

## Functions of boundary spanning in context:

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A postcolonial, power-sensitive perspective

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Working Papers OPAL

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**Hamburg 2018**

**Working Papers des Forschungsclusters OPAL der Helmut-Schmidt-Universität**

**Working Papers No. 2, Hamburg 2018**

**ISSN 2512-8019 (online)**

**ISSN 2512-7950 (print)**

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# **Functions of boundary spanning in context: A postcolonial, power-sensitive perspective**

## **Abstract**

Functions of boundary spanning have seldom been the focal point in boundary spanning research. This is surprising given the close entanglement of interests and power (relations), and the early emergence of power-sensitive boundary spanning studies. This paper traces the influence of macro-level, race-related power relations on functions of boundary spanning, using the example of a German public administration. The findings show that power relations influence why and how actors engage in boundary spanning across levels of analysis. A counter-hegemonic reading of the results shows that the particular functions of boundary spanning resemble colonial patterns of mediating between the colonizer and the colonized.

## **Keywords**

boundary spanning, interests, culture, identity, postcolonial, power

## Introduction

Boundary spanners are considered as critical resources of organizational adaption (Aldrich & Herker, 1977) who build bridges between an organization and external stakeholders or between units within an organization. Thereby, boundary spanners require specific skills and characteristics (cf. Kane & Levina, 2017; Roberts & Beamish, 2017), which may increase their power position, driving organizations to control and ensure their loyalty (Barner-Rasmussen, Ehnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä, 2014). Besides examining issues of power on the micro-level, boundary spanning research also studied the effect of macro-level status and power differences between cultures on cross-cultural boundary spanning (Abbott, Zheng, Du, & Willcocks, 2013; Kane & Levina, 2017; Levina & Vaast, 2008). Thereby, low identification of cross-cultural boundary spanners with low-status home cultures has been shown to negatively affect the success of boundary spanning activities in MNCs and vice versa (Kane & Levina, 2017). Whereas culture has been considered in boundary spanning research, so far, an account of the effect of societal power relations related to race, class or gender on micro-level boundary spanning activities is largely missing.

In this study, I trace the influence of race-related power relations on functions of boundary spanning. Based on a qualitative study in the German public sector, I show that such power relations shape *why* and *how* boundary spanners engage in certain activities. Categorizing 21 functions of boundary spanning activity, I discuss their entanglement in race-related power relations across levels of analysis. Building on ethnographic and postcolonial research (de Jong, 2016), I argue that boundary spanning resembles (post-)colonial culture brokering in a context where actors have to negotiate

race relations and mediate between an organization representing the dominant society and marginalized communities.

The paper contributes to boundary-spanning research through more strongly connecting structure to agency that is macro-level power relations and discourses to micro-level boundary spanning activities and interests across levels of analysis. Thereby, research on functions of boundary spanning (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Johnson & Duxbury, 2010) is expanded through illustrating that a power-sensitive perspective on boundary spanning broadens the view for a range of different functions beyond existing classifications. The study also contributes to a diversity-sensitive perspective on boundary spanning. Racialized ascriptions of cultural and language competencies are portrayed as an important factor shaping informal boundary spanning expectations, beyond ascriptions of technical competencies (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981) and biculturality (Kane & Levina, 2017).

### **How power and interests shape individual-level boundary spanning activities**

Scholars have categorized a variety of boundary-spanning activities that individuals engage in to act 'as both filters and facilitators' (Aldrich & Herker, 1977, p. 218). Table I provides an overview over categorizations of individual-level boundary-spanning activity. Whereas the level of detailing boundary spanning activities varies, all categorizations revolve around handling information and knowledge, building relationships and striving for change. The three-fold categorization of Ryan and O'Malley (2016) best condenses these central aspects: mediating/facilitating, network building and innovating.

When acting as *mediator and facilitator*, boundary spanners gather, channel and interpret information and often seek to create a mutual understanding beyond diverging

interests (Ryan & O'Malley, 2016). Thereby, language and cultural skills are context-specific competencies, which have proven to be particularly important in cross-cultural boundary spanning (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). For instance, the positive outcome of such boundary spanning may depend on the identification of bi-cultural individuals with their home country; when such identification is low this may result in boundary spanners hindering collaborators through micromanaging or narrowing communication channels (Kane & Levina, 2017). Alike mediating and facilitating, *networking building* relies on a boundary spanner's ability to bridge interests and requires 'an empathic understanding of how others define the problem and what they might value in a solution' (Ryan & O'Malley, 2016, p. 8). Strengthening relationships through networking is significant since the relationship dimension is 'the enabler of future interactions' (Johnson & Duxbury, 2010, p. 38). When enacting the third aspect of their role as *entrepreneur* (Ryan & O'Malley, 2016), boundary spanners develop solutions to complex problems, again brokering diverging interests (Williams, 2012, 2013). Thereby, the adaptive flow of their activities is either inward-oriented at changing the organization and/or outward-oriented at changing the external environment (Johnson & Duxbury, 2010). Willingness to challenge existing organizational structures becomes less likely when boundary spanners' identification with the organization increases, which is, for example, influenced by favourable intergroup comparisons that enhance members' collective self-esteem (Bartel, 2001). Boundary spanning serves different functions ranging from building trust to information acquisition to maintaining the organization's workflow (Johnson & Duxbury, 2010).

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Insert Table I about here  
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*The influence of power on boundary spanning activity*

Issues of power have been studied early on in boundary spanning research (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Jemison, 1984; Spekman, 1979). Researchers have shown that unique skills increase the boundary spanner's influence, as the (perceived) power of boundary spanners positively correlates with the increasing difficulty of imitating their tasks and skills (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014), or the vitality of the received information for the organization (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). Various power bases thus influence whether and how a boundary spanner may shape practices, identities and behaviour. Besides expert power based on unique skills, boundary spanners such as managers can use their position power to influence organizational practices and behaviour (Jemison, 1984). Thereby, they can punish others for not acting according to their expectations (coercive power), reward them for following their demands (reward power) or strategically exploit actors' tendency to act according to norms and expectations of groups and actors whom they identify with (referent power) (Raven, 2008; Spekman, 1979).

Organizations will try to control boundary spanners and to ensure the loyalty and commitment of boundary spanners to their ethics, goals and values. Routinizing boundary spanning activity is one control mechanism, which 'will vary directly with the volume of repetitive work, the predictability of outcomes, the homogeneity and stability of the environment, and the need to control the behavior of organizational members' (Aldrich & Herker, 1977, p. 226).

Ambiguity and tension often characterize the everyday work of boundary spanners, especially when values, frames or cultures of the stakeholder groups significantly differ (Williams, 2013). Despite its negative emotional and psychological consequences, boundary spanning positions also provide a source for gratification and recognition (cf. Au & Fukuda, 2002; Butler, Zander, Mockaitis, & Sutton, 2012; Kane & Levina, 2017) as they 'permit boundary spanners to gain power, improve their bargaining position, and hence increase their job satisfaction and perhaps even gain better jobs' (Aldrich & Herker, 1977, p. 228).

The potentially powerful position of a boundary spanner not only depends on formal boundary spanning roles but also on informal ascriptions of boundary spanning competencies (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981). Whereas formal status or level of experience foster the possibility of being a boundary spanner, in specific areas 'individuals approach those whom they see as technically competent regardless of formal status'; and as a consequence, top managers or expatriates are not always the most effective boundary spanners (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). Cross-cultural competencies are another potential determinant of boundary spanning status, and MNCs often ascribe such competencies to bicultural individuals, thereby disregarding the influence of home country-identification on boundary spanning outcomes (Kane & Levina, 2017). Status and power differences between cultures have been shown to shape the identification of boundary spanners with international collaborators, leading either to empowerment and knowledge sharing or to narrowing information channels and micromanaging (Kane & Levina, 2017).

Identity negotiations related to boundary spanning activities underline that boundary spanning takes place 'in the cultural confrontation and interactions of global sourcing



contexts' (Abbott et al., 2013, p. 124), where (cultural) boundaries are often blurred and fluid. When accounting for macro-level power structures, researchers have primarily focused on differences between low- and high-status cultures in a global context (Abbott et al., 2013; Kane & Levina, 2017; Levina & Vaast, 2008). Issues of racial or gender inequalities have so far been rarely studied in their effect on micro-level boundary spanning activity. If so, gender has been included in quantitative studies as an explanatory variable of boundary spanning opportunities, organizational support and professional success (cf. Baroudi & Igbaria, 1994; Johlke, Stamper, & Shoemaker, 2002). This qualitative study resonates with a social constructivist perspective on boundary spanning (Abbott et al., 2013), tracing the influence of racial inequalities on the enactment of and motivations behind boundary spanning activity. Such inequalities are historically grown and depend on specific spatio-temporal contexts (Omi & Winant, 1986). The now introduced postcolonial figure of the 'culture broker' specifies the notion of boundary spanner with regard to questions of historically grown dominance and marginality and helps to address issues of racial inequalities in boundary spanning research.

### **Culture brokering: Historizing power, language and culture in boundary spanning**

The term 'culture broker' was first used by anthropologists in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to describe those who mediated between a newly established national culture and the 'traditional' culture of local communities (Redfield, 1956; Wolf, 1956). Culture brokers were frequently female and belonged to the marginalized group, and they often accidentally came to occupy their position (Szasz, 2001). Because of inherent status and power differences, researchers have stressed that an awareness of power

dynamics essential to understand the role of culture brokers in the studied societies (Geertz, 1960).

After gaining prominence in anthropology in the 1990s, research interests in culture brokering spilled out to research fields such as health care, social work and education (Michie, 2003). Studies in the field of health care and social work have addressed issues of partisanship and loyalty related to culture brokering. In a study on community engagement and child welfare systems, culture brokers 'described themselves as a bridge, advocate, support and voice for families' (Siegel et al., 2010: 56). They thus addressed the power differential between the child welfare agency and the family and sought to reduce the power gap in favour of the latter. In contexts of unequal societal power relations, a partisan attitude of culture brokers has been argued to be legitimate and important to build the trust of historically marginalized groups in formal authorities and institutions (National Center for Cultural Competence et al., 2004). Culture brokers often function 'as a role model for those in the ethnic community who aspire to participate in mainstream activities' (Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983, p. 117).

Power relations not only influence whom culture brokers may feel obliged to speak for. They further influence *where* culture brokering takes place. Birkle (2009) stresses that culture brokers mediate ever changing boundaries between past and present, between Self and Other, and between home and host countries. This temporal and spatial broadening of culture brokering resonates with Abbott et al.'s (2013, p. 123) notion of creolization, which describes 'the encounter and the interaction between, and the disjuncture and the assimilation of, cultures across time and space'.

In the field of gender and postcolonial studies, de Jong (2016, p. 57) claims that dismantling the entanglement of culture brokering in existing power structures requires

'an attentive counter-hegemonic reading' because contemporary culture brokers, alike native informants as their colonial equivalents (Szasz, 2001), run the risk of being instrumentalised to demarcate boundaries between two cultures imagined as radically different (de Jong, 2016). She traces the culture broker as a gendered and racialized figure that originated in the colonial era and continues to shape the present. Her counter-hegemonic reading of Turkish women in Austria and their culture brokering makes aware that marginalized individuals often expand the expected role beyond mediating based on language and cultural skills. The studied women, for instance, provided 'affective empathy and knowledge about survival in the Austrian migration system' (de Jong, 2016, p. 56). A counter-hegemonic reading of boundary spanning activity requires historization (Bourdieu, 1992) since '[r]econstructing and historicising assumptions, beliefs and practices across levels of analysis makes researchers aware of the subtle workings of systems of domination and enables them to produce counter-narratives to dominant discourses' (Collien, 2018, p. 140). Partisanship in boundary spanning work can accordingly be read as an attempt to balance longstanding race-related power inequalities, instead of framing it as disloyal behaviour towards the organization.

In this paper, I argue that studies on culture brokering help to raise awareness in boundary spanning research for critically reflecting on the broader context of boundary spanning and related power inequalities. A counter-hegemonic reading, which may include postcolonial perspectives on culture and migration that trace the effects of colonialism and imperialism up to the present (Castro Varela, 2010; Prasad, 2003), is encouraged to ensure a power-sensitive perspective when studying boundary spanning

activities. The following analysis of a case study in the German public administration demonstrates the advantages of such reading.

### **The case study**

My power-sensitive exploration of boundary spanner activity is based on a qualitative case study of a diversity policy named *Interkulturelle Öffnung* ('Cross-cultural Opening'). In 2012, the German government declared in its sixth National Action Plan for Integration (*Nationaler Aktionsplan Integration*), that Cross-cultural Opening would be its central strategy for attaining more racial equality in the German society, especially within the public sector. The policy aims at increasing the cross-cultural competencies of the existing staff and at recruiting more employees with migratory background to improve service for customers with migratory backgrounds. Official statistics define the term 'person with a migratory background' as people who were not born in Germany or whose parents have immigrated to Germany after 1949 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010a). In the context of Cross-cultural Opening, boundary spanning positions and activities gained importance as the administration sought to reach out to (racially marginalized) migrant communities. The interviewed public servants built bridges to these communities and the motivations behind their boundary spanning activity have proven to be a rich source for studying the influence of race-related power relations on micro-level boundary spanning.

#### *Data collection*

In total, I conducted 13 in-depth interviews with employees of the public administration about the implementation of Cross-cultural Opening. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and 2 hours and were conducted between August and October 2011. I posed

questions on the employees' understandings of the policy, their practices of implementation and cases of discrimination within the administration. Additionally, I asked them to estimate the share of employees with migratory backgrounds in their particular department and in the public administration in general to gather data about the organizational marginalization of racialized people, since due to legal constraints such data are not available in Germany (Ette, Stedtfeld, Sulak, & Brückner, 2016). Finally, they were requested to state in one sentence their associations with four central terms related to processes of racialization in Germany, namely: integration, migratory background, ethnic origin, and culture. Cross-cultural Opening touches upon sensitive issues related to identity formation like migration or discrimination, and researchers therefore have to be particularly careful when approaching potential interview partners (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010). I was lucky to be provided with a contact to one of the key cross-cultural boundary spanners within the administration. Since this boundary spanner knew a lot of other boundary spanners, she served as a door opener. In a snowball effect, other employees were willing to join my study. Again, it proved that in sensitive contexts snowball sampling is an adequate method of data collection (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

### *Data analysis*

The data was transcribed within three weeks after the interviews and sent back to the interviewees for final remarks and changes. To trace the effect of race-related power relations on boundary spanning activities, I focused on those interviewees who reported instances of interacting with marginalized communities and of acting as formal and informal boundary spanner. The remaining five interviewees all had a migratory

background, yet differed as to being read as white German or as immigrant. Table II provides a brief description of these interviewees as to their migratory background and organizational position.

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Insert Table II about here  
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Based on the review of boundary spanning activities in Table I, I first traced and categorized instances of boundary spanning activities in the interviews. The categorizations were condensed, resulting in four boundary spanning activities: information gathering, networking, mediating/facilitating and innovating.

Taking a closer look at the accounts of boundary spanning activity, it struck me how strongly the interviewees articulated the functions of their activities. For example, Setareh stressed that she mediated between the administration and migrant communities because she felt the need to give these communities a voice, even though this was not part of her formal job description. Based on these insights, I specified the boundary spanning activities with regard to functions of boundary spanning. Interests and motivations behind changing or maintaining existing structures and practices are influenced by societal power relations (Collien, Sieben, & Müller-Camen, 2016; Creed et al., 2010), and are therefore a promising aspect to look into, when seeking to develop a power-sensitive approach to boundary spanning. Figures 2 to 5 detail the functions of boundary spanning activity by providing examples from the data.

In a final step, the categorized boundary spanning activities and their functions were subjected to a counter-hegemonic reading (de Jong, 2016) to ensure a historically-aware and power-sensitive interpretation of the activities. This means, that taken-for-

granted discourses, practices and knowledge were questioned, which may open up the view for new interpretations of the world. Following Collien (2018), who suggested a triad of being critical, political and reflexive when taking a power-sensitive research approach, I questioned taken-for-granted discourses and practices and re-read them in a historic context of colonization, globalization and migration.

In my analysis of boundary spanning activities, I also came across differences as to whether boundary spanning activities were part of the formal or informal role of boundary spanners. Again, I conducted a counter-hegemonic reading and realized that racialized ascriptions influenced expectations to act as informal culture broker, mediating between the administration and a marginalized community. The presentation of the findings illustrates how boundary spanners dealt with formal and informal calls to act as culture broker and how this affected their boundary spanning activity.

### **The influence of power relations on the enactment of and motivations behind boundary spanning activities**

Societal power relations have a significant effect on boundary spanning in organizations. The now analysed cases of boundary spanners within a German public administration (see Table II) show that race-related power relations influence the functions of boundary spanning activity as well as the enactment of formal and informal boundary spanning roles. Thus, societal power relations shape *why* and *how* actors engage in boundary spanning activities.

Four boundary spanning activities could be categorized in the data: mediating/facilitating, information gathering, networking, and innovating. Figure 1 details whether the boundary spanning activities targeted marginalized communities and/or the dominant society and specifies whether they aimed at altering power relations on the

micro-level of individual behaviour and interactions, the meso-level of organizational structures and practices or the macro-level of societal discourses and structures. Figure 1 illustrates the multi-level workings of power relations and the related complex reactions of the studied boundary spanners.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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I now detail the functions of the boundary spanning activities, providing a counter-hegemonic reading (Collien, 2018; de Jong, 2016) to highlight the influence of historically grown power relations on boundary spanning in a German context. Thereby, the boundary spanners appear as culture brokers who mediate historically grown power relations between a dominant society and marginalized communities. The counter-hegemonic reading allows for a new perspective on issues of partisanship, loyalty, language and culture.

*Mediating and facilitating*

All interviewed boundary spanners mediated and facilitated between the administration and marginalized communities. This form of boundary spanning served eight different functions (see Figure 1 and Figure 2): Four functions of boundary spanning were directed at the dominant society, either seeking to change individual behaviour and stereotypes or to alter the meaning of societal discourses. Three functions addressed marginalized communities, trying to counterbalance the negative effects of societal inequalities on the micro- and macro-level. One function targeted both groups,



explaining the complex reasons for persisting inequalities on the organizational meso-level.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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*Mediating to break stereotypes and to raise awareness.* Almost all interviewees mediated to break stereotypes about marginalized communities and to raise awareness for their experiences of discrimination and inequality. Maria, the counsellor for migrant women with precarious residence permits, repeatedly tries to counter stereotypical attitudes in her everyday work.

I know that many customers have a problem when I say: 'Well, I am not a jurist. I can't answer your question. Please call Mrs Meyer or Mr Wong.' And they go: 'What?! No, I will not go to the Chinese man! And I go: Hello?! He is a top jurist. ...' In this case, the customers definitely need to ... accept that someone from non-German decent ... holds a responsible position. (Maria)

Maria fights the tendency of ascribing people with foreign sounding names lacking professional competencies. She mediates between the stigmatized person and the customers by stressing the competencies of Mr Wong. Whereas Maria's story addresses customers' stereotypes, Setareh, the responsible for Cross-cultural Opening, reports an internal incident where she sensitized an operator for the fact that bringing frozen German food to India might not be a culturally-sensitive approach.

There has been this one operator who wanted to do a project with difficult to train youth in India and who wanted to bring along the packaged, frozen food from Germany. And I said: This is Eurocentric. You absolutely can't do that! My colleagues were completely confused ... But they did not dare to answer back to me. ... After that it was no longer an issue. (Setareh)

Even though mediating to raise awareness frequently occurred as boundary spanning activity, it was rarely part of the formal job description, unlike in the case of Nia who organizes public antidiscrimination and awareness campaigns. Besides calling out stereotyping behaviour and raising cultural awareness, the boundary spanners tried to overcome the reinforcement of racial and cultural boundaries through clever communication strategies, as detailed in the next function.

*Mediating to reduce defence mechanisms.* The boundary spanners mediated to overcome resistance against racial equality within the administration (and the German society). The boundary spanners adapted their communication strategies because changing societal power relations was more important than righteously naming exclusionary practices as racism, as Setareh outlines.

I am very aware that strategically I cannot use the term racism when I want to promote cross-cultural opening processes because then [Setareh makes a closing gesture to signal the end of a communication process]. ... It is really difficult because everybody says: "What does it have to do with us?!" ... You find these system-immanent reactions also within the administration ... (Setareh)

Setareh strategically talks about Cross-cultural Opening instead of racism in her efforts to bring about organizational change. Even though she regards racism as the root cause for the underrepresentation of people with migratory backgrounds within the public administration, she rather labels her change measures as Cross-cultural Opening to avoid immediate resistance and to open up a discursive space. Nia provides reasons for the defensive behaviour of many public servants, when it comes to naming racism and related inequalities.

In Germany, the term discrimination still triggers enormous defence behaviour. ... I think this is historically grown. In Germany, there is a strong fear of excluding or disadvantaging people since

the Nazi regime. ... People want to use weaker terms, which are less frightening. ... It is the same with the term racism. (Nia)

The examples highlight how historically shaped macro-level discourses and inequalities influence the boundary spanners' strategies and behaviour on the micro-level. A great level of awareness and understanding of power structures and dynamics is required to effectively mediate between marginalized communities and the administration representing the dominant society; a characteristic of culture brokers (McKinley, 2001).

*Mediating to create visibility.* Some interviewees, like Setareh, felt the need to create visibility for marginalized communities through their position.

Integration, migration and cross-cultural issues have always been my topics. ... I always had the attitude saying: I am in this position because migrants do not have a voice and I am able to give them a voice in my position. (Setareh)

Even though it is her personal goal to increase visibility for migrant communities, Setareh stresses that this is actually not her job. Yet, she is frequently approached by her colleagues with requests to mediate between the administration and migrant communities. She serves as culture broker, who functions as buffer between two worlds imagined as radically different (de Jong, 2016).

What I do realize is that when it comes to contacting self-organized migrant organizations and such actors, they always turn to me. They ask me, even though this is not my job, because the others are lacking access, or they have little access. (Setareh)

Mursal reports similar ascriptions as migrant representative. She interprets the behaviour of people approaching her with questions about migrant communities as 'calls for help', which she answers because she wants to create visibility for these communities using her influential position.

Well, I am the interface and I do mediate between different parts of the administration, the communities and single actors. Even though this is not my job, I have grown into it because there seems to be a need to talk to people who are sensitized because of their biography and who therefore do know specific communities. ... I appreciate people calling because it is better than to create a mess. ... These are issues that are transferred to me because I am a migrant ... (Mursal)

The examples of Mursal and Setareh underline that mediating often takes place when it is not part of the formal job description. This dynamic bears resemblance to those who occupied culture brokers positions in colonial times and who often accidentally happened to fill such positions (Szasz, 2001). Both actors react to identity calls to serve as mediator because of their personal motivation to create visibility for marginalized groups. Their statements show that this represents a conscious decision because both are aware of potential negative consequences for affected communities (Setareh: 'migrants do not have a voice'; Mursal: 'better than to create a mess'). Being highly visible and serving as representative for migrants also has the downside of 'being the token migrant', as Mursal explains. She adds that this sometimes annoys her and that she would wish for the public service to be more diverse. Being aware that racial inequalities prevail and characterize the public service, she concludes that 'the public service is very white'.

The interviewees' accounts demonstrate that boundary spanners may face *informal* boundary-spanning expectations, owing to racialized ascriptions of migrant status. People with migratory backgrounds in Germany, like Black people in the US and UK (Mercer, 1990), have to carry the historic burden of being addressed as culture brokers, even though their job description may have nothing to do with such tasks. How such expectations affect the interviewees' boundary spanning activity depends on their

personal identity work and identification with the ascribed identity. This is best illustrated by contrasting Mursal's and Setareh's reactions to informal boundary spanning requests to Canan's responses. In the following section, three functions of boundary spanning activity are simultaneously discussed because they are unique to Canan's boundary spanning approach.

*Facilitating to empower, to give back, and to alter hegemonic meaning.* Canan, the organizer of a network for teachers with migratory backgrounds and a mentoring system for aspiring teachers with migratory backgrounds, articulates no inner conflict as to being the token migrant. Instead, she aspires 'to embody an exemplary role model for our students' and to offer 'support to a biography that faces similar challenges' so that 'migrant youth can reach their full potential'. Her *formal* boundary spanning role as a facilitator between youth with migratory backgrounds and the education system matches her personal goals. She wants to empower youth with migratory backgrounds to become teachers, a goal which is shared by the education department of the public administration. Canan is grateful for all of the opportunities that she had in Germany 'as a child of Turkish immigrants' and now mediates 'to give back to society'. Although Canan seems to be comfortable with her mediating role, she subverts the hegemonic meaning of the social identity 'person with migratory background', when she redefines her migratory background as a source of 'enrichment ... It is a form of blessedness. Even though it is often discussed as something deficient, I do regard it as absolute enrichment' (Canan). Her redefinition of the hegemonic, deficient meaning of a migratory background allows Canan to embrace and identify with an altered meaning of this social identity. Her boundary spanning activity of mediating to empower and to give back to

society seems to be enabled in all of its positivity and powerfulness by her positive identification with the redefined term 'person with migratory background'. In an environment where boundaries are upheld and reinforced, the studied boundary spanners in the tradition of culture brokers seek to create spaces 'where differences occur as areas for negotiation, learning, creativity and embracing multiple perspectives' (Abbott et al., 2013, p. 133), stressing that 'diversity is super relevant ... because no team is truly monocultural' (Nia) or that a migratory background can be 'a form of blessedness' (Canan).

*Mediating to restore trust.* More than ten per cent of persons with migratory backgrounds feel strongly discriminated by formal authorities in Germany (Sachverständigenrat deutscher Stiftungen für Integration und Migration, 2012, p. 11ff.), making it necessary for boundary spanners to restore the trust of these communities in the public service. Maria, working in the women's department, needs to explain the functioning of the public administration to her migrant clients, who have negative experiences with authorities, especially with police forces.

When the women get here mediated through the commission of hardship cases, it is a very different picture. There is a huge level of inhibition because we are an administration, an authority. ... I have women who have committed no crime yet are afraid because of their residence status and have turned around and left, where I had to explain that the department for economic crime investigation [which happens to be located in the same building as Maria's department] has no interest in them.

(Maria)

Maria is the only interviewee with a Swedish migratory background who is generally read as white German. She presents ascriptions of migrant status as an advantage in her role as mediator seeking to build trust. In contrast to the other interviewees, Maria is

not automatically marked as migrant and therefore does not struggle with ascriptions of being the token migrant. Instead, being associated with migrant status allows her to more quickly connect to people of marginalized communities.

Well, I have a double surname. This is because of my Palestinian estranged husband. Arabian and Iranian women are always happy about that. It happens a lot that people do ask about it and I realize that this allows a more personal relation ... I do speak Arabic and when the Arab women do speak German poorly – at first, I wait because language competencies are an important integration measure and an important factor in convincing the Senator in cases of hardship. ... Therefore, I wait but I do not torture her when I realize that she is not able to speak German. Then, I offer to continue in Arab. The word spreads and I get calls in Arab. Language is a key issue and the fact that they assume that they will not have to explain certain issues. They think: “You have an Arab husband, you know how it is.” (Maria)

Maria's account of her everyday experiences shows how important power-sensitive behaviour is to increase the trust of migrant women with precarious residence permits in the administration. She points to language as a 'key issue' because integration is closely related to language competencies in German discourse (Esser, 2006; Extra, Spotti, & Avermaet, 2009; Stevenson, 2006). '[L]anguages and accents can act as symbols of belonging and foreignness and give rise to differentiation and discrimination' (Esser, 2006, p. i). Migrants who do not speak proper German may be stigmatized as unwilling to integrate, even though reasons for lacking integration are primarily the result of social and economic precarity (Toprak, 2010). Maria's story emphasizes that societal power relations related to residence status, language and discrimination shape the interactions between the boundary spanner, the organization and members of marginalized communities. Culture- and language-sensitive mediating combined with an awareness of power inequalities is therefore critical when seeking to restore trust, and ascriptions of

migrant status may provide a credit of trust in such cases. Whereas mediating to restore trust and to create visibility are marked by a partisan attitude, the boundary spanners balanced different perspectives, when facilitating to create a mutual understanding.

*Facilitating to create a mutual understanding.* Boundary spanners not only recounted instances of creating a mutual understanding, they also remained in this role during the interview. In the following example, Setareh explains to me how the administration's structures and the communities' behaviours hinder the increase of employees with migratory backgrounds in the administration (strategy of Cross-cultural Opening). Thereby, she remains loyal to both parties without judging the behaviour of any side.

... the Senate wants to increase the share [of employees with migratory backgrounds] analogous to their share in the [city's] population. This is difficult ... Reasons are the recruitment freeze and the lacking awareness on the management level. On the other hand, I also think that the public service is not attractive for many migrants because they neither know the areas of activity it comprises nor do they have enough access to be able to state: "This is my dream job!" ... The experiences with the administration also play a role, like they do for all citizens. (Setareh)

In contrast to her strong critique of racial inequality within the administration, which she labels as 'in the hands of white men', the above quote displays Setareh differentiated perspective on the obstacles hindering an increase of employees with migratory backgrounds. Creating a mutual understanding thus existed side by side with a critique of the public administration and a partisan attitude towards marginalized communities. This contrast highlights that boundary spanners use different strategies to convince their counterpart and that loyalty may not be this easily categorized as either loyal to the organization or to the community.

*Information gathering*



The least frequent form of boundary spanning was information gathering. It appeared once with the aim to create a diverse organization (see Figure 1, organizational meso-level, and Figure 3). Nia, the head of the antidiscrimination department, details that ‘within our project “Diverse City”, we have conducted surveys. ... We have identified needs and requirements as to customers, employees, recruiting’ (Nia). Nia uses information gathering as a strategy to increase the number of employees with migratory backgrounds and to respond to the needs to customers with migratory backgrounds. The seldom appearance of this form of boundary spanning does not equal the lacking importance of exchanging information in the context of boundary spanning and power relations. Instead, the sole gathering of information seemed to be less important than sharing knowledge in longstanding networks and adapting organizational practices with regard to marginalized perspectives, as explained below.

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Insert Figure 3 about here  
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### *Networking*

Interviewees’ mainly exchanged information and shared knowledge in the context of networks. The boundary spanning activity of networking was used for a very diverse set of functions, whereby networking to build bridges and trust was the reason shared by most actors. Seven functions could be differentiated in the interview material (see Figure 1 and Figure 4), of which three aimed at strengthening marginalized communities on the micro- and macro-level. The other four functions mainly addressed the public administration’s policies and practices with the intent to improve their fit to the needs of

customers with migratory backgrounds. Networking was located at the micro-, meso- and macro-level and primarily focused on changing organizational structures and practices through including marginalized perspectives and knowledge.

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Insert Figure 4 about here  
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*Networking to build trust.* When networking between the administration and community organizations, overcoming scepticism of these actors towards the administration was one of the main boundary spanning goals. Such efforts may take years, as Maria explains.

We visit the projects; at least we have done so in the past. However, we are regarded as federal representatives. This changes the picture. The female employees in the projects ... we have sometimes known each other for years and friendships have developed over time. In these cases it is no longer relevant. (Maria)

The administration is often imagined as representing the dominant society and its particular perspective on marginalized communities as underclass, lazy, unwilling to integrate, irrational and so (cf. Göktürk, Gramling, & Kaes, 2007; Kilomba, 2008; Toprak, 2010). Establishing personal relationships with actors of low-threshold organizations is therefore an important and a necessary condition for ensuring the next two functions of networking: self-reflection and connecting theory and practice.

*Networking to incite self-reflection and to connect theory and practice.* Maria was the actor who most clearly articulated that networking served to incite self-reflection about

stereotypical ascriptions of marginalized communities. Her example of her work in the committee of hardship cases regarding residence permits best illustrates this goal. The committee examines requests of persons without residence permits who would be obliged to leave the country and try to gain a right to stay by arguing that they are a case of hardship. The committee may recommend to the Senator to hand over a (temporal) residence permit.

I am lucky to be part of the committee which is very mixed in terms of nationalities ... This is a perfect corrective before any stereotypical image starts to sediment. ... For example, you discuss the tenth case of a scrap dealer from a certain community and the income oscillates between three and five euros. ... Yet, then the next case is someone who totally gets out of this line. Thus, before you are able to establish a fixed pattern, life teaches you the contrary. (Maria)

Maria not only uses such networks to reflect on her personal behaviour, she further stresses that they help to connect strategic planning processes within the administration to the needs of marginalized communities. Thereby, she is able to prevent establishing practices, which may do more harm than good for marginalized persons, or to develop new practices addressing the needs of such persons.

The contact to the practical work results from the cooperation with other projects [that work closely with migrant clients]. This is really important to me because it grounds me and prevents that sketchbook measures are invented here. (Maria)

Through longstanding networks the knowledge of marginalized communities enters the administration and can be used to design measures and practices, which take the particular living conditions of marginalized persons into account. Culture brokers are aware of the importance of indigenous or marginalized knowledge for changing organizational power structures. Including marginalized knowledges through constant

self-reflecting to improve organizational practices may help to overcome an 'epistemological cornerstone of imperialism, that the colonized possess a series of knowable characteristics and can be studied, known, and managed accordingly by the colonizers whose own complicity remains masked' (McKinley, 2001, p. 75).

*Networking to multiply impact.* Networking may also increase the impact of single efforts to fight the discrimination of marginalized communities, as Nia outlines.

We are part of a larger network. The federal antidiscrimination office also launches many campaigns. All the other counselling centres continue to raise awareness and step by step, I think, another perception is created in society whether or not discrimination exists ... (Nia)

Canan also uses the effect of multiplying impact through networking, yet she primarily networks to empower and to create visibility for marginalized groups.

*Networking to create visibility, to empower and to provide recognition.* The percentage of teachers with migratory backgrounds is estimated to be around five or six per cent in Germany (Massumi, 2014; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010b). Youth with migratory backgrounds are more likely to choose engineering and less likely to choose teacher training as their field of study than children without migratory backgrounds (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016, p. 179). Canan's network of teachers with migratory backgrounds who mentor aspiring teachers with migratory backgrounds therefore has the double-purpose of creating visibility as well as of empowering marginalized persons to become teachers. Canan explains that the network's main goal 'is to increase the number of teachers with migratory backgrounds in [city's] schools. This is where we put all our creative power and our wo/manpower'. Visibility as a large network in turn has an empowering effect, as she outlines.

Like I said, it is great to be located at the centre [of a university] where young female and male teachers are trained. We set a signal there: "We [teachers with migratory backgrounds] are there for you. We are here. (Canan)

The network also faces criticism for focusing on teachers with migratory backgrounds and Canan therefore details the broader societal context rendering the network necessary.

We do not want to exclude others. We are the ones who are excluded, when you look at it from a quantitative perspective. We are underrepresented and we don't want to exclude. We simply want to close a supply gap. (Canan)

Again, an awareness of power inequalities pervades the boundary spanning activities. In such a context, the recognition of representatives of the dominant society may be crucial to demonstrate to the aspiring teachers that they belong, as Canan explains.

The head of my department will be there for the next kick-off event of our mentoring programme at [School's name]. This is great! This is an ideal form of support and representation. This shows that the administration is open. (Canan)

In the context of unequal power relations, where belonging and recognition of people with migratory backgrounds is questioned (cf. Brubaker, 2010; Ha, 2007; Skrbiš, Baldassar, & Poynting, 2007), networking can provide a strong resource for empowerment, recognition and visibility. As culture broker, Canan consciously navigates this terrain with the aim to increase the number of teachers with migratory backgrounds.

*Networking to increase effectiveness.* Boundary spanners network across departments of the administration to ensure a diverse perspective on issues of social inequalities. As culture brokers they underline that inequalities are intertwined and should not be addressed through single-issue politics (Smooth, 2011). Yet, other actors need to be

convinced that such concerted action is trustworthy and improves effectiveness. Networks provide a platform for building trust and improving organizational structures and practices, as Nia explains.

We have created a network which functions well and where we ensure this process of coordination [from a diversity perspective]. The network is called “Network for Equal Opportunities and Diversity”. Communication is the key here. ... This finally works well in [city]. It has not always been like that. There is competitiveness and there are fears because the cake is limited as to resources (Nia)

Fears of losing resources and significance needed to be addressed and dealt with in the network through communication. To ensure that networking served the aspired purposes, boundary spanners sometimes needed to change existing structures and practices or to introduce new ones. They then served as innovators.

### *Innovating*

At the time of the interviews, the studied public administration was subject to budget cuts and recruitment freeze. Boundary spanners accordingly became creative when seeking to change structures and practices. The boundary spanning activity of innovating served five functions, of which all were directed at the dominant society and in particular at changing the administration’s structures and practices (see Figure 1 and Figure 5).

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Insert Figure 5 about here  
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*Innovating to connect theory and practice.* Innovating was used to stabilize the critical function of networking to connect theory and practice that is to ensure that measures planned by administration matched the needs of marginalized communities.

Our network in the areas of domestic abuse and women trafficking would remain, even if all of us were to start a new job tomorrow. ... We consciously created this because we did not want to depend on the goodwill of a superior who is potentially not willing to talk to NGOs. We said: "We would like to have a cooperation agreement so that future police presidents feel bound to it." (Maria)

Maria describes how a governmental change may affect their practice of collaborating with representatives of marginalized communities. A more conservative government may install a police president who is not in favour of such collaboration and thus Maria's network came up with the idea of a cooperation agreement to guarantee stability.

*Innovating to create a diverse organization, to create visibility and to alter organizational power relations.* Canan, for example, professionalized and expanded her network's mentoring efforts to bring teachers with migratory backgrounds in key positions within the education system, where they may influence personnel decisions. Thereby, she pursues her goal of creating a diverse organization. Mursal confirms the importance of bringing marginalized persons into responsible positions in order to increase their representation and to create a diverse organization. She concludes that this 'contributes to a natural mix mirroring society's diversity'.

Besides creating a diverse organization, some interviewees explicitly stated the aim of altering organizational power relations through innovating. Setareh's idea was to sensitize the administration for the need to employ people with migratory backgrounds because so far most measures of Cross-cultural Opening were primarily outward-oriented. Yet, she is aware of the power struggles that may ensue.

This was one of the thoughts I had: ... an inward-oriented campaign promoting Cross-cultural Opening. Therefore, a backing from the top is needed because there's going to be resistance that naturally appears when people think: "What?! More migrants?! But we don't have enough jobs!"

There is always concurrence. It is always about concurrence, about power. We have to take this way more into account than we have done so far. (Setareh)

Mursal shares Setareh's explicit criticism of power inequalities and therefore included a societal perspective in her new training series. 'We also do address issues like discrimination [of migrants], for example on the labour market. And we address the contribution that an administration can make.' Mursal's also wants to break white dominance within the administration, an issues which really outrages her.

I want the public service to be a reflection of society, quantitatively speaking. ... In general, the public service is very white. ... People shall no longer go: "Bo! There is a migrant in this position.", when they hear a foreign name on the phone. ... People here tell me: "You are the first Muslim woman whom we encounter." "Wow!" ... We also asked in the trainings how many Muslims the people knew: "None." And this was not the minority response. This is incredible! (Mursal)

The boundary spanner's awareness of race-related power inequalities drives their innovation efforts. Alike when facilitating to reduce defence mechanisms, they articulate that changing the organizational structure may trigger resistance and power struggles.

*Innovating to raise awareness.* Boundary spanners may bring a unique perspective to the table, which may lead to an altered approach to existing practices. For example, Mursal's background in international politics has led her to create innovative cross-cultural trainings, which include a global perspective.

My focus is not the classical cross-cultural competence. Instead, I underline the interactions between inside and outside. ... My background is external policy and I have come to realize that people do not know how much influence certain conflicts [in other countries] have and how much migrant communities are influenced by what is happening in their countries of origin. (Mursal)



This global perspective on conflict, culture and inequalities resonates with Abbott et al. (2013) and de Jong (2016) who stress that culture brokers need to negotiate temporal and spatial boundaries between past and present, local and global, or us and them. Besides changing individual behaviour and organizational structures, boundary spanners also aimed at changing societal structures, such as legislation.

*Innovating to foster antidiscrimination.* Nia has an intersectional perspective on the marginalization of people with migratory background and therefore advocates changing the current antidiscrimination legislation.

The social status or the social origin of a person are very important discrimination factors. They are especially important as factors reinforcing other discrimination factors. ... For example, as woman and Muslim woman, these are already two potential discrimination factors, yet, when [a lower] social status is added the discrimination rate rises significantly ... In my opinion, social status should also be legally protected [in the Equal Treatment Act], that it should be included in the catalogue of protection worthy categories. This is why we work towards it. (Nia)

At the time of the interview and even today, discrimination because of social status cannot be pursued under the Equal Treatment Act. Again (Scherr, 2010), potentially reinforcing existing inequalities. The examples highlight that an awareness of societal – and even global – conflicts, discrimination and inequalities drives the interviewees' boundary spanning activities. They use their personal scope of action to invent practices, which alter existing power inequalities.

## **Discussion**

The aim of this paper was to trace the influence of societal power relations on micro-level boundary spanning activities. Based on a qualitative case study of a German public administration, I showed that race-related power relations shape how and why boundary

spanners engage in specific activities. In Figure 1, the categorized functions of boundary spanning activities underline that negotiating power relations across levels of analysis played an important role in the everyday practices of the studied boundary spanners. Most boundary spanning activities aimed at changing individual behaviour, organizational structures and broader societal discourses, which give rise to racial inequalities in German society. In fewer cases, boundary spanners sought to empower marginalized communities, to restore their trust in formal authorities and to increase their overall visibility. The functions of boundary spanning indicate that the studied boundary spanners were aware of power imbalances and more or less subtly took a partisan standpoint for marginalized communities. Interestingly, they were often approached as boundary spanners, even though it was not part of their formal job description. The boundary spanners also mediated to create a mutual understanding and thereby showed the ability to include a complex, double-sided perspective on mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization. A counter-hegemonic, historic reading of the boundary spanning activity revealed that in contexts of negotiating power imbalances, boundary spanners act as culture brokers who (more often accidentally than not) mediate between a dominant society and marginalized communities (de Jong, 2016; Szasz, 2001). This figure best describes the complex entanglement of power relations and organizational position, which the studied boundary spanners had to navigate and to negotiate.

#### *Contributions to boundary spanning research*

Researchers have called for more strongly including power and inequality into studies of boundary spanning (Abbott et al., 2013; Williams, 2013). My study sheds light on how macro-level power relations shape micro-level boundary spanning activities in

organizations. Thereby, it expands the discussion on issues of power in boundary spanning research, where power has been primarily studied in relation to ensuring boundary spanners' loyalty and decreasing their unique organizational position (cf. Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014; Williams, 2013), as various power bases enabling boundary spanners to influence organizational practices and behaviour (Ibarra, 1993; Levina & Vaast, 2005; Spekman, 1979) or as power and status differences between cultures that shape cross-cultural boundary spanning (Abbott et al., 2013; Kane & Levina, 2017; Levina & Vaast, 2008). The distinction between the various levels of racial inequality that the boundary spanning activities and their functions address underline the complex entanglement of power relations in boundary spanning (see Figure 1) and provide a theoretical starting point for future power-sensitive boundary spanning research. The study confirms that boundary spanning activity includes a negotiation of spatial, identity, and temporal boundaries (Abbott et al., 2013), where boundaries between a dominant society imagined as racially superior and a marginalized community imagined as inferior are constantly at stake. A postcolonial, counter-hegemonic reading of the functions of boundary spanning showed that language still works as a means of domination (Ha, 2007) and that a partisan standpoint may be crucial in signalling openness to marginalized communities. The study further reinforces prior insights, which conclude that boundary spanners must be able to 'create an environment where network members come to understand, accept and apply knowledge that was previously outside of their ability to recognize and value' (Roberts & Beamish, 2017, p. 535). Some interviewees' strategies of framing antiracist measures as Cross-cultural Opening or as diversity management reflect such efforts to open up

discursive spaces by taking into account defence mechanisms related to Germany's national socialist past.

Management and organization research so far has rarely studied the mediating effect of gender, age, ethnicity, class or other diversity dimensions on boundary spanning activities. If so, gender has been used as an explanatory variable in quantitative studies on perceived boundary spanning success (Au & Fukuda, 2002; Baroudi & Igbaria, 1994; Johlke et al., 2002). Another exception is the literature on cross-cultural boundary spanning, where culture and status differences have been addressed in their effect on boundary spanning activities in MNCs (cf. Abbott et al., 2013; Kane & Levina, 2017; Levina & Vaast, 2008; Schotter & Abdelzaher, 2013). This paper expands diversity aspects in boundary spanning research through studying a racially diverse set of interviewees and tracing the implicit and explicit role expectations with regard to boundary spanning, which these individuals face. It highlights that how actors engage in boundary spanning is influenced by racialized ascriptions of boundary spanning competencies. Such ascriptions lead to identity tensions, yet also provide a resource when seeking to restore trust of marginalized communities in formal authorities and organizations associated with the dominant society. So far, ascribed competencies and related calls to act as boundary spanner have been traced down to formal status, level of experience or biculturality (Di Marco, Taylor, & Alin, 2010; Hong & Doz, 2013; Kane & Levina, 2017; Tushman & Scanlan, 1981). This study strengthens the importance of considering informal boundary spanners and their contribution to the organization. Its diversity-sensitive perspective makes aware of the workings of racialized (gendered, and so on) ascriptions, which may drive boundary spanning expectations. Racism-critical researchers have labelled such informal boundary spanning work as a form of extra

work or burden carried by those who are categorized as not white (Mercer, 1990). How boundary spanners handle their identities, when torn between two cultures or races, significantly influences the effectiveness of their boundary spanning. Kane and Levina (2017) conclude in their study of bicultural individuals boundary spanning in a global context that embracing home country identities leads to empowering collaborators from the home country group whereas distancing from such an identity results in actions hindering collaborators. My study shows that complex levels of identification with the marginalized 'culture' enable different boundary spanning activities, such as empowering or creating visibility. In general, the interviewees displayed a partisan attitude towards marginalized communities and their awareness of power imbalances and their specific organizational position drove them to address unequal power relations from the micro- to the macro-level. Categorizing 21 functions of boundary spanning, the study further expands Johnson and Duxbury (2010) who named three motivations behind boundary spanning activity. It shows that such functions may show a much greater variety and significantly vary depending on how the boundary spanners react to stereotyping ascriptions of boundary spanning competencies.

The study also resonates with prior studies questioning whether bicultural individuals automatically are best for spanning boundaries between an organization and its customers who seemingly differ culturally (Kane & Levina, 2017). It highlights that the boundary spanners require a great level of awareness when navigating conflict laden terrain related to inequality, culture and identity. Speaking different languages and being ascribed migrant status or cross-cultural competencies may provide a credit of trust, yet such skills and competencies are not sufficient when seeking to efficiently span boundaries in a context of unequal race relations. The interviewees accordingly used

their historic knowledge of race relations in Germany to explain dynamics of stereotyping, exclusion and discrimination and to find starting points for opening conversations about inequalities. As researcher, a counter-hegemonic, historically sensitive reading of the results may be necessary to ensure that a power-sensitive interpretation of the results prevails. Postcolonial, queer or gender studies (cf. Acker, 1990, 2006; Ahmed, 2007; Prasad, 2003) which often seek to dismantle workings of power and dominance in everyday organizational practices and individual behaviour provide a valuable resource for such reading. In this study, the (post-)colonial figure of culture broker (de Jong, 2016; Szasz, 2001) is applied to stress the influence of power relations in boundary spanning activities. Culture brokers mediate in an environment of historically grown power imbalances and their particular strategies reflect a conscious decision to alter race-related inequalities. Reading their strategies in their historic context prevents the researchers from accusing boundary spanners of lacking loyalty towards the organization or of overtly identifying with marginalized communities. I argue that a counter-hegemonic reading is required to go beyond taken-for-granted assumptions about marginalized communities and dominant organizations and to dismantle the effect of power relations on micro-level boundary spanning. Such a counter-hegemonic reading may be reached through contextualizing the described practices and highlighting their embeddedness in larger societal systems and power relations.

#### *Avenues for future research*

Future research on boundary spanning could expand this study by taking an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991) to functions of boundary spanning. Thereby,

interactions between gender, race, or class could be traced as complex factors shaping boundary spanning in everyday practices. Researchers could further study the influence of power relations in areas such as financing or IT where such connections may be less obvious than in the current case study. Additionally, it would be interesting to compare boundary spanning activities of racialized with non-racialized actors to detect similarities and differences between their boundary spanning activities and to even more strongly outline the informal extra work performed by certain boundary spanners.

### *Implications for practice*

The current study shows how organizations tend to automatically use those employees, who are ascribed cross-cultural competencies or migrant status, as boundary spanners between them and marginalized communities. This work is often rendered invisible or taken for granted. Instead, organizations should value these extra contributions of their employees and strive to create a more diverse workforce, where such tasks are not only transferred to a few individuals. Additionally, the current study underlines that cross-cultural competencies are not enough to navigate a globalized world where historically grown power relations shape everyday interactions. Boundary spanners should therefore be aware of power dynamics and organizations should assign them accordingly. The study also highlights how important longstanding networks are in the context of learning to adapt to the needs of marginalized and hard-to-reach communities, especially when organizations want to avoid reproducing the colonial dynamic of (simply) extracting knowledge from marginalized communities (McKinley, 2001). Boundary spanners may play a crucial role here and their loyalty to the organization may depend on the way that their extra work is being rewarded and

appreciated. Ensuring loyalty through appreciation may be a better way than to ensure it through control.

## **Conclusion**

Boundary spanning research has long treated questions of power with minor interest. This study underlines the important influence of macro-level power relations on micro-level boundary spanning activity. Power relations related to race, gender or class shape why and how boundary spanners engage in their activities, and probably whether or not they remain loyal to their organization. A stronger integration of issues of power seems to be a promising path to a more holistic understanding of boundary spanning activity.



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**Table I.** Classifications of boundary spanning activity in boundary spanning research

Author(s)	Classification of boundary-spanning activity
<b>Abbott et al. (2013)</b>	<p><i>Network expansion</i> at the inter-national level = mediating reputation, network extension, relationship building, creating local-global linkages</p> <p><i>Mutual sensemaking</i> at the inter-national and inter-organizational level = translating knowledge, trust building, co-construction of meaning, co-creation of value</p> <p><i>Cultural hybridity</i> at the organizational level = integrating multiple cultures into the organization</p> <p><i>Identity multiplicity</i> at the individual level = operating at the interface of cultural groupings, negotiating a state of “in-betweenness”, tensions arising from the adoption of multiple cultural identities</p>
<b>Anaconda &amp; Caldwell (1992)</b>	<p><i>Ambassadorial activity</i> = securing resources for and promoting the team to ensure access to organizational power structure</p> <p><i>Task-coordinator activity</i> = stabilizing the horizontal workflow through feedback or negotiation</p> <p><i>Guarding activities</i> = targets release of internal information to external stakeholders to preserve group image</p> <p><i>Scouting activities</i> = increase expertise of team through gathering information about market or external stakeholders</p>
<b>Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014)</b>	<p><i>Information exchange</i> = exchanging information and knowledge across MNC-internal boundaries</p> <p><i>Linking</i> = using one’s networks to connect previously disconnected internal actors</p> <p><i>Facilitating</i> = engaging in cross-border interactions of others through delivering or interpreting messages between groups</p> <p><i>Intervening</i> = occurs when boundary spanners resolve misunderstandings or conflicts between groups with the intention to turn a negative into a positive outcome</p>
<b>Birkinshaw et al. (2017)</b>	<p><i>Spearheading</i> = opening up relationships with external actors</p> <p><i>Facilitating</i> = linking actors across the MNC</p> <p><i>Reconciling</i> = helping external actors and MNC managers to understand each other’s point of view</p> <p><i>Lubricating</i> = helping individuals within the MNC to overcome biases and misperceptions about how they might work together</p>

Author(s)	Classification of boundary-spanning activity
<b>Johnson &amp; Duxbury</b> (2010)	<i>Relationship building</i> <i>Shaping</i> = gathering information about external actors to influence their agenda <i>Intelligence gathering</i> = search for privileged (or local) information <i>Delivering</i> <i>Coordinating/negotiating</i> = task-coordinator activity (see Anaconda & Caldwell, 1992) <i>Guarding</i> = guarding (see Anaconda & Caldwell, 1992) <i>Information gathering</i> = scouting (see Anaconda & Caldwell, 1992) <i>Representing</i> = enhancing an organization's reputation through modelling desired values <i>Intermediary</i> = facilitating relationship development between two actors
<b>Klueter and Monteiro</b> (2017)	<i>Spanning organizational boundaries</i> to engage with the external environment and generate new opportunities <i>Spanning national boundaries</i> to reach for 'best in the world' knowledge in foreign locations <i>Spanning internal boundaries</i> to connect and engage with relevant business and R&D units to mobilize external knowledge within the MNC
<b>Ryan &amp; O'Malley</b> (2016)	<i>Network builder</i> = cultivating inter-personal relationships while also appreciating the context of the problems the boundary spanners wishes to solve and how these might be interconnected with other issues or past events <i>Entrepreneur</i> = recognised capacity for visionary or lateral thinking and ability to bring together problems and solutions in novel ways <i>Facilitator/mediator</i> = enabling information flows and mediating between varying 'interests' within the organization and across organization (emphasis on the co-creation of solutions)
<b>Williams</b> (2012, 2013)	<i>Reluctant component</i> = highlights the importance of networking whereby boundary spanners need to understand the linkages between roles, interests and organizations and be aware of power inequalities <i>Co-ordinating</i> = co-ordinating various actors <i>Entrepreneurial component</i> = develop solutions to complex problems including brokering diverging interests <i>Interpreter/communicator</i> = appreciate different cultures, perspectives and practices whereby trust is built through showing empathy, striving for consensus and resolving conflict

**Table II.** Interviewee (alias), organizational position and migratory background

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<p><b>Mursal</b> is in her 30s and works as an expert on Islam and international relations in the public administration, where she occupies a highly visible position. Her Palestinian parents came to Germany as asylum seekers.</p>	<p><b>Nia</b> is a woman in her 40s with a German–Turkish passport. Her parents migrated from Turkey to Germany when she was very young. She works in the field of diversity and antidiscrimination.</p>	<p><b>Setareh</b> is in her 40s and is a central figure on topics like integration and migration within the administration. She has drafted the Federal State’s legislation regarding Cross-cultural Opening. Having migrated from Iran to Germany, she worked in non-governmental organizations before she joined the public administration.</p>
<p><b>Maria</b>, a white female employee with Swedish migratory back-ground in her 40s, is working with refugee women in her department. Her double surname contains a Palestinian surname.</p>	<p><b>Canan</b> is in her 40s and works in education, where she builds a network for teachers with migratory backgrounds. Her parents were teachers in Turkey before they migrated to Germany.</p>	

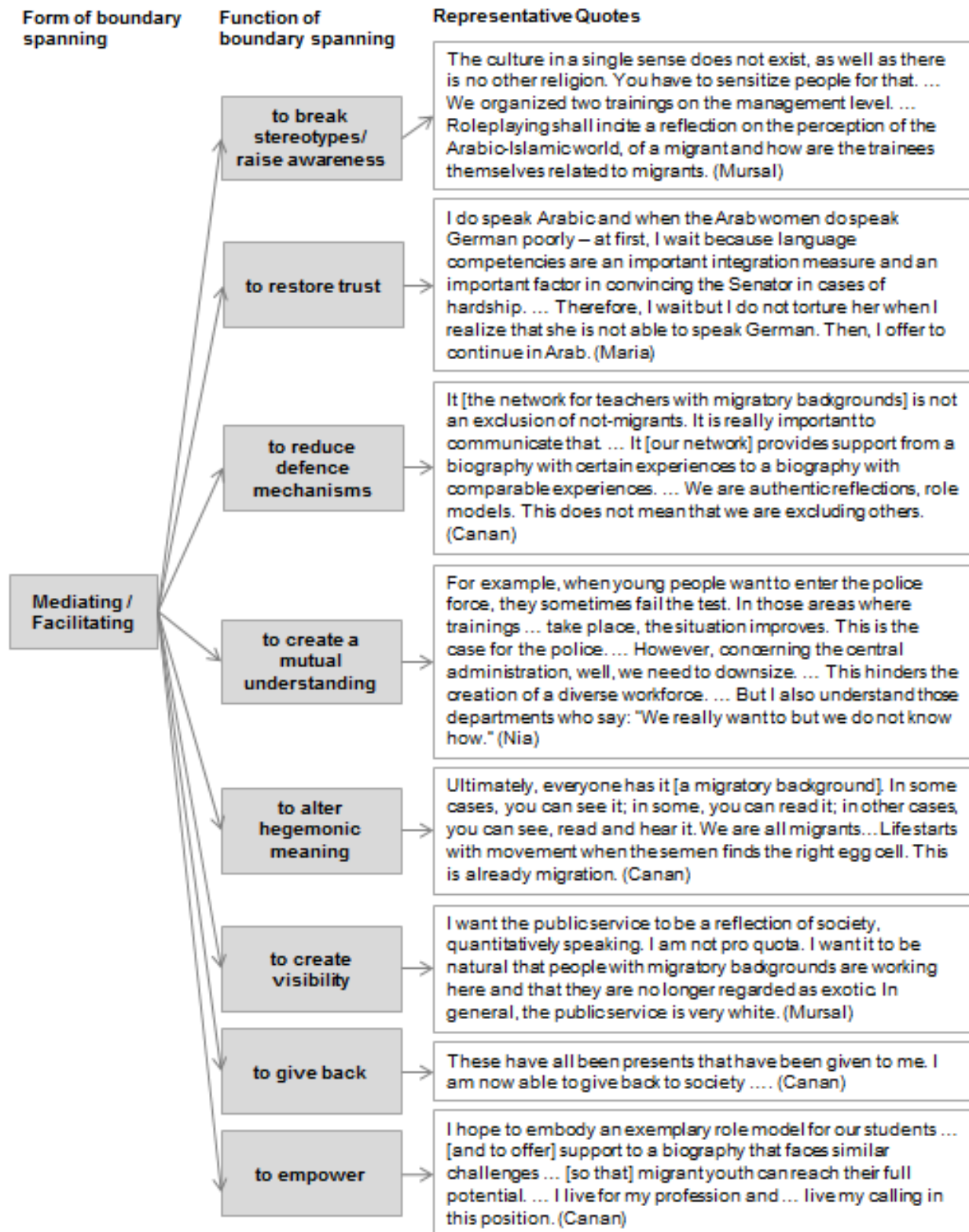
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**Figure 1.** Boundary spanning activities and functions across levels of analysis and addressee.

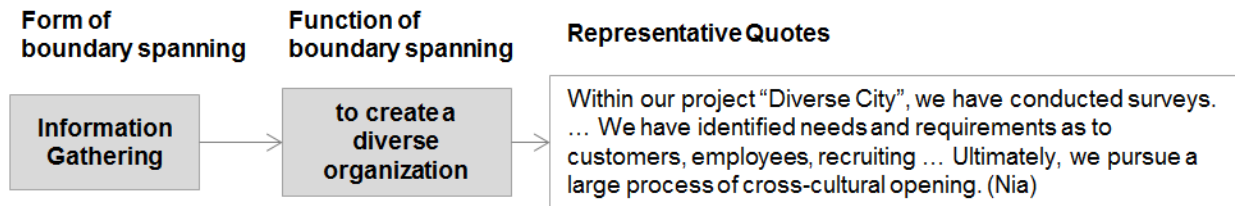
Dominant society	Both at the same time	Marginalized community		
<p><b>Mediating/Facilitating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to break stereotypes / raise awareness</li> <li>• to reduce defence mechanisms</li> </ul> <p><b>Networking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to incite self-reflection</li> </ul> <p><b>Innovating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to raise awareness</li> </ul>		<p><b>Mediating/Facilitating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to restore trust</li> <li>• to empower</li> </ul> <p><b>Networking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to empower</li> <li>• to provide recognition</li> </ul>	<p>Micro-level (individual)</p>	
<p><b>Information Gathering</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to create a diverse organization</li> </ul> <p><b>Networking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to connect theory and practice</li> <li>• to increase effectiveness</li> <li>• to build trust</li> <li>• to multiply impact</li> </ul> <p><b>Innovating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to connect theory and practice</li> <li>• to alter organizational power relations</li> <li>• to create a diverse organization</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mediating/Facilitating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to create a mutual understanding</li> </ul>	<p><b>Networking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to build trust</li> </ul>		<p>Meso-level (organization)</p>
<p><b>Mediating/Facilitating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to alter hegemonic meaning</li> <li>• to give back</li> </ul> <p><b>Innovating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to foster antidiscrimination</li> </ul>		<p><b>Mediating/Facilitating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to create visibility</li> </ul> <p><b>Networking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to create visibility</li> </ul>		



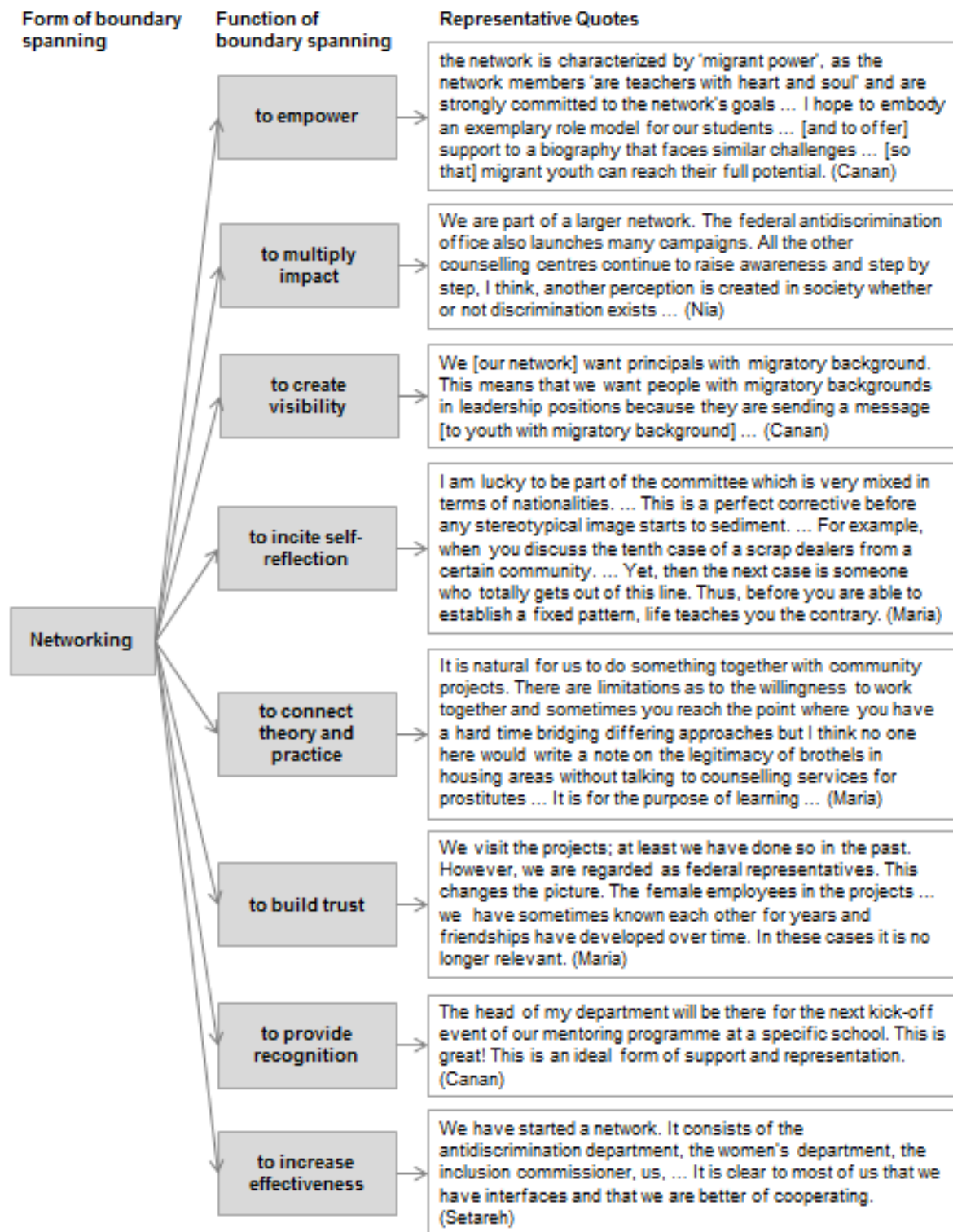
**Figure 2.** Examples from the data for functions of mediating and facilitating.



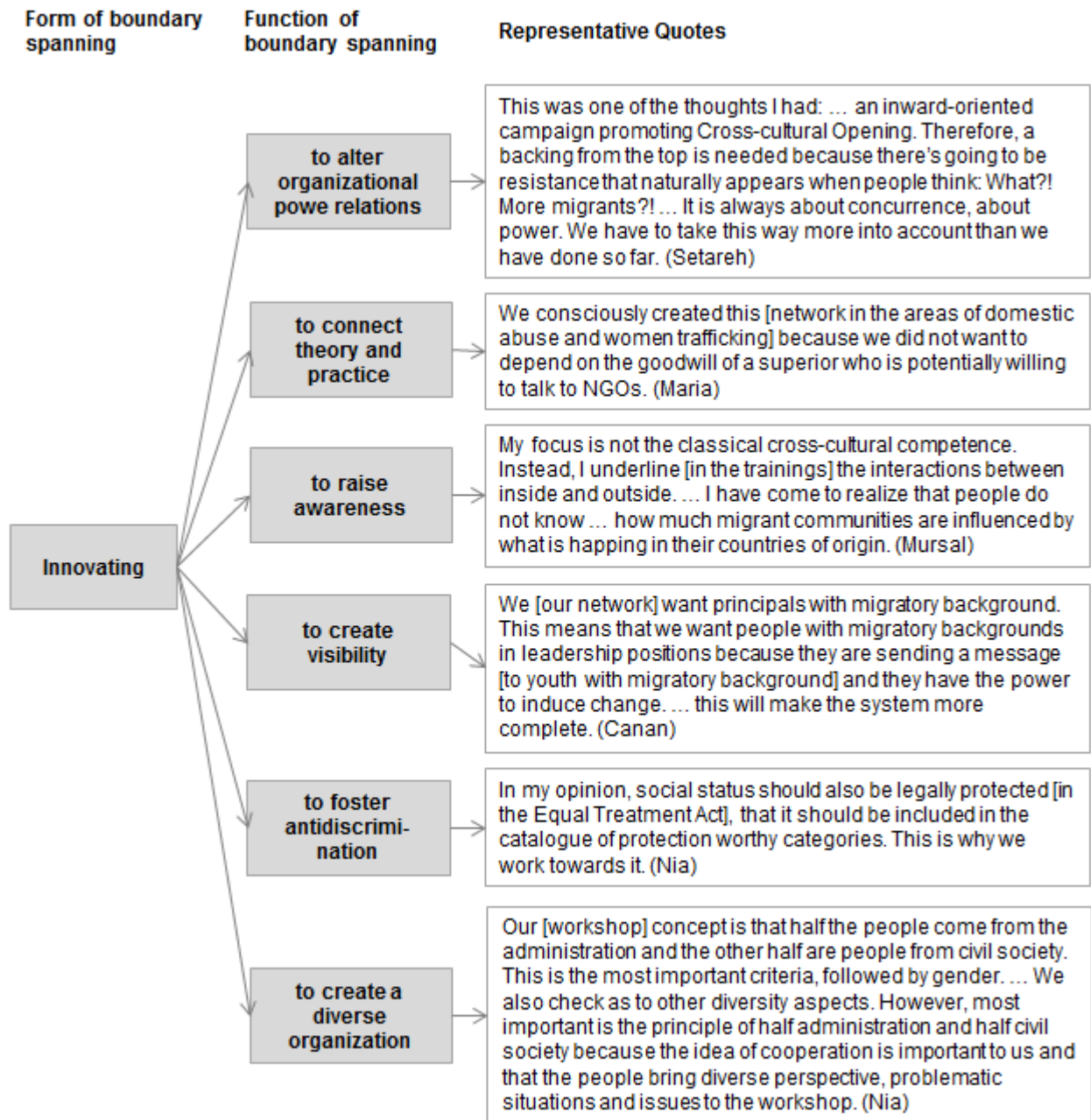
**Figure 3.** Examples from the data for functions of information gathering.



**Figure 4.** Examples from the data for functions of networking.



**Figure 5.** Examples from the data for functions of innovating.



## **Working Papers des Forschungsclusters OPAL der Helmut-Schmidt-Universität:**

- 01. Hintze, Astrid 2018:** Entwicklung und Implementierung einer Cluster-Dachmarke - Konzeptualisierung auf strukturationstheoretischer Basis am Beispiel des Luftfahrtclusters Metropolregion Hamburg
- 02. Collien, Isabel 2018:** Functions of boundary spanning in context: A postcolonial, power-sensitive perspective

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