Towards Interculturality: building on existing cultural experience

Cultural travel

Strange cultural practices which we can just work out

- Privacy, closing doors, running water, shoes on or off, bathroom arrangements
- Salt and pepper, showing numbers, talking to people
- Answering questions

What we carry with us and therefore make sense of when we get to other places

- And back, or on to the next place

Examples from narratives

- John’s memory of grandmother’s home – how to deal with difficult formalities – and bringing back understandings of social space
  - ... and so how I have learned to behave in an Iranian ‘shab-e sher’ Interculturality
    - English poetry (that resonates), protocols of the event (just another event)
- Jenna using the resource of hard work and preparation, and the example of kicking out teachers, to speak out in class – then being explained away with essentialist disbelief
- Safa buying cherries after years of waiting – after working it out
  - Also noting that ‘paying free’ is catching on at home with a very indigenous flavour
  - ... only to be accused by her childhood friend of corrupting the culture (even though there is Bob Dylan on her iPod) and her friend here of being Westernised

And from fiction (other people’s)

- We need new names – NoViolet Bulawayo (2013)
  - Child character supremely cosmopolitan
  - Untainted by adult discourses
    - Know all about aids despite parents’ traditional explanations
    - Not educated to be different
  - Juxtaposition of awarenesses
    - ... of indigenous (but somehow globalised) – funeral and worship (but critiqued)
    - ... and global (but localised in games) – finding bin Laden, singing Lady Gaga
    - Country games – country countries and not real countries
Seeing through NGO people
- ... similar familiar-strange perceptions in the US
- Overhearing adults speaking

### Outliers of recognition
- Wormholes to other places – through small culture formation
  - Family next door, every new experience
  - Globalised connections with other worlds - nothing new - even in the
- Complex matrix of experience, familiar and unfamiliar
- Reading Jane Austen helps travel to China
- Building autonomy on observation on memories

#### Always a political backdrop
- In every case not what we bring but what we meet

### Everywhere
- Decentred accounts of cultural travel
  - Between communities and generations (e.g. Adichie 2007, 2013; Davidar 2002; Sanghera, S. 2013; Selvadurai 1998)
  - Conflicts about language, tradition, modernity, values
- Discourses and statements of culture – grammar
- Global positioning and politics – grammar
- Methodological nationalism – but nation only becomes an issue when raised
- The politics of values
  - Not going far enough with the family next door – ‘don’t value politeness or critical discussion’

#### Potential travels and then meets adult issues - Darling

### Why the West non-West issue
- West bashing? (Stanley 2013: 45)
- Italian Sara going to Whitstable
  - No more strange than many places in Italy
  - As long as she has the language
  - Not a visible minority
  - But is travel really neutral?
    - Hierarchy of where to go. Work and opportunity vs. holidays
- Centre, Western construction of the rest e.g. Stuart Hall (1991, 1996)
The ‘West as steward’ discourse

- Tacit view – modernity and progress only in the West, and only learnt in the West
- ‘Our responsibility to help’
- ‘You are going so well’ (Wodak 2008)

Mirrored by similar discourse where long-standing aggression hides beneath a believed traditional cultural sense of doing what is good for the victims – narratives of Sikh families in Britain (Sanghera, J. 2007; Sanghera, S. 2013)

Different worlds

The emergent world – ‘the really real one’

- ‘critical cosmopolitan’ discourse of culture
- an unrecognised ‘real’ world
- all possible cultural activity
- whether recognised, misunderstood or thwarted
- ... depends on the resilience and perseverance, and the size of the resistance of prejudice (grammar arrows)

The established world – ‘the “real” one’

- the ‘essentialist culture and language’ discourse
  - plus softer versions – neo-essentialism – less essentialist but maintaining solid cultural boundaries
- provides the most common language for talking about culture – including in my narratives
- normalised as neutral and matter of fact – ‘thinking-as-usual’

The dominant imagined world – the ‘real’ problem

- underpins the established world
- world of ideology of which we are ‘standardly unaware’ (Fairclough 1995: 36)
- explains why the ‘West as steward’ discourse is so hard to see except by those who are critical of it – between the lines of the established world
- imagines the relationship between the Self and the Other
  - the established world does not recognise that what is being imagined as imagined or a discourse

The marginal world – what the established world likes to think it takes notice of

- speaks the ‘West versus the rest’ discourse

1 (Holliday 2014), developed from Holliday (2011: 188).
o ironically supports the ‘essentialist culture and language’ – self-Othering

o resistance against the prejudice of the essentialist definitions → polarised essentialist views (e.g. Asante 2008; Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini 2010; Miike 2008)

o hides more complex postmodern realities (Kim 2012; Kumaravadivelu 2008)

References

Kim, M.-S. (2012). Trends in intercultural communication research - from a research culture of war to a research culture of peace. Paper presented at the BAAL Special Interest Group in Intercultural Communication: intercultural communication in international contexts - training and development, practice and research, Open University, Milton Keynes.