

Intercultural communication

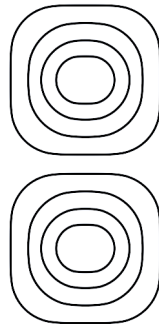
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This will introduce a non-essentialist approach to interculturality, therefore focusing on undoing the more traditional essentialist separated cultures model. It will look at how cultures are creative, inspiring, figurative and constructed rather than confining, limiting and separating. Rather than inhibiting cultural travel and migration, our existing cultural experience is our best resources. We will explore how the blocks to these threads are the prejudices we meet and bring with us. And how all of this takes place within a varicultural flow.

Readings for the seminar: Canagarajah (1993), Holliday (2025), Badwan & Hall (2020)

Competing social theories



Separated cultures



Cultures constructed within a varicultural flow

Separated cultures - established theory

Structural-functionalist - like biological organisms - the parts serve the function of the whole - each layer explained by the one above - classroom << national culture << civilisation (Emile Durkheim 1964/1893)

Positivist - always finding examples of dominant ideas - e.g. separate characteristics of each culture (Hofstede 2003; Triandis 1995)

'Western cultures are **individualist, low-context, direct** - self-direction, critical thinking

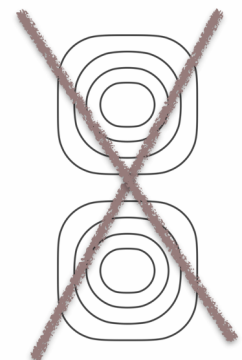
One nation, one culture, **one language**

Justifies **Orientalism** (Edward Said 1978) - Western imagination of the 'East as indolent' - **collectivist, high-context, indirect - group-thinking**

Native-Speakerism (Holliday 2006, 2021) - 'English is native to a superior Western culture'

West as steward discourse - 'we must help them to be critical and self-directed like us' (Delanty, Wodak & Jones 2008; Holliday 2016)

Essentialism: Othering, reducing people to stereotypes



Methodological nationalism - social science always beginning with nation << C19th European nationalism >> **colonialist organisation** (Beck & Sznaider 2006; Quijano 2007)

Alternative theories

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

Splintered and normalised into our **personal narratives** (Goodson 2006; Lyotard 1979: 22; Wodak 2021: 106)

Social action theory (Max Weber 1964/1922)

There is **no such thing as a collective personality which 'acts'**. When reference is made in a sociological context to a 'state', a 'nation', a 'corporation', a 'family', or an 'army corps', or to similar collectivities, what is meant is, on the contrary, *only* a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons. (p.102, his emphasis)

How does this relate to **relationality - everywhere?**

Postmodern (Ahmed & Donnan 1994; Crane 1994; Dervin 2011; Jordan & Weedon 1995; Morawska & Spohn 1994; Sangari 1994; Sarangi 1994; Schudson 1994; Spears 1999)

Social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann 1979/1966) - **constructivism**

Small and large cultures constructed within a **varicultural flow of seamless cultural diversity**

Threads of hybridity - not the result of globalisation - deCentred globalisation has always been there (Stuart Hall 1996: 631)

I heard people speak Venetian, Frankish, Saxon, Greek, Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Hebrew, and several other dialects I couldn't even distinguish. Despite their seemingly endless differences, all of these people gave off a similar air of incompleteness, of the **works in progress** that they were, each an **unfinished masterpiece** (Shafak 2010: 109)

While we Tamils worked creatively with our **multiple languages** to construct community, we also developed strategies to **resist unfair imposition** of other people's norms and values. We grew up with stories from our oral history on how our community members **outwitted the colonisers** through our multilingual resources. (Canagarajah 2022: 32)

Discussion of multilingual US STEM academics creating innovative ideas through **translanguaging** (Canagarajah 2018) and language students' **multicultural references** (1993)

Hybrid integration - making use of the cultural experience **we bring with us as a major resource** in new cultural settings

EU-funded CHILD-UP project to explore the **personal cultural trajectories** of migrant children in schools (Baraldi 2023)

Existing school structures are the major inhibitor

Cultural styles that we can all somehow make sense of:



Customs, stories, histories, national myths, traditions, institutions, rules for doing things, religious environments, food, practices of eating, sleeping, washing, greeting, treatment of guests and management of privacy, architectures of buildings, use and design of streets, use and arrangement of shops, use and arrangement of rooms, furniture and floor space, and so on, and what might be termed psycho-physical features such as proxemics, hand and face movements, ways of walking and standing

Constructed: Made, in the sense that we are **agents in the way in which we label and apply meaning to the world around us**. This can be social or political construction. Understanding this about society is sometimes referred to as constructivism

Small culture formation on the go

Everyday, transient, conforming, challenging, staying, leaving - the family next-door

Not normative 'communities of practice'

Beginning with the small to counter Centre structures - 'bottom up', **looking around** (Stuart Hall 1991: 35)

Competing forces - **blocks and threads**

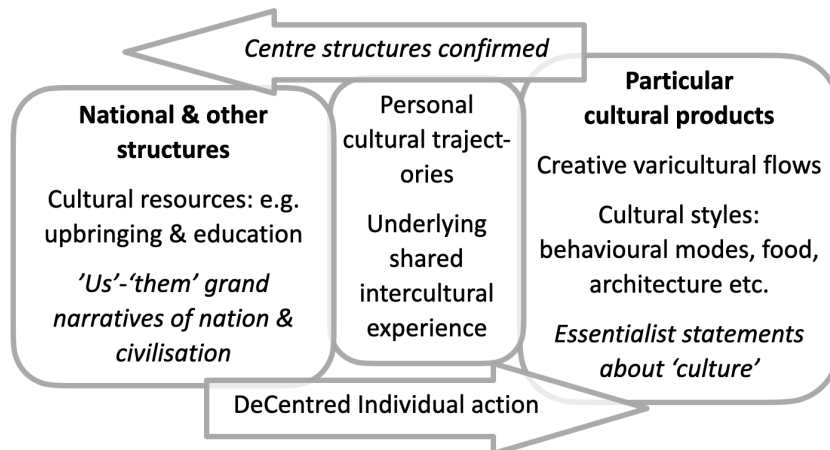
Blocks - **constructing** culture as separated 'us'-'them' entities that pull us apart

Threads - ... as fluid entities within which we can find commonalities

The **grammar of culture** (Holliday 2019)

inspired by C Wright Mills's (1959/1970: 235) 'grammar of the **sociological imagination**'

Showing how the *blocks* work from all directions to prevent the threads

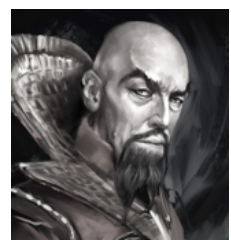
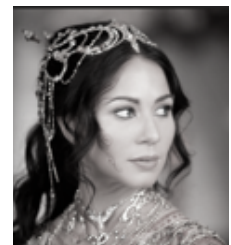


Example 1: Autoethnography of living in Iran in the 1970s (Holliday 2022a)

Drip-fed Orientalism during upbringing - children's stories, education, cinema

Idealisation of ancient Greek (ancestors?) democracy, fighting the evil empire of Persia, ... of Islam during the Crusades, ... of the Spanish; white male adventurers representing or saving noble savages or imprisoned women, Flash Gordon, Star Wars, Alexander.

Match with the domains of the grammar



| Events | Blocks | Threads |
|--|--|--|
| At home. Room arrangement and function. Eating rules | <i>'Collectivist culture, no respect for privacy. No personal rooms. Everyone invading each other's space when eating.'</i> | Experience of different styles in grandparents' home. Deeper understanding of how personal space is expressed - 'excuse my back' - informing future personal and professional practice. |
| Stories, media, histories, music, literature and theatre | <i>'Inaccessible civilisational stories - inward-looking and indulgent.'</i> | National myths and stories have similar structures to my own. My basic learning about political satire and soap-operas. The same Russian novels that I read. Owning 'Western' progressive music. |
| Catching taxis | <i>'... chaotic shared taxis. Everyone jumping in and no control.'</i> | Intensely professional taxi driver - organising and managing customers, personal space and routes. Assessing behaviours. Informing my future professionalism. The experience of hitchhiking. |
| Language and being foreign | <i>Foreigners accused of Western judgement or silly imitation of exotic clothing - 'thinking we are all the same.'</i> | Appreciated for being myself , even with my accent, and not pretending - which works in all situations. Hybrid cosmopolitan diversity. |
| Classrooms and teaching | <i>'Students need special activities to get them to be critical. Their culture prevents them from speaking' (native-speakerism).</i> | Simin chose to write an assignment that critiques my classroom debate on 'why Iranian women only want to get married'. Her not being able to speak in the debate connects with women everywhere being silenced. |

The value of having to populate each cell

Not just a privileged Western white male - though more so than female

Our best resource is the everyday intercultural experience we bring with us

Life experience of **everyday small intercultural experience** - going to school, the family next door

Disciplined ethnography of working out rules - useful life training

In the street, there was **opportunity to watch** other people catching taxis and to learn from their demeanour, body language, tone of voice – how to shout and command without being presumptuous and irritating.

To catch a taxi, **you had to** shout the name of your destination with the right intonation and tone of voice to indicate certainty and authority while at the same time expressing respect. This involved very particular body language and gesture. **Timing** was also crucial. You had to meet the eyes of the driver just at the right moment, with the understanding that they were also looking out for customers and slowing down and pulling in nearer to the side of the road just sufficient to catch what might be called out.

When the taxi stopped, **you then needed to** say just enough more about the destination in such a way as to show the right degree of flexibility in consid-

eration of the other passengers already in the taxi - leaning forward **just the right** amount not to crowd the driver and convince them that you would be the sort of passenger who would not upset the fine balances of the efficient impetus of the journey. **The demeanour of your eye contact** would therefore need to indicate the right amount of understanding of this necessity. Unlike, with tedious customers at the counter of a shop, with whom the shop assistant and other waiting customers would have to waste time, the taxi driver could, **within seconds**, decide you were not worth the effort and drive on without stopping.

Then, when getting into the confined space, you needed to say **just the right few words** of the right greeting, with **the right body language and intonation** to show due consideration for the other people there. This would be informed by **rapid assessment** of who they were on looking into the taxi at the same time as speaking to the driver.

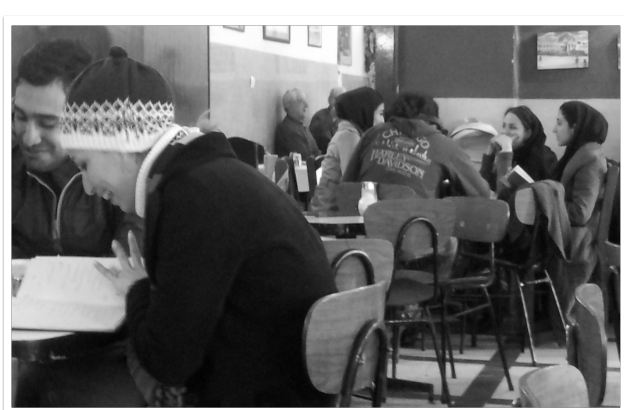
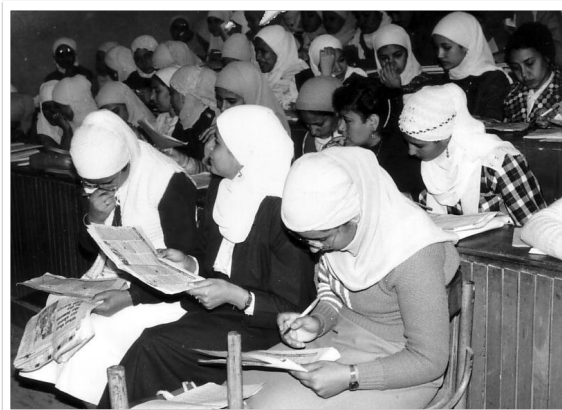
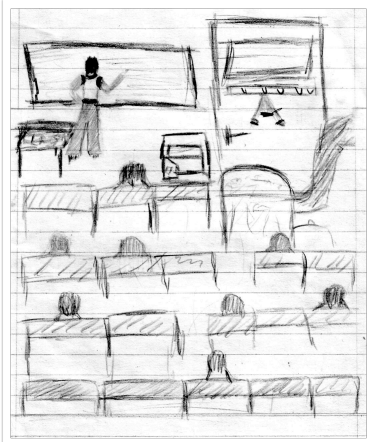
And so on with the other practices throughout the journey and its completion. Much of this could be learnt from **direct observation in the street, from inside the taxi looking out and inside the taxi**. (Holliday 2022a: 52-53)

Key to communication - the **laboratory** of the shared taxi

Not just speaking, but **thinking and looking**

Why are these images **unexpected**?

Simin's drawing of me teaching, Egyptian university students working alone ('We can do this by ourselves at home (Holliday 2010)), Café Naderi in Tehran, founded in 1927



You don't need to be Western to be modern (Honarbin-Holliday 2009)

Example 2: Negotiating relationally in an institution (Holliday in press)

Sinad is working in a 'Western' university quality office after being a student in the management department.

Using creative non-fiction (Agar 1990; Holliday 2022b), but summarised here

1. He doesn't get the staff development funding he's been promised by his manager.
2. This conflicts with his belief that 'Western' people are **'straightforward' and 'direct'**.
3. His 'Western' colleague Petra explains that managers can't control other forces in the institution, and might be shy to admit this. Others tell him they find admin policies and decisions **impossible to understand**.
4. He observes that different university departments have **different cultures**.
5. He attends a lecture on **postcolonial theory** and hears about **'methodological individualism'** - the Western emphasis on 'low-context' directness and individual freedom to act
6. This doesn't fit with the **relationality he's seen around him** - that people don't do whatever they want. Petra has told him about **being silenced** in meetings by male **looks and body-language**.
7. **Thread:** He remembers **his aunt** who always claims to be 'direct' and 'plain-speaking'. But her family say this isn't true.
8. He reads about **big 'I' and small 'i' individualism** (Minh-Ha 1989), and Canagarajah's (2018) notion of **spatiality**, where people everywhere practice personal agency as required within events.
9. He concludes that 'methodological individualism' is **'flag-waiving'**, similar to his aunt's

How therefore to deal with 'essentialist statements' about 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'

Self-Othering? Spivak's **Strategic essentialism** (Darius & Jonsson 1993)

Chinese students in British universities (Grimshaw 2010: 256)

Why research 'participants' (and anyone) might tell us very different things even 30 minutes later**Bibliography**

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