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Life strategies and parenting methods of intercultural families based on Milton J. Bennett Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

After graduation, I started my career as a child- and youth protection social worker in Budapest. From 2000 to 2007 I lived in Israel. After returning to Hungary, for ten years I worked in a Hebrew-Hungarian bilingual, family-run nursery, operated by an Orthodox Jewish foundation. In the course of my work, I have developed a close relationship with young mixed Israeli, Hungarian families living, working or studying in Hungary for a longer or shorter period of time.

Focusing on the multicultural Jewish community, I continued my studies, majoring in Cultural Anthropology. During my field research I used holistic, cultural relativist approach and collection of empirical data. The aim of taking notes, photographs, conducting interviews, documenting my observations was to shed light on what life is like from someone else's perspective. (Boglár 2001:8)

Through years of fieldwork, I have tracked and continued to follow the lives of dozens of families. To better understand the daily lives, mindsets, and feelings of the families observed, I take every opportunity to be present at their community events, celebrations, gatherings, and the like. These occasions provide an opportunity for friendly conversations. At the same time, it opens up the possibility of observing parent-child interactions.

In most cases the mother is Hungarian; the father is of a different origin. Most of the time, both parents are dual citizens, one of which is Israeli. It is common that the father originally came to Hungary to study, others came with their parents in the early 1990s, during the civil war in Georgia, while yet others came for economic reasons. Couples have lived in Hungary for 3 to 24 years, at times moving, or possibly moving back in a few years. They have previously lived in Israel, and many other countries.

The parents I interview are between 20-40 years old. They use Hebrew or English with each other, speak Hungarian, Hebrew, English, or occasionally the language of their grandparents with their children and usually learn each other's language.

As they explained, usage of English is preferred when discussing certain subjects, they do not want the children to understand. However, the children, because they do want to know what the discussion is about, pick up English rather quickly. In the stores or on the playground it happens that parents speak Hebrew others do not understand, thus creating a feeling of “chumminess” between parent and child. This type of language-switching is known as “code-switching”. (Knipf, Komlósi 2001: 690–697)

Families connect with each other through their children. My observation is that their relationship is intertwined along their origins, language, and cultural heritage. At the same time, they make an effort to respect each other's faith, religious customs, or lack thereof. In their daily lives, one can observe the tendency to adapt to the habits of the social majority. At the same time, they are strongly tied to the country of their origin. After all, part of their families still live there.

These modern, urban, nuclear families live spread out in Budapest. As a result, my field of research is not a local area, but a “*mental space*”: experiences at a given time when I take part not as an outsider, but as a participant observer.

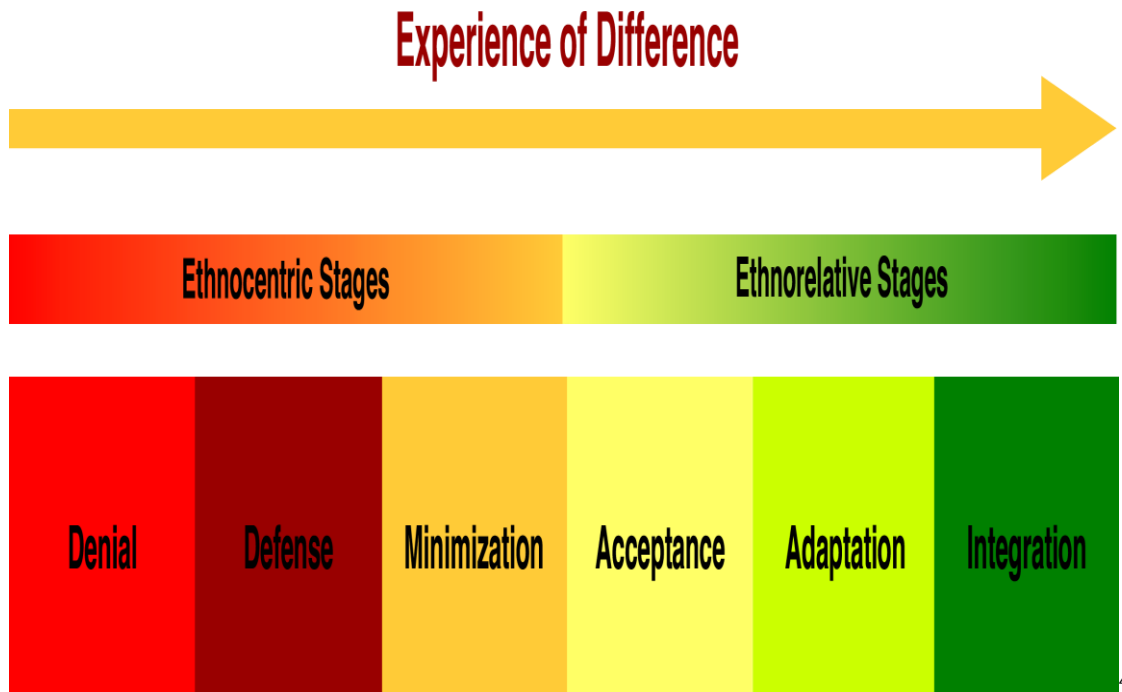
Anthropology, an empirical observation science, provides an opportunity to separate norms and practices while it also makes it possible to concretize the relationship of those two. (Wolff 2001: 7) For example, a parent reports being mindful of using the mother tongue when speaking to her child. Yet, in various life-situations it is observed that she uses mixed languages without even realizing it.

As for multiculturalism within the families: when two individuals from different cultural backgrounds with different mother tongues tie their lives together, they have to establish a new, shared way of organizing their life. New cultural, different verbal, perhaps even religious practices will present themselves. The members of the observed families belong to two or three different linguistic and socio-cultural mediums. (Buk 2018: 15-31)

In order to better understand the life strategies and parenting methods of intercultural families, I briefly describe Milton J. Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity using examples from family accounts. (Milton 1998)³ According to Bennett's

³ Milton J. Bennett holds a master's degree in psycholinguistics and a doctorate in intercultural communication and sociology. As a professor, he teaches intercultural studies.

interpretation, culture is not only what distinguishes one group of people from the other on the national level, but is distinguished by gender, age group, religious affiliation, occupation, and so on.



Ethnocentric, means that individuals judge others based on their own cultural experiences and point of view. Ethnorelativism maintains that cultures can only be understood relative to one another. Cultural difference is neither good nor bad, it is just different.

The first three stages of the intercultural sensitivity process are ethnocentric, as one sees his own culture as central to reality. Going further, that is, gaining experience while living together, the individual is increasingly moving towards an ethnorelativist perspective.

By the fourth stage, ethnocentric views are replaced by ethnorelativist views recognizing the value system of the other as equivalent. For multicultural families, if this does not happen, conflicts make cooperation very difficult and can result in family breakdown, as is may be the case.

Based on reports the model reflects the process of culturally mixed couples' experience during the period of becoming a family. At the beginning, the point of

⁴ <https://jmoreno1496.wordpress.com/>

references for the participants was different. In lack of personal experiences, the couples projected stereotypical views on each other. This naturally created problems. Working through those enriched and supported the process of becoming a family.

Denial of Difference - Stage 1.

We don't recognize the difference between our and the culture of the other.

For the individual, his culture is the only true one. They tend to simplify other cultures.

During my field research, some of my conversation partners remembered, when arriving in Israel from Hungary for the first time, they thought of the dietary customs and way of dressing as "*stupid*" simply because they were different from what they were used to.

Defense against Difference - Stage 2.

We recognize the difference, and as a result, we become defensive. It is typified by a dualistic way of thinking, us vs. them.

This position is accompanied by stereotyping in three different ways:

- Contempt: We consider the other culture inferior.

Several of my Hungarian conversation partners reported that at the beginning of their relationship, the home of Israeli husbands was considered too "*empty*", "*without books*" or decorations. This has been stereotypically attributed to their "*dislike of reading*", and this was judged negatively.

- Superiority: We consider our own culture superior to the other.

According to Israeli dads, the Israeli permissive-parenting is more effective than the Hungarian compliant-one, as evidenced by the fact that "*there are more Israeli Nobel laureates*".

- Self-belittlement: Our own culture is devalued and other cultures are romanticized as superior.

This is typical of those who already know some of the other cultures and sympathize with it.

Many Hungarian mothers describe, Israeli parenting as "*very liberal*". This encourages "*creativity*". The Hungarian system on the other hand, according to them, "*takes away children's self-confidence*".

Minimization of Difference - Stage 3.

The experience of similarity outweighs the experience of difference. *“After all, we are all alike.”* People recognize similarities in the other culture over cultural differences, such as spiritual needs, loving care, and similar universal values.

When we realize that the difference between cultures does not mean difference in value, we arrive at ethnorelativism. Through our experiences we learn and understand that there is no absolute measure for right or wrong. There is an example of children not allowed to watch TV at home on Sabbath, while this is not prohibited at the maternal grandmother’s house.

Acceptance of Difference - Stage 4.

People accept that others think differently about reality and attach a different value system to it. Different languages produce different ways of thinking. We recognize the cultural side of value creation.

Adaptation to Difference - Stage 5.

Individuals recognize the possibilities lying in various cultural approaches. Two ways of it is:

- Empathy: identify with or understand another’s situation or feelings.
- Pluralism: numerous distinct ethnic, religious, or cultural groups are present within a society.

This may be the result of living in a different cultural relation system for an extended period of time.

A mom of Hungarian descent and a Georgian dad moved into a traditional community after their university years. It took them a while before they were able to adjust to each other’s culture. It was harder for the less traditional mom, meanwhile she saw the cultural tradition represented by her husband as *‘healthier’, ‘more hygienic’, ‘keeping the family together’, ‘leading to success’, ‘helping to achieve goals’*.

Over the years living together, my conversational partners experience a process of cultural adaptation. Their children are socialized within the complex system of families. Identity of the children brought up in a bi- or multilingual environment will not be the same as of their mothers or their fathers. Yet, they do develop a cultural sensitivity and are at home in both cultures. In that sense, they develop a multicultural identity. (Erikson 1991: 396–404)

Integration of Difference - Stage 6.

We become active participants in the other culture; we learn to examine and react to things from multiple cultural perspectives. We recognize that we may also use our differences as a resource in our daily lives.

Through interactions and conversations within the community, takes shape what the “cultural package” that families want to pass on to their children: “*respect of the family*”, “*tolerance toward other religions and cultures*”, “*appreciation of books, music, films, and theater*”, “*education, knowledge*” are all part of it. Importance of language skills is emphasized.

Goals of their child upbringing are “*raising an open-minded person*”, “*a world citizen*”, “*someone accepting and capable of fitting in*” as an adult. It is seen as a way of introduction to other kinds of cognitive or mental structures.

In the next phase of the research, I would like to gain insight into the kinship system of intercultural families and their extended family relationships, life strategies and conflicts across borders. I attempt to explore cultural networking, the operation and impact of cross-border family and community relations at the level of events and interactions that can be experienced in the daily life of families. As for the methodology, the COVID situation has altered the previous research plan with difficulties around personal contacts.

Meanwhile, communication and “consumption of culture” is increasingly taking place online and through social media. So a multi-faceted examination of these dimensions is essential.

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