Critical and 'alternative' models of culture
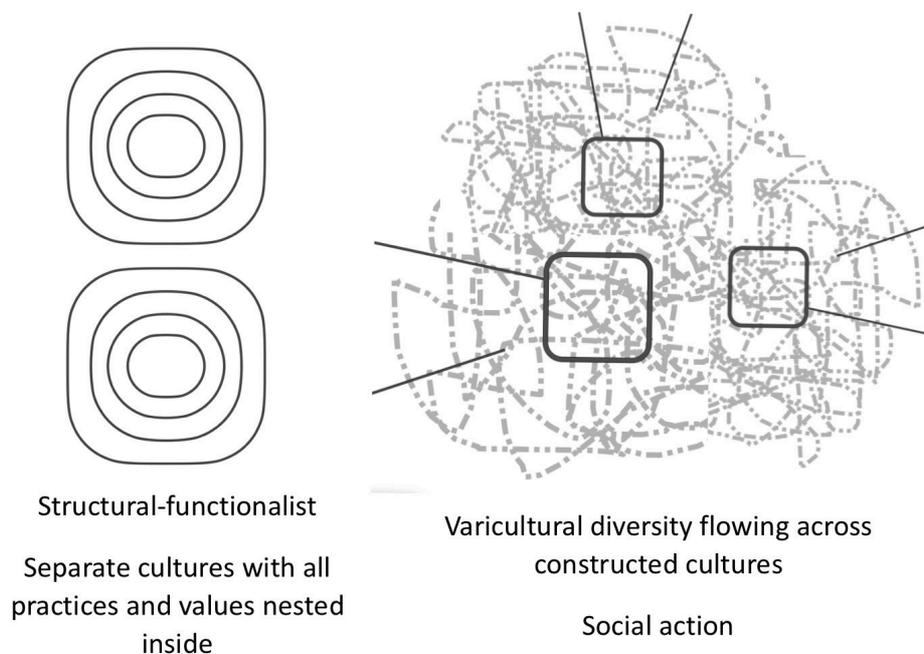
My continued sense-making

Small cultures (1999), the intercultural and ideology (2011), grammar of culture (2019), **small culture formation on the go** and third spaces (2022a, 2022b; 2020), **variculturality** (Holliday 2023a, 2023b)

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Three basic social theories

- Emile Durkheim, structural-functionalism (1893/1964)

- Max Weber, social action (1922/1964)

- Karl Marx, political ideology, and the possibility of false consciousness (Engels 1934).

Figure 1: Competing models

Structural-functionalist

Separate cultures with all practices and values nested inside

Varicultural diversity flowing across constructed cultures

Social action

Structural-functionalist (Emile Durkheim 1893/1964)

- All the parts function in synchrony with the whole
    - Families, classrooms, businesses, friendship groups (small cultures), language and behaviours, have the same practices and values as the whole
- Cultures define and confine all our practices and values
- Moving from one culture to the other requires difficult, new, competence
- **Hybridity** is a new blurring of boundaries caused by globalisation (Kramsch & Uryu 2020)
- **Positivist** - beginning with established description and finding examples
- Continues to be influential
    - Simplicity and usefulness - prediction, comparison, explanation
    - Concepts such as dysfunctional and deviance

- **Easy** positivism and apparent science of national cultural profiling (e.g. individualism vs. collectivism, low-context vs. high-context) (Bolten 2014; Hofstede 2003; Lewis 2005; Triandis 2006)
- **Methodological nationalism** (Beck & Sznaider 2006; Delanty 2006)
    - C19th European nationalism - one nation, one culture, one language

Varicultural (Holliday 2023a, 2023b)

- **Cultures are constructed**
- **Social construction of reality** (Berger & Luckmann 1966/1979)
    - National or civilisational identities, state intervention, institutions and systems, the media, art forms etc.
    - Corporate, workplace, community, family, subcultural, friendship etc.
        - lasting or fleeting with clearly defined or highly transient membership
- **Very real** and sometimes crucial to the identities of the people associated with them (Antonsich et al 2016), but **not confining and defining**
- We pass in and out of small cultures
    - In **Southall** people identified with different religious and community cultures depending on circumstances (Baumann 1996)
    - **Thinking-as-usual** is always being redefined (George Simmel 1908/1950)
- **Threads of hybridity** flow across and between constructed cultures
    - We are all many things
    - Eating, greeting, politeness, formality, arranging, dressing, buildings, spaces, music, language
        - **Are they that difficult to learn** if we don't have prejudices?
    - **There will always be something we recognise** - otherwise we could never travel
    - As we always were before colonisation and nationalist organising
        - **Translingualism** (Canagarajah 2018; Li 2018)
        - Recovering **unrecognised identities** (Stuart Hall 1991b)
- **We** create, design and develop culture

    Example: working in a shop, learning and conforming with a particular culture of behaviour, leaving it behind when we go home, but perhaps being influenced by it. (Holliday 2021)

Small culture formation on the go

Everyday making sense of, passing by, engaging or not engaging with the intercultural

- Positioning and repositioning
- Going to school, the family next door, distant travel
- With agency to **act** and change given the politics (Max Weber 1922/1964)
- Connecting with others through **threads of experience**

> Car journey with Chinese colleague. I can <u>choose</u> to talk about 'my culture, your culture' or 'work-life balance' (Holliday 2016b: 320, 322)
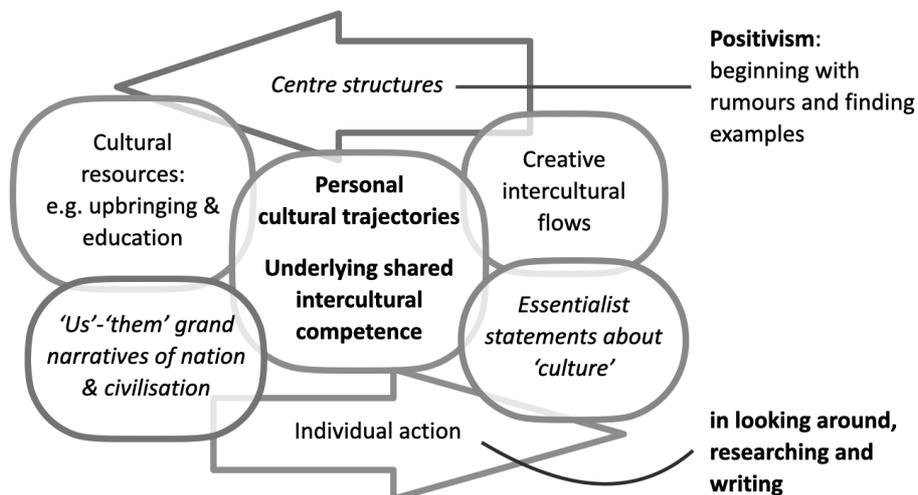>
> The strangeness of my grandmother's house helps me make sense of homes in Iran (if I put aside the Orientalist block) (Holliday 2022a: 36-37)
>
> Catching taxis in Iran forms the basis of future professionalism (ditto) (56-57)

<u>But</u> **also invaded** by essentialist, culturalist, even racist **blocks**

- **Easy answers** and **rumours** fed by the apparent objectivity of structural-functionalism
- 'Us'-'them' **grand narratives** of nation and civilisation
    - Splintered and normalised into our **personal narratives** (Goodson 2006; Lyotard 1979: 22; Wodak 2021: 106)

Figure 2: Grammar of culture

The source of blocks

- **Essentialism** - 'presents people's individual behaviour as entirely defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are' (Holliday 2011: 4)
- **Culturalism** - similarly conceived to racism and sexism - Depicting people as inferior or superior because of imagined cultural traits (Holliday 2011: 197)
- **Neo-Racism**
    - culture as a euphemism for 'race' (Hervik 2013; Spears 1999)
    - 'unwitting' racism related to 'culture or ethnic origin' (Macpherson 1999: 6.4, 6.17)
    - Cultural profiling of **so-labelled** 'international' students (Clark & Gieve 2006; Kubota & Lin 2009) - a **West as steward discourse** (Holliday 2016a; Holliday & Amadasi 2020)
    - 'We have to teach them critical thinking and self-direction'
        - **Very hard to shake because based on apparent 'well-wishing'**

- BUT 'collectivism' implies deficiency, also applied to underachieving US students (Kubota 2001)
- **Native-Speakerism** - that an idealised native language is required by the national culture - **L2-C2 fixation** (Holliday 2005, 2018)
- **Orientalism** (Edward Said 1978) - the West's imagination of the East (and the global South) as indolent (collectivist, lacking self-direction …)

> Example: 1975 Iranian student assignment. Parvaneh describes a classroom debate and says that she cannot speak because of pressures 'in her society' regarding women speaking out. (Holliday 2022a: 102-107)
>
> - Block (Orientalist, native-speakerist) interpretation: her culture, collectivist, high context, 'women are subjugated', lacks criticality.
>
> - Thread interpretation: women everywhere can feel intimidated in male-dominated events. Then I begin to see things not previously noticed: her overall critique of my teaching, reporting how other students feel, studying engineering at university, comparing teaching at British and American language centres, reading the same Russian novels as I do, critical discourse analysis of the debate topic ('Iranian women are only interested in getting married')
>
>   - My native-speakerist strategy to 'get them talking'; but actually hidden culturalism

'Postmodern' resistance

- Understanding that nation-culture-language claims are ideological grand narratives (Anderson 2006; Dervin 2011; Holliday 2011; Mannheim 1936; Mills 1959/1970)
- Critical cosmopolitan sociology (Delanty, Wodak & Jones 2008)
- Postcolonial theory (Hall 1991a, 1991b, 1996a, 1996b)
- We don't have to be Western to to modern (Holliday 2011)
- Postcolonial fiction (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie 2013; Lalami 2015)

> Iranian art students claiming that Italian Renaissance art is part of their heritage - claiming the world. (Honarbin-Holliday 2009: 77)
>
> Distant lands and distant times. 16th century. Moroccan Mustafa sells himself into slavery to survive European expansion. He notes how Europeans believe things just because they are said. In pre-Columbian Texas he becomes a travelling doctor and supports his masters who are now slaves. He notes the local people's modernity. On arrival in Mexico, the colonial authorities ask him to report that the people he saw are in need of civilising. (Holliday & Amadasi 2020: 25-28, citing Lalami)

Paradigm war

- Paradigm **recidivism** (Holliday & MacDonald 2020; Kuhn 1970)

- The academy sticking to old ideas
- **Neo-essentialism**
    - Accepting that there is creative diversity, but still within bounded large cultures
    - Lindholm & Mednick Myles (2017)
        - begin with statements about the hybrid and creative nature of culture (p.2)
        - **But** then fall back to Western versus Eastern, individualism vs. collectivism and high- vs. low-context (p.6) which then guide the rest of the book
    - UNESCO (2010: 3)
        - Opposes 'segregation and fundamentalism' and supports 'pluralism' and 'human rights'
        - **But**, implies a confining and defining role of 'culture' as 'the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group' (my emphasis).
    - Deardorff (2020: 4)
        - States that 'cultures are themselves multiple'
        - **But**, suggests a confining and defining role where where 'each culture is the sum of assumptions and practices shared by members of a group, distinguishing them from other groups' (my emphasis) and 'a nested series of progressively smaller groups'.

How to respond to what people say about 'their culture'

'In my culture we don't think critically'

'My culture values family and is relational'

'Our loyalty is to our parents before our wives and husbands'

'We couldn't experience modernity and individualism until we came to the West'

'When we learn English we are in danger of losing our culture.'

'I can't understand you because you're a non-native speaker'

'We visited three new cultures while on holiday'

'We like to experience new languages because they represent new values'

- Do people's statements about culture represent factual information about their cultures?
- Do they presents how the speaker wishes to position themselves? Strategic essentialism (Danius & Jonsson 1993). Are we always aware of how or why we are positioning ourselves (Fairclough 1995: 36)?
- How should we respond? (Like when people make sexist or racist statements)

Post script: brand new definitions (Holliday 2022a)

- Culture is 'creative, flowing, boundary-dissolving' and changing. It is something that we can be inspired by and align our identities with; but it does not confine or define us.

- 'A culture' is something that we construct or imagine contingent on particular circumstances (e.g. as an operational setting to research, as a political or emotional rallying point, or as a branding or disciplining mechanism in organisations)

- The intercultural as whenever and wherever we encounter cultural practices and values that cause us to position and reposition ourselves.

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