETs, elucidated in the IPA analysis.

4. Final Considerations

Adopting IPA in my, and augmenting its narrative analytical scope by including elements of IP, showed that its application in fields other than psychology (Larkin et al. 2006), can render valid findings. The study's cross-cultural aspect called for acknowledging my part and position as a researcher.

My white identity positioned me on a shaky ground (Thuwai-Smith, 2007) and evoked my reflections on the concept of whiteness. My attempt to understand what black meant to the participants, I had to reexamine what white meant to me. When I undertook the study, I had little awareness of my cultural positionality. I did not recognize that in the eyes of the participants I might have been perceived as "a white woman with a mission". I did not fully understand the power and privilege embedded in me simply being white, with its being a political identifier of difference. Within my research it simply occupied a rhetorical location. At the same time, I decided to reject the exclusivity of white researchers (Bergerson, 2003) from the mixed-race research entailing cross-cultural and racial issues. Instead, I attempted to disrupt the "history of exploitation, suspicion, misunderstanding, and prejudice" as advocated by Tuhiwai-Smith (2007). I also understood and appreciated the attempts to develop methodologies and approaches to research that privileged indigenous knowledges, voices, experiences, reflections, and analyses of their social, material, and spiritual conditions (Rigney, 1999, p. 117). I saw a place for researchers, like myself, who share common mindset, empathy, despite being located in a different part of the world. Further, I saw that creating counter stories that challenge the dominant views in research such as mine had a legitimate position, as it opened up possibilities of alternative research participation speaking from different location, and demonstrating and acknowledging different shades of white. By providing insights and knowledge about the African cultural values my study undermined whiteness, understood as a historically contingent ideological mechanism that establishes notions of racial superiority, maintains social status, power and privilege, and endorses discrimination and injustice against non-white people and cultures (McIntosh, Moon & Nakayama, 2019).

In addition, from a critical perspective, my study has provided a unique insight into the lived experience of black African educated professionals living and working in Finland.

This knowledge provides critique directed at the conventions and structures of social orders and the forms of knowledge as well as privileged understandings. It opens a possibility of a conversation, and suggests an alternative perspective of considering black foreign co-workers, a perspective that looks beyond the skin color. Therefore, the findings of my study offer a possibility of the transformative redefinition of skills and competences necessary in cross-cultural and diversity management.

It is my hope that this knowledge will develop an understanding and acceptance of members of Finnish society who are labelled as others. I see this understanding and acceptance as being an essential step to reformulating the concept of otherness in Western discourse into a more inclusive one through which the analytical dualisms of tradition/modernity and development/underdevelopment can be rendered obsolete and substituted by a new hybrid epistemology (Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006). Through this new epistemological perspective such concepts as the lower level of material consumption, strong kinship ties, and social commitment (Zein-Elabdin, 2009) can be viewed as serviceable ethics. This will help reconceptualize the working cultures of Western organisations as well as understand and accept non-Western ways.

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