Cultural travel and cultural prejudice

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Abstract: I will explore the argument that we are able to carry our cultural identities with us and build on them as powerful resources to engage with new cultural environments. There are however problems to be faced, in the form of prejudice and power structures, some of which operate at a global level of inequality. In looking at this, I will consider competing discourses of culture, which, in different ways, either contribute to or oppose a perceived and branded 'Western' failure to recognise the proficiency of perceived and branded 'non-Western' cultural realities. Deep prejudice remains hidden between the lines of apparent praise and recognition; and common statements about culture are too easily used as literal evidence for the essentialist theories of culture that feed these prejudices. At the same time there is evidence of unexpected movements of bottom-up globalisation, where marginalised communities claim the world with an alternative modernity. Furthermore, once we begin to understand these deeper cultural realities it becomes evident that we all have the potential for immense creativity in engaging with culture. Throughout, I will locate these discourses, prejudices and movements within the everyday manner in which we all go about our lives.

In this paper I address the broader theme of identity, representation and practices by looking at how these might operate in cultural travel. By cultural travel I mean moving from one cultural domain to another. While the major focus in intercultural communication studies considers travel to very different and far of locations, most often designated as foreign countries and whole foreign cultures, I will begin my discussion from the point of view of the travel we all carry out as we move through life, between what I have referred to elsewhere as small cultures – families, workplaces, friendship groups, sports clubs etc. In doing this I will explore the nature **[end of page 25]** of the experience that we all bring to cultural travel. The practices are what we engage with everyday and what we find when we travel; and on one level we have all the skills we need to engage with them. Identity and representation, I shall argue, are influenced by profound and influential discourses of culture that are locked into a global politics. I shall begin with some theoretical underpinnings of my discussion, and from this look at the conflicting discourses of culture and their implications.

Initial statement

My discussion is based on a number of premises that derive from a critical cosmopolitan view of culture (e.g. Beck & Sznaider, 2006; Delanty, 2006) and a social action model of society that derives from the sociology of Max Weber (1964). This first is that we can carry our cultural identities with us. This is very different to more traditional view that cultural travel means travelling

from one defined and separate national or regional culture to another and learning the new culture to be able to do this. We are not confined by essentialist cultural boundaries and can engage creatively in new cultural domains. Where we come from provides our most powerful resources in the form of our existing linguistic and cultural knowledge. These resources are unexpected and often unrecognised because the dominant view is that we have to learn everything about being in another place when we get there. Underlying universal cultural processes which we all share, and which enable all of us to engage with culture wherever we find it, enables these resources. This is built on our experience of everyday life, where we have to engage with and take part in constructing small cultures. To try to avoid the more closed essentialist perception, I shall use 'home' and 'abroad' to indicate the familiar that we are used to because of where we come from, and the far away, perhaps but not always in other countries. Instead of talking about different cultures I will refer to cultural environments and settings to indicate something with more open and interpretable boundaries, which can be small or large.

What we can work out

When we travel we will encounter unfamiliar cultural practices, which will often certainly be more unfamiliar the further we travel. However, they are still things that we can work out because of the experience that **[end of page 26]** we have of engaging with new practices in the places, both at home and abroad, where we have already been. There are examples of this in the narratives in Holliday (2013). These are constructed from interviews and observation of behaviour, sometimes put together with the researcher's own history. Methodologically, they follow the principles of creative non-fiction, in which characters and scenarios are constructed from ethnographic material to demonstrate observed social action (Agar, 1990). They also purposefully do not locate the characters in particular countries in order to make the point that much of what goes on at the intercultural level is universal in terms of underlying process and strategy.

One such narrative is about John, who stays with a family abroad (Holliday, 2013, p. 144). He is puzzled by the strange rules of privacy, where people do not close doors when doing private things like changing clothes. Other similar encounters might be the rules regarding washing up only under running water, the taking off of shoes in people's homes, but then not in others, what people have in bathrooms – showers with or without basins, in rooms with or without washing machines – whether the salt is in the dispenser with one or with many holes. What helps John, when faced with, for him, the completely foreign practice of a dinner party with no place settings, is his memory of visiting his grandmother's home at an early age, when he first had to deal with adjusting his sense of identity with unfamiliar formalities. This then leads him to see the connection with buffet suppers and picnics at home, where there are also no place settings. What first of all has appeared to him a chaotic disregard for personal space begins to make sense when amid the apparent hurly-burly of the foreign family event people excuse themselves for showing their backs to him. Then, when he asks *why* people don't close the door when changing their clothes, he is asked why he is looking. This experience abroad gives John an expanded understanding of personal space which he then carries with him back home and even uses the expression 'excuse my back' when in crowded settings there.

John's experience indicates that one does not have to know or be forewarned about unfamiliar cultural practices in preparation for travel. Instead, he is able to use some deeper cultural competence to work them out when he encounters them. He is able to ask questions to find out

what is going on. He might even find that by asking questions he will find out that the people who are already there are also asking questions and working things out. (See the unexpected discussion of eating habits in **[end of page 27]** Holliday (2013, p. 40).) This also tells us something about interculturality, which can be defined as a 'dynamic process by which people draw on and use the resources and processes of cultures with which they are familiar but also those they may not typically be associated with in their interactions with others' (Young & Sercombe, 2010, p. 181). At home I occasionally attend a poetry reading evening run by the local Iranian community. My Farsi is good enough to understand large parts of what people say, but not the poems themselves. I have however acquired I think a strong aesthetic appreciation for their rhythms and sounds with not insignificant knowledge of probable histories behind them. English is of course also very much there in the gathering; and I am able to communicate with an English that carries Iranian cultural reference, with a large dose of Iranian linguaculture.

I take the notion of linguaculture from Risager, who states that it is a cultural 'language resource' which can be carried from its language of origin to other languages. For example, 'people carry their Danish language resources with them into new cultural contexts and perhaps put them to use in new ways under new circumstances' (2011, p. 107). She continues: 'when I as a Dane move around the world, I tend to build on my Danish linguaculture, when I speak English, French or German. I therefore contribute to the flow of Danish linguaculture across languages' (p. 110). It is therefore possible for me to recite an English poem that I feel resonates with the atmosphere and protocols of the event. I share fully the anxiety and humility of having to read that I feel the company expresses; and I choose something with a content that I think touches the experiences of the audience. Of course, all sorts of things mediate the degree to which I can be successful. All of this is also highly interpretable. However, for the other people there, who like me are not practised poets, but exiles from a wide range of Iranian backgrounds in Britain searching for a heritage identity, a poetry reading is also a precarious event. In this sense, we are all in this together. They might bring language and poems in that language, while I bring other things. It would be a natural extension of the personal trajectories of the Iranian poetry readers to carry their backgrounds into English and to colonise it.

Everyone must find resources from the past to bring to unfamiliar cultural events, whether they are poetry readings within their own communities or events abroad. Jenna, a university student abroad, who has been labelled quiet and therefore uncritical by home students, takes **[end of page 28]** courage and uses the traditions she brings with her of hard work, preparation and occasional student revolution against teachers, to enable her to speak out in class (Holliday, 2013, p. 64). Safa, also far away from home, takes years of careful research into local behaviour before she finds the moment and the place to introduce her home tradition of buying cherries for colleagues at work (p. 149). This means that wherever we go there are somehow outliers of recognition that help us to work out what is going on. These are like wormholes to other places through the medium of small culture formation that acts as a universal medium for interculturality that works everywhere. For many of us this begins with our experience of the family next door or somewhere else completely different to our beginning experience of life at home. Immediately, in new environments as children we have to work out who we are in constant negotiation of how to be with others.

A not immediately obvious principle, which is at the centre of this thinking, is that reading the British 19th century novelist Jane Austen can help us travel to China. How can this be when

Jane Austen's novels are about what might seem to be a different society – a different culture – to that of China? The point is that her novels provide us with a profound analysis of how a particular society operates. It is a society that is alien even to the British reader, separated by 200 years that have involved massive shifts in civilisation. Yet the British reader can still find resonances because there is a complex detail to which they can apply their tacit knowledge of how culture operates everywhere. Perhaps this connection is fired by a belief that we have a history in her settings and characters. However, this resonance also travels, as with all good literature, because it provides underlying sociological insights which can be applied to any society, including China. These are the underlying structures and relations that apply to all societies everywhere.

Destructive forces

There are however other forces which act against our ability to find ourselves as travellers in cultural domains abroad, and which act against the human potential to understand each other. The same underlying universal cultural processes that enable us to engage with culture across boundaries also provide us with prejudices and power structures that inhibit this travel. Apart from the normal communication difficulties that we all have on a daily basis, it is not our cultural backgrounds that cause **[end of page 29]** difficulties when we travel; it is instead the prejudices which we face and which we also carry with us.

Our histories and national narratives lead us to perceptions of global inequality and superiority. They set us apart with 'us'-'them' imaginations as we compete for territory and capital. 'Culture' here takes on a different meaning to that of the underlying processes that enable us to be with each other. We use the term to state our imagined exclusivity of civilisation. In this sense, whenever culture is mentioned as a term that relates to a particular nation, people, religion, and so on, it is always political and ideological. It is embroiled in an everyday Self and Other politics where we make statements about culture that demonise others and idealise ourselves, or vice versa (e.g. Delanty, Wodak, & Jones, 2008; King, 1991).

Recognising that culture is politically and ideologically constructed represents a constructivist approach within a postmodern paradigm. Here a particular culture with permanent defining attributes is not a real, measurable, tightly definable thing. Such a particular culture is therefore less an objective reality than a projection in the minds of the people who make reference to it. This projection, realised by statements about culture, what people say about it, upholds a particular ideology – for example that 'Western culture' exclusively values 'the democratic self-determination of the individual'. A useful definition of ideology in this respect is that it is a way of presenting knowledge about the world that serves a particular interest (Spears, 1999, p. 19). The particular interest is political, which, in the case of culture, is 'us'-'them' positioning either on a global or local level. The political outcome of the above example is that the West therefore claims the licence to impose a moral governance across the world. At a more local level, a particular commercial company may project a culture that serves an exclusivity in honest dealing and quality of product through which it can claim a superior position in the politics of the marketplace.

There are a number of competing and powerful discourses of culture that serve these ideologies. In this respect, a useful definition of discourse is a way of deploying language, or other forms of communication, which constructs things in a particular way (Stuart Hall, 1996, p. 201, citing Foucault) and which supports the larger ideology. Discourses are therefore the day-to-day

realisation of the ideology and can be seen at work in the language and imagery deployed in official documents, the media, what people say to each other, and so on. Hence the importance of critical discourse analysis in studies of ideology (e.g. Fairclough, 2013). Ideologies **[end of page 30]** are essentially positions, arguments and interpretations of reality. While they incur huge power, they are also therefore soft, fluid, flexible. So too, discourses can shift and swirl, serve different ideologies, and can be employed in different ways, at different times. This is demonstrated by Baumann's ethnography of a London suburb, where people from what might commonly be thought of as different cultures, communities or ethnicities, express and contest multiple discourses around these terms in a multiplicity of ways:

> The same person could speak and act as a member of the Muslim community in one context, in another take sides against other Muslims as a member of the Pakistani community, and in a third count himself part of the Punjabi community that excluded other Muslims but included Hindus, Sikhs, and even Christians. (Baumann, 1996, p. 5)

Figure 1: Competing worlds[1]

Established world
Dominant Centre discourses
Normalised, 'neutral'
essentialist culture and language discourse

Imagined marginal world
'West versus the rest' discourse
Resisting prejudice and being defined
Imagines all difficulties come from Western cultural norms

Emergent world
Unrecognised cultural abilities and contribution
Criticality and autonomy on own terms
Bottom-up globalisation
Critical cosmopolitan discourse

Dominant imagined world
Non-Western people must learn from the West
Top-down globalisation
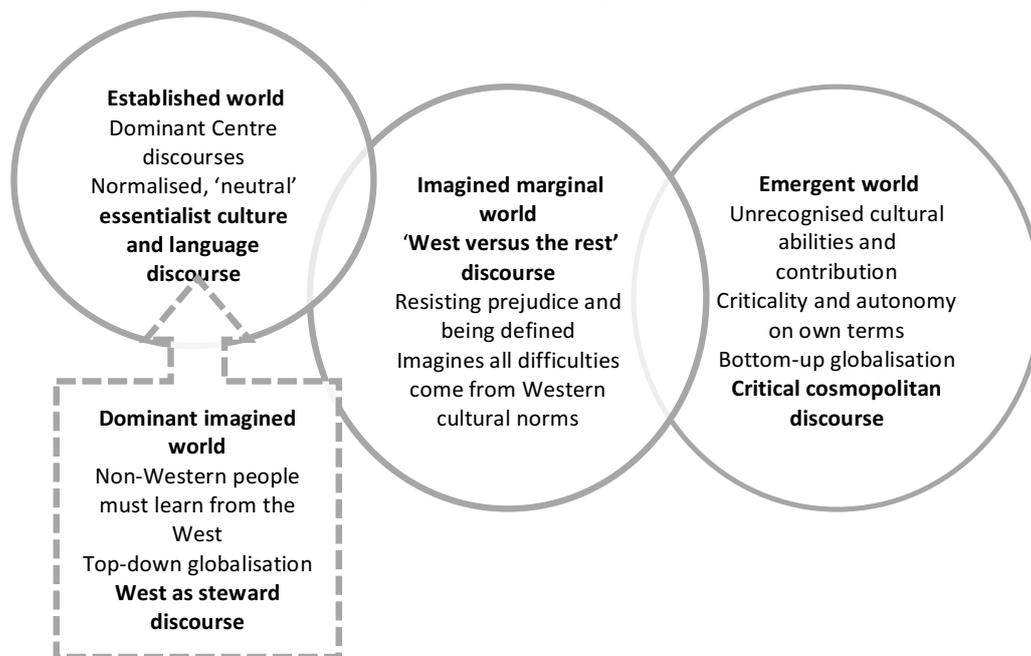**West as steward discourse**

Figure 1 maps how competing discourses of culture operate in very different ideological worlds. I use 'world' as in 'worlds apart' or 'you belong to a different world to me' – totally different realities that might inhabit the **[end of page 31]** same space – to illustrate how it is possible to look at the same thing and yet see it as completely and utterly different. 'The same thing' in the figure is the relationship between the West and the non-West, the Centre and the Periphery, or, as Hannerz (1991, p. 107) defines these concepts, those who always feel defined and those who are perceived to always do the defining. In focusing on the West–non-West divide I follow Stuart Hall (1996) in feeling that the West-rest divide is a powerful force in global politics, at least in the minds of very many people who identify themselves as non-Western.

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[1] Figure 1 is adapted from Holliday (2011a, p. 188) by including discourses of culture taken from Holliday (2013, pp. 101-124). See also my description of these discourses in Holliday (2014b), and of a similar version of the figure in Holliday (2014a).

This presentation of competing worlds is of course my own interpretation, coloured deeply by my own critical cosmopolitan and social action viewpoints within a postmodern paradigm. However, both these worlds and my defining of the discourses that project them, are only 'ideal types', another borrowing from Max Weber (1968). This means that the definitions of these worlds and their discourses are strictly temporary, heuristic categories that survive only for the purpose of aiding analysis. I shall deal with each world in turn.

The 'real' world

On the left of Figure 1 is the established world that many believe to be 'real' in the way in which culture is perceived. Here, the dominating discourse is the essentialist culture and language discourse. This states that cultures of large populations (e.g. national, continental, religious) are separate entities, each with their particular characteristics that define and confine the essential traits and values of the people within them; and language is thought to have a major defining role. This is therefore diametrically opposed to the postmodern view. Rather than recognising culture as ideologically constructed, this discourse states that ideology is a feature of the culture itself. This positioning of ideology has the important implication that this discourse is perceived to be a positivist truth and therefore not a discourse and not itself ideological. The essentialist cultural and language discourse is therefore reified as the normal perception of how things are – '"common sense" assumptions of which people are generally unaware (Fairclough, 2013, p. 2). This might even be considered to be the way in which most of us talk about culture both in the academy and in society generally. It has taken on the role of the neutral, matter of fact, 'thinking-as-usual' way of talking about things.

This view of culture is further strengthened in its establishment by the **[end of page 32]** essentialist cultural and language discourse appearing to address recent critiques of intercultural essentialism and acknowledging cultural diversity. However, in what I have termed a neo-essentialist approach, this does no more than adapt the discourse by saying that the diversity is strictly within the old fixed cultural boundaries (Holliday, 2011b, pp. 7-8). This results in soft, neo-essentialist projections of interculturality and intercultural training where the aim is confined to tolerating of the values and practices of 'other cultures' through a critical awareness of the values and practices of one's 'own culture'. It is like a show and share encounter; and there continues to be a denial of ideological standpoints in this process.

The 'real' problem

But what are these ideological standpoints that are being denied? These are revealed in the hidden and unrecognised *dominant imagined world,* which underpins the established world with dominant imaginations about culture. This is the ideological world that resides between the lines of the established world. The West as steward discourse of culture that characterises this world is therefore shadowy yet persistent, and hard to see except by those who are critical of it. This discourse says that modernity and progress reside in only the West.

An example that reveals this discourse is the differentiation between collectivist cultures (group oriented, hierarchical, indirect, traditional) and individualist cultures (self-direction, innovative, autonomy, direct, organising, planning ahead). In the established world, the essentialist culture and language discourse presents this differentiation as purely descriptive and neutral. It is however revealed by those who critique this position that collectivism is instead a

Western construction of cultural deficiency (Kim, 2005; Kubota, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Therefore, within the West as steward discourse, a constructed Western Self claims a monopoly of individualist cultural attributes and excludes a constructed non-Western Other from being able to have them unless they are learnt from the so-called West. This results in a complicated mission of stewardship which is deeply patronising but hides under a powerful veneer of well-wishing. Its subscribers genuinely believe that they *support* people from 'non-Western cultures' – either by *respecting* their imagined collectivist values or by *helping* them to acquire individual-ist attributes.

The workings of this West as steward discourse can be seen in an unpleasant twist in the narrative about Jenna described above. Once Jenna **[end of page 33]** has, in her own terms, succeeded in speaking out in class, one of the home students wants to make friends with her and to praise her, not for the new visibility of where she comes from, but for having become like them. There is no doubt that this praise is well-wishing. The more sinister side of the discourse is well hidden beneath this euphoria. Jenna nevertheless sees through it, and feels that being told 'You are doing so well' is deeply patronising because it sounds as though it is unexpected that she should be doing well because of her cultural background. Her prior cultural experience is discounted to the extent that it is thought that she can only do well because of what she has learnt in the West. Moreover, when Jenna points out that not all the home students speak out in class, it is explained to her that this is because they come from an individualist culture and therefore have free choice whether to speak or not. The implication here is that Jenna does not have free choice because she comes from a collectivist culture. Therefore, speaking out in class is constructed as not possible for someone from her culture so that she *must* have learnt it from 'here'.

The thinking, which can be seen here at an interpersonal level, also has global implications. It hides imperialism under the 'well-wishing' agenda. It claims to protect other people's people who are being killed by their own people, as long as they are the underdog and learning from 'us'. It condones military action in support of this cause – to save their people – killing other people's people in the name of democracy and self-determination, so that they can be educated Zimmerman (2006) provides an example of this educative imperialism in his study of the journals of early American Peace Corp volunteers. Though not named as a West as steward discourse, it has been critiqued within postcolonial studies and the Orientalism thesis (e.g. Said, 1978; Sangari, 1994). The dominant imagined world also resonates with what might be termed a top-down globalisation which serves Western markets (Bhabha, 1994, p. xiv; Canagarajah, 1999, pp. 207-209; Fairclough, 2006, p. 40).

The imagined marginal world

This world, in the centre of Figure 1 is what the established world likes to think it takes no-tice of. The dominant discourse here is the 'West versus the rest' discourse, which says that the West is dominating the way culture is defined as 'normal', 'desirable', 'proficient' or 'defi-cient'. It therefore acknowledges the politics implicit in the West as steward discourse. In global politics it has fuelled popular resistance against Western hegemony **[end of page 34]** in defence of the marginalised cultural values of the non-West in science and the academy (e.g. Asante, 2008; Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini, 2010; Miike, 2008; Qureshi, 2010).

There is however a problematic aspect to the 'West versus the rest' discourse. It ironically supports the 'essentialist culture and language' discourse of the established world. It is fired by resistance against the prejudice of the essentialist definitions imposed upon it; yet to get its message across it needs to have its own but obviously oppositional essentialist concepts that can be understood within the essentialist mind-set. This in effect, this reverse 'essentialist culture and language' discourse has been labelled by some as self-Othering, self-essentialising or self-marginalising (Kim, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). There has however been an association of a It might indeed be argued that the manufacturing of oppositional but equally essentialist counter definitions is the most effective way to package and make understood what cannot be imagined by the established world. It however supports the established world in its divisive cultural relativism.

At an interpersonal level this resistance and this conflict can be seen in the narrative about Safa, above. Despite her sustained struggle to introduce the cultural practice from home of buying cherries for her colleagues while abroad, she is accused by her friend from home of having betrayed and corrupted her home 'culture' by being supportive of the introduction of the foreign practice of paying for oneself when eating out with friends (Holliday, 2013, p. 149). Safa is horrified at this accusation. She has certainly noted this foreign practice. At first she also found it very distasteful because of the clumsy way that people went about calculating how much they owed. She then adopted it because of its practicality. She also noted it had surprisingly become fashionable at home, regardless of her own actions. However, she felt that this was not so much a cultural invasion as an appropriation very much on the terms of the people who had adopted it. The practice has taken on a very indigenous flavour. It is labelled 'paying free', and the young people who do this seem, to Safa, far more organised than their clumsy foreign counterparts. Safa also notes that her friend who has accused her has Bob Dylan on her iPod and doesn't seem to think that this is a betrayal of her so-called 'culture'.

Safa's friend represents the 'West versus the rest' discourse; but Safa's response indicates a different interpretation. It represents the more complex postmodern realities that are pushed even further out of site by the imagined marginal world. **[end of page 35]**

The emergent world – 'the really real one'

These hidden realities reside within the emergent world. The critical cosmopolitan discourse that characterises this world is the one that drives this paper. It acknowledges the complexity of cultural realities that are unrecognised and marginalised by the established world. It is associated with the unmarked experience of everyday life and the world that Safa and Jenna attempt to access when they struggle to introduce cultural creativity on the basis of their own backgrounds. They do what they can with all their resources both brought and observed, from their immense stores of underlying universal cultural knowledge and competence. They are therefore critical cosmopolitan actors; but whether they are recognised, misunderstood or thwarted is to do with their resilience and perseverance, or with the size of the prejudicial resistance that they face from the established and imagined marginal worlds and the pushing and pulling of the everyday struggle for cultural recognition. In contrast to the top-down globalisation of the established world, this struggle represents a bottom-up, de-centred globalisation, whereby the centre stage is claimed from the unrecognised margins, as indicated by Stuart Hall (1991).

De-centred research and the value of fiction

De-centred research methodologies are required to recognise and record the often hidden nature of this struggle for the centre stage because more traditional methods will often find it harder to get to the bottom of what is going on here. My own use of creative non-fiction in the stories of Jenna, Safa, and John falls into this category. Connections can be drawn out in these narratives that would require a lot of data or that may not come out at all in more traditional data sets. Simply asking people about their intercultural encounters might well lead them to draw on the thinking-as-usual or common sense discourses of culture fund in the established and imagined marginal worlds. Creative non-fiction has allowed me to search around between different experiences and often in between the lines of what people tell me, to come up with thick descriptions of what seems to be going on. By thick description I mean precisely that – a piecing together of bits of evidence to create a bigger picture – gong deeper to get at the cultural meaning (Geertz, 1993, p. 6). By de-centred I mean that the meaning is not the one established by those dominant discourses, but hidden in the de-centred emergent world. This does not mean that interviews cannot be useful. Indeed, they have formed part of the evidence **[end of page 36]** that contributes to the creative non-fiction. But they also need to work hard to help the participant dig deep between the lines of their own accounts. The test here is the emergence of what both the interviewer and the interviewee find unexpected (Holliday, 2012).

Another place where de-centred meanings can be found is in fictional literature which itself comes from the emergent world. This falls within the overall category of post-colonial fiction,; but the novels I am thinking of are particular accounts of cultural travel with migrant or minority writers who project a de-centred voice. They are written by people, perhaps a little like Safa and Jenna, who have travelled from what might be considered the Periphery, the non-West, the margins, the emergent world, to the West or on response to a Western domain. In every setting, from very small to very large, there are conflictual relationships between people who knowingly or unknowingly define (i.e. Centre), and those who are resignedly, unhappily or angrily defined (i.e. Periphery).

In every case they describe a sophistication, individuality and modernity, which is unexpected of people from their backgrounds. *Americanah,* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013) in my view expresses the full range of the critical cosmopolitan discourse as she recounts the linguistic, race and identity politics surrounding the travel of a Nigerian student to the US. Her rich description of an unrecognised, critical modernity is also seen in her (2007) novel about the 1967 Biafra conflict; and she explains the difficulty of a whole nation being represented by an exoticised 'single story' in her (2009) TED Lecture.

In *We need new names*, by NoViolet Bulawayo (2013a), we see a ten-year-old child character in a shanty town in Zimbabwe who is supremely cosmopolitan despite a lack of formal education, which may even add to her deep criticality. She and her friends have a literacy for talking about aids despite the taboos of her parents' generation (p. 102); they secretly witness a funeral ceremony and questions its practices (p. 104); they play 'finding bin Laden' and sing Lady Gaga songs; encountering Western NGO people, they comment on the uselessness of their handouts of plastic toys and that they can't see where they are looking through their sunglasses (p. 58). In their observations there is a deep blend of local and global aspiration. Reflecting both their feelings about the world order and their own positioning within it, they play the 'country-game', distinguishing between the 'country-countries' of the West, which they really want to go to, and

the 'rags of countries' like their own (p. 50). When **[end of page 37]** the main character then gets to the USA she experiences the way in which people from her background are marginalised and misunderstood. The novel seems to support the critical cosmopolitan discourse throughout. However, as with Safa's accusation by her friend, when she calls her playmates back home, there is the inevitable twist to the dominant 'West versus the rest' discourse as they accuse her of having left and betrayed her culture by going to the US.

The tension between these discourses is present in everyday conflicts about tradition, modernity, and values. Immensely destructive cultural prejudice exists everywhere and is very often levelled at members of the same communities. The 'West as steward' discourse is therefore mirrored by similar discourse formations in many locations where long-standing aggression hides beneath a believed traditional cultural sense of doing what is good for the victims. This is very clear in the tradition-based violence in Jasvinder Sanghera's (2007) and Sathnam Sanghera's (2013) stories about in Sikh communities in Britain.

It does need to be remembered that where this is fiction, these are still author's interpretations of what they experience. NoViolet Bulawayo may well not herself have experienced being a child in a shantytown. She explains that the child character in her novel was inspired by a photograph of a child sitting on a pile of rubble, and that then thinking of such children, she was driven to explore 'what their stories were, and how those stories would develop' and 'by what children can stand for, by their innocence, their resilience, humanity and humour, and what they tell us about our world' (Bulawayo, 2013b).

It is these so often misunderstood worlds that desperately need to be researched and written about in whatever way is possible. It is the questions that people ask which makes the difference, and what aspects of peoples' lives are then focused on, and what is noticed about what we see around us. In Mehri Honarbin-Holliday's (2005, p. 11) ethnographic study of fine art students in two universities in Iran, there is a photograph of two women students sitting on a bench in the campus. They wear black hijab, dark blue 'overall' coats and blue jeans, and look what many would imagine to be the image of women somehow confined within a non-Western culture. However, one of them is holding an art book with a picture of Leonardo da Vinci and his *Mona Lisa* on the cover. One could follow the essentialist culture and language discourse, ignore the book because it doesn't seem to be part of 'their culture', and just ask them about their culture. **[end of page 38]** It would then be easy for them to feed back the essentialist culture and language stereotype. Alternatively, one could ask them about the book, but in a way that might lead them to talk about they engage with the book. Honarbin-Holliday finds the right moment to do this. She is witnessing of a life drawing session that the students organise at home because drawing the nude is illegal in the public domain of the university. There is another book about Italian art that she asks about; and one of the students explains how European art is a normal part of her education and that 'all of art history' is her 'heritage'. The researcher then explains that she is 'intrigued and inspired by this young woman' who 'draws a picture of her world' where 'her ideas, mind, and imagination can rise beyond geographical and cultural boundaries' (also Holliday, 2011b, pp. 98-99; Honarbin-Holliday, 2009, p. 77). However, the other side, which must not be forgotten, is that another researcher or any other visitor witnessing this event, may well respond with the essentialist culture and language or the 'West versus the rest' discourse and the view that young Iranian student taking part in a life drawing session means

that they are Westernised and betraying their culture. The student's own accounts may also be less direct than the one Honarbin-Holliday was lucky to hear.

Managing voices and sorting out voices

To take stock of the discussion so far, one interpretation of Figure 1 is that there are false appearances in the established and imagined marginal worlds that are represented by dominant but mistaken essentialist culture and language and 'West versus the rest' discourses. Then there are unrecognised realities in the emergent world that are represented by the critical cosmopolitan discourse. Within this tension, the people who are victims are Safa, Jenna, the Zimbabwean child, the Nigerian student travelling to the US, and so on – though they win out in the end through the critical cosmopolitan discourse. The perpetuators of this injustice are the people, the friends, family members, Western interlocutors and so on. The only way to recognise the unrecognised is to carry out postmodern research that digs deep enough to see it.

However, it is not as simple as that. The different worlds and their discourses can co-exist in the same people at different times. There are indeed some things that are hidden, more real than others, more just than others in terms of what is understood. This ambivalence and uncertainty should always be made room for in creative non-fiction, where there are **[end of page 39]** always other interpretations about the various characters and their intentions. It is always good when students note these other possibilities. It might also be noted that in the narratives in Holliday (2013), even the characters who subscribe to the critical cosmopolitan discourse often continue to use the language provided for them by the established essentialist culture and language discourse when they continue to talk about this culture and that culture. The value of excellent fiction is that, by its nature, it shows this richness. And any good data chapter discussing interview data should pause cautiously in its consideration of what the data extracts actually show. This is the value of thick description, which considers carefully multiple realities, meanings and interpretations.

Let us therefore reconsider Safa and the Iranian art student as examples. Who knows what else Safa did or said to get the reaction she gets from her friend; and what motives might really be behind her friend's response? Who knows what else the Iranian student might have said to another person on another day when she was feeling less upbeat about Italian art? The researcher tells me that another student explains that, while she would prefer to explore the Italian style, she is painting a miniature in the traditional Iranian style just because there are foreign visitors and this is what they would expect (Honarbin-Holliday personal communication). Well, she might be saying that now, reflecting on how she appeared to the visitors, or to others; but at the time she may have had other thoughts and motives, perhaps actually wanting to display this part of who she was. Perhaps, at different times and for different reasons she might even want to appear, or flirt with being 'Western' – to wear the concept, for a moment, like a fashion item. The point is that she can; she has the capacity and the knowledge. Right from her childhood she knows all about playing with images for the best effect. The Western image has been available to her all her life through the media; and she can own it and do what she wishes with it. Bulawayo's teenagers above show that the exposure does not have to be great as they play with Lady Gaga. Amadasi (2014) demonstrates well this ability to play with discourses and images of culture in her study of conversations with young Italian teenagers from diverse migrant backgrounds as they negotiate their identities. Research is also beginning to emerge about how people use statements about culture strategically to gain social capital, for example in the case

of Chinese students in a British university feeding their tutors with the standard stereotype (Grimshaw, 2008). **[end of page 40]**

The point may therefore not be to try too hard to sort out what is real and not real, but instead to acknowledge all these layers. Whatever this is, it is leaving far behind the old positivist explanation that culture X can be defined and used to explain behaviour X. It also means that all claims about culture – statements about culture – do need to be taken as claims and statements, and not as evidence for putting people in their place according to some Othering and confining definition of who they are. We recognise this diversity of complicity in our politicians, in advertising, in the acrobatics of the media. The important thing is to recognise that everyone can participate in such creativity, and not just those from imagined individualist cultures. We must learn not to be like Jenna's friend who thinks that for 'us' this negotiation is creative and strategic while for 'them' it's deceptive, duplicitous, subservient or conformist. At the same time we must not tolerate the claims of our leaders that they are taking us to war and bombing others for the simplistic reasons of culture that they give.

The broader implication is that we can all engage with people from other cultural backgrounds in not dissimilar ways to how we engage with people from more familiar backgrounds. They may be very different to us in terms of religion, education, family structure, eating habits and preferences for relationships; but we can still do things together, work things out together, and share the basic things about life. At the same time, the constraints of power, politics, hierarchies, status, class, and so on, will work against this engagement in all cases. They will be harder to recognise in less familiar settings; and it may be harder to learn them.

To return to the broader theme of identity, representation and practices, the above discussion indicates that the way in which identity is represented by ourselves and others can be mediated dramatically by powerful discourses of culture and the ideologies that they represent. While these discourses can be long-standing and embroiled with a global and local politics that may be beyond our control, we may also have the resilience to play with these forces, depending on how powerful and sinister they are. The implication for intercultural communication is that we always need to look for deeper to see who people might be and be wary of the discourses that pretend to represent them. There is nevertheless a global crime. All of us have experienced being misunderstood, not being appreciated by all that we can be and do. The domination of the established world brings this interpersonal crime to whole swathes of the world. It needs however to be noted that Safa's deeper identity is not only rejected by her new friends **[end of page 41]** abroad, but also by her childhood friend from home. Safa also has to struggle to overcome the established discourses that try to reduce her. We can therefore all, both perpetrators and victims, be taken in and perhaps be somehow complicit; and this can serve all sorts of personal and community as well as global purposes. **[end of page 42]**

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