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THE FRAGMENTED SELF

Cross-cultural difference, conflict and the lessons of ethnographic experience*

Thomas Reuter

In this post-modern world advanced transportation and communication technologies are presumed to have brought us all closer together as co-residents of the one global village, and encounters between people with different cultural backgrounds have become a more frequent and common occurrence. This greater mobility and frequency of encounters is increasing the potential for cross-cultural conflict, alongside other factors, such as increasing disenchantment with political ideologies at the conclusion of the Cold War. Numerous local and international conflicts in recent decades have been legitimized as clashes between different cultures. Political demagogues on all sides are now tending to invoke ethnic, religious and other forms of cultural differences and associated fears of cross-cultural encounters in order to raise popular support for various forms of violent political action. This disturbing trend towards the politicisation of cultural difference is exemplified most prominently by the ‘War on Terror’, which seems set to become the most significant conflict of the twenty-first century.

We must urgently ask ourselves, therefore, what we, as anthropologists, can do to help ameliorate these supposedly ‘cultural’ conflicts. As members of the only academic discipline specifically dedicated to cross-cultural research and to fostering mutual understanding, anthropologists would appear to be well placed to provide a different perspective to counteract the proliferation of divisive culturist ideologies. Starting from this assumption, the present article explores how anthropology can be made more relevant to these contemporary political issues, and shows how, in order to meet this challenge, we shall need to develop a deeper understanding of the psychology of our own ethnographic encounters with cultural difference.

The trouble with cultural difference: anthropology and the ‘War on Terror’

The inspiration for writing this article arose from my research on religious revival movements on the island of Java in Indonesia, where the dominant religion is Islam. Field research for the project began on the fateful day of 11 September 2001. This day marked the beginning of America’s ‘War on Terror’, which is directed at members of international revivalist Islamic groups with loosely affiliated local allies in many countries, including Indonesia. Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a geopolitical climate of increasing mutual suspicion between the Islamic world and the West, as well as in a national climate of increasing polarisation between Islamists and nationalists

* I would like to acknowledge the support of the Australian Research Council for having funded most of my ethnographic research, some of which has inspired this paper. An earlier version has been published in a volume edited by Ursula Rao and John Hutnyk (Reuter 2005). I would like to thank the editors [**des Sammelbandes oder von Paideuma?**] for giving me permission to publish this much more condensed, revised and differently focused version under a different title, even though it does use some of the same case material used in the earlier text.

within Indonesia itself (particularly after the Bali bombing of 12 October 2002), was an extremely challenging experience, even for a seasoned ethnographer. The difficulty of building bridges across cultures was increased, yet the need for them was greater than ever. Witnessing at first hand how political tensions were being raised on all sides through the media by appealing to culture and religion, I felt strongly compelled to ask myself what I, as an anthropologist, was able and, hence, morally obliged to do in order to discredit culturalist ideologies and help promote cross-cultural understanding.

On its way to becoming the major new global military conflict of this century, the 'War on Terror' is rationalized through negative interpretations of cultural differences. Samuel Huntington's (1993:1) words now seem almost prophetic when he suggested that

the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. [...] The clash of civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

The politicisation of culture we are indeed witnessing at this time is itself an ideological construct. Clashes of civilizations are not the natural consequence of an insurmountable cultural difference that needs to be played out on the battle-field. Huntington's hypothesis, however, has become a self-fulfilling doomsday prophecy in the hands of unscrupulous politicians who find it advantageous to promote suspicion, fear and violence between groups of people who can be distinguished on cultural grounds.

Anthropology, with its focus on the study and celebration of cultural difference, would seem to be more relevant than ever in view of this contemporary trend towards a politicisation of culture, though perhaps only to a degree. The 'War on Terror' and other culturally defined contemporary conflicts simply put the spotlight on a political dimension that has always been present in anthropological studies of non-Western societies. The colonial domination of Indonesia, for example, was in part justified by reference to an idea of superiority based on reports of cultural differences brought back by anthropologist-like explorers. In the case of the island of Bali, where I have conducted most of my research, the evidence in question consisted of reports of doubtful cultural practices such as 'widow-burning' (*suti*) and the looting of shipwrecks (Vickers 1989). Given that anthropology is primarily concerned with the study of contemporary societies, however, my concern is not so much whether or not, or to what extent, our discipline became a handmaiden of colonial imperialism, even though there was much to be learned at one time from the exercise of applying a post-colonial studies paradigm to the history of anthropology. The more burning question is whether we are contributing to, or simply not doing enough to combat, new, contemporary forms of imperialism which also and increasingly rely on cultural difference.

If anthropologists are to share their insights on how to respond to challenging experiences of cultural difference in a positive manner, they must first learn to reflect and speak out more openly on the coping mechanisms they themselves employ to meet the psychological challenges of living in another cultural world in the course of their ethnographic field research. This is no easy task. On one level, the difficulty has to do with the fact that such coping mechanisms are not conscious strategies: many of their own psychological strategies remain opaque to anthropologists themselves. On another level, the task is made difficult because the challenges of fieldwork are not freely discussed by anthropologists in public. Indeed, the very idea of cultural otherness as a challenge to be dealt with, as something potentially unpleasant, does not sit easily with

anthropology's ethos of celebrating cross-cultural difference. This is perhaps the more intractable problem.¹

The silence about the challenges and darker moments of anthropologists' ethnographic experiences must be broken before we can hope to critique culturalist ideologies effectively. This may seem counter-intuitive at first. In my opinion, however, it is impossible for us to have any credibility outside our own discipline as long as the problem our contemporaries have with cross-cultural difference is one we tend to deny the existence of when it comes to ourselves. Rather than claim a position of moral superiority, let us assume that, as human beings, we are all equally challenged by the experience of difference to begin with, though as anthropologists we may have had greater opportunities than most other people to acquire experience in these matters and to reflect on that experience.

Cross-cultural encounters publicly as being no more naturally pleasant than they are naturally violent. The ideological component of culturalism always needs to be identified as an excess, a superimposed element of the political manipulation of people's sentiments in order to detract attention from the real issues arising from specific cross-cultural encounters. And yet, as anyone working in an Islamic country today will know only too well, some actual cultural differences between the beliefs, values and practices of such countries and those of our main audience do in fact exist. Most ethnographers will know this because they will be familiar with the temptation to want to conceal or distort some of these actual differences in cultural practices whenever they think these practices may be perceived as unpalatable or worse by their audience. For anthropology to be relevant as a social science of cultural comparison, however, such differences must be shown to exist, and moreover they must be significant differences if there is to be any potential for cultural critique. Indeed if this were not the case, the consequences would go well beyond the discipline. Without significant human cultural diversity, there would be no evidence to suggest that humans have freedom of choice at the socio-cultural level.

The taming or sanitising of cross-cultural difference in anthropology has also been challenged in a recent article by David Parker (2003), who speaks of the dangers of a lingering Idealist notion that cultural difference can be overcome by fostering a spirit of cosmopolitanism. Anthropologists have inherited some of this Kantian ethos. They have thus been less than forthcoming with abundant evidence of the more difficult aspects of their own ethnographic experiences which contradict the assumptions of the cosmopolitan utopia. In fact, however, the evidence of anthropology contradicts the very principle of a Eurocentric Kantian version of cosmopolitanism, in that it finds its vision of hope in a heterogeneous and fragmented world, one which, however, is all the more rich and beautiful for that very reason.

The problems involved in this anthropological tightrope act – of down-playing cultural difference to avoid premature judgment while at the same time celebrating difference as the basis of human freedom – is so crucial to this discussion that it cannot be stressed enough. While people everywhere and throughout history have sometimes experienced encounters with actual differences in race, ethnicity, culture or religion as exciting and stimulating, they just as often find such differences undesirable or excessive. Except, that is, for the cosmopolitan 'anthropologist'. After setting ourselves up for maximum exposure to cultural difference in a deliberate and systematic fashion – by way of a research method usually involving a single individual who sets out to experience extreme dislocation and isolation within an alien cultural environment – we

¹ It is, however, related to the first one, insofar as the denial of one's difficulties in adapting is also an unconscious coping strategy.

supposedly walk away from the experience, unscathed and unperturbed, speaking lightly of human variety as something to be celebrated. In view of such nonchalance, one would expect anthropologists to be well equipped with coping strategies that can be passed on to other individuals, if not scaled up to resolve some of the many inter-cultural conflicts of our time.

This expectation rests on the assumption that we really do know what happens to us psychologically during immersion in another culture. Unfortunately, that is not normally the case. While most anthropologists use their own psyche as a research instrument, few reflect on how their sense of self is shaped by experiencing unfamiliar worlds, or what the structure of their coping mechanisms may say about their own practice as anthropologists. Worse still, most conversations on how we feel about fieldwork take place in a corridor rather than a seminar room. Our own difficulties with cultural adaptation and re-adaptation are usually kept out of sight for fear of appearing insufficiently heroic and unsuitably perturbed by our fieldwork experiences of cultural difference. Finally, there is a somewhat cruel tendency to ignore failures and to take the success stories for granted.

Not all ethnographers cope well with the challenges of their ethnographic encounters, however, and none of us copes well at all times and under all conditions.² As for our students, we all know that each and every new generation of ethnographers suffers considerable attrition on account of many individuals' inability to cope with difference in the manner prescribed by anthropological tradition. The successes, on the other hand, do not seem to warrant explanation because inter-cultural tolerance and competence are simply assumed to come naturally to the kind of person who wishes to be an anthropologist. This lack of reflection and openness cannot be maintained if our expertise is to become transferable to other people who are now increasingly experiencing intense exposure to cultural difference and are finding it challenging.

Coping with immersion: reflections on the psychology of cultural difference

Anthropologists routinely immerse themselves in other cultures without asking what kind of internal restructuring needs to take place in order to accommodate cultural difference. How can ethnographers truly embrace a second culture, given that the target culture may well contain ideas and values that are incommensurable with their own? How must this restructuring process be designed in order to accomplish the seemingly incommensurable aims of maximizing the depth of a person's immersion experience while avoiding an attrition of the initial self, which could cause a re-adaptation problem later? At present we do not have the right tools to look under the bonnet of the individual ethnographer's psyche and explore the foundations of second-culture acquisition. Perhaps neuropsychological techniques will fulfil this task one day. In the interim, however, the age-old method of introspection will still serve to identify some interesting effects which accompany processes of cross-cultural adaptation. I shall briefly discuss just three of these phenomena.

The sunrise effect

Just how much activity goes on in a person's mind when moving between two familiar locations and socio-cultural settings first became apparent to me upon returning to the

² See also Cassandra Green (2003).

once familiar world of India after a three-year absence. I arrived at New Delhi airport before dawn and decided to ride a local bus into town. As the sun rose, that world I called 'India' was slowly coming back into focus, in grey tones and shadowy at first, with the streets still quiet and empty, though once familiar smells were already stirring up fragments of associated images from the depths of my memory. Then the vision gained life with the addition of sunlight, colour and the sounds of the awakening city, until at last, as the bus reached the already crowded and buzzing market area of Old Delhi at dawn, India came fully and forcefully into existence again in my mind, and with it a different 'me', which had been slumbering, fitfully at times, but without ever awakening with such incredible forcefulness as it did now during all the years I had been away.

The sunrise effect is the physical sensation one experiences as a mass of interrelated bits of knowledge – from phrases in the local language to local roadmaps and the familiar voices of old acquaintances – surfaces suddenly out of long-term memory back into the full and immediate relevance of lived experience, of the here and now.

Warm-up dreams

As I learnt by observing myself on many similar subsequent journeys between familiar worlds, the surfacing of a submerged, culture-specific web of memories or 'cultural self' is in fact not always so sudden, and such transitions never go completely unprepared. There is another type of transit phenomenon, closely related to the sunrise effect, which illustrates this point, and which I would like to refer to as 'warm-up dreams'.

Warm-up dreams foreshadow the use of a language and various other elements of a body of knowledge which will become relevant upon arrival at the destination of a journey on which one is about to embark. Generalization may be difficult, but as far as my own observations are concerned, such dreams seem to occur with some regularity as much as ten days before departure. The duration of this subconscious preparation period may depend on a range of situational and personal factors, but generally the degree of challenge one is anticipating on the particular voyage appears to exert an influence here. The dreams thus tend to be expectation-driven. They also tend to revisit past experiences, especially the kind that have left one with the sense of a lack of comprehension or closure.

Warm-up dreams suggest that information relevant to one's survival in different cultural worlds is stored in separate locations or neural networks. Culture-specific information can lay dormant as long as it is not needed, only to surface in chunks when it is. Nevertheless, people also tend to prepare themselves, consciously or unconsciously, for a major switch-over whenever there is a perceived need to do so.

The Doppelgänger effect

The alter ego that awakens at a moments of re-entry into a familiar world is not just an inner, psychological phenomenon. Being somewhere and being someone else has a reality outside the consciousness of the individual because part of our person is constituted by what other persons think, feel and remember about us. This is beautifully illustrated by a phenomenon I would like to call the double or *Doppelgänger* effect.

A case in point is that the 'me' that belongs to Bali seems to have acquired a life of its own. Often when I return to the central highland region where I have conducted

research over many years (Reuter 2002), I receive strange but persistent reports about my own doings of which I have no memory at all. A number of these mysterious sightings were reported by friends, others by more distant acquaintances. It seems that when I am physically absent, a double or some part of me at least wanders through the island and meets people or even talks to them. In the case of close friends, these apparitions were always encountered in dreams or other dream-like states, and some lack of visual clarity is always observed. For many acquaintances it was the same, but others insisted that they really did see me in the flesh.

Some of these reports can be written off as mistaken identity, others as dream-like imaginings, or even as the result of a belief, still common among rural Balinese, that witches and other practitioners of the spiritual arts can involuntarily or deliberately detach and dispatch some part of themselves in sleep or meditation to wander far and wide in a human or animal form that is visible to others.

These reports admittedly appealed to my own sense of displacement from a social environment which had become a second home to me. I eventually realized, however, that my Balinese friends were telling me something of more general importance. The *Doppelgänger* they had met was not a temporary ‘being-there as a state of my mind’, in the individualist sense of Martin Heidegger’s existentialist definition (1962:172–173, my emphasis), but a being-there within the minds of all the people in Bali who know me. While this case may have unique features, all manner of *Doppelgänger* can be found, in various guises, across many different cultures. However, people’s attitudes to such fragmented states are not always so positive. Somewhat closer to home, Robert Louis Stephenson’s tale of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is an example of the double becoming a symbol of madness while very much retaining an uncanny sense of relevance by pointing at the fragmentary nature of the self in all of us.

The first and second of these phenomena suggest that different cultures are differently located in individual consciousnesses, to be stored away in the memory and brought back to the surface of awareness in order to meet an immediate or immanent need. Moreover, the third phenomenon shows that this separation is underwritten by the separate webs of social association and intersubjectivity that hold us in each cultural world, and that are never the products of our own minds alone. Overall, this evidence suggests that the restructuring which needs to occur if people are to gain competency in two or more cultures involves a kind of fragmentation or compartmentalisation of the mind into two or more selves, both for the individual self and for the dividual social self. Importantly, on one level, at least, this inner fragmentation is a reflection of a fragmented world. While the effects I have described can happen, I am not saying that they always do or, even if they do, that the divisions are always so deep that the term ‘fragmentation’ is justified. I shall now outline some of the different strategies that anthropologists and others actually use in order to cope with an alien cultural environment, strategies some of which do not lead to cross-cultural competency at all, and which therefore do not create any significant fragmentation.

The avoidance strategy

For most people, the avoidance of exposure to significant cultural difference has long been a favourite response to cultural others. Often this has been a simple matter of ‘staying at home’. The world is changing, however, and more people are finding it impossible to avoid cross-cultural contact. In part this is due to an enormous back-wash of migration in counter-direction to former patterns of colonial domination, as well as current patterns of economic domination. In part it is also a consequence of exposure to

partial and often distorting experiences of hitherto unknown worlds through television and other electronic media. These involuntary or inadvertent cross-cultural encounters are often marked by suspicion, fear, ridicule, distancing and, ultimately, avoidance. While avoidance does not lead to understanding, it can sometimes be an effective strategy for preventing conflict so long as cross-cultural encounters can in fact be avoided, minimized or conducted with a minimum of engagement. Where this is no longer possible, fear and resentment will mount, and the sentiment that leads to avoidance can then quickly swing towards a more violent form of expression.

Some anthropologists can and do practice avoidance as well, though necessarily in a more sophisticated manner due to the expectations laid upon them by the discipline's primary method of 'participant observation'. Ethnographers may choose to position themselves as aloof and distant observers. They will then obviously fail in their role as participants, and yet they may successfully and quite easily conceal this from their colleagues ever after. Expressed in terms of the psychology of cultural immersion, this kind of failure is caused by withholding emotional commitment from the new cultural self so that it will never be able to stand up as equal, or nearly equal to the original self. The result is a mono-cultural or at least lopsided ethnographer who still remains a creature of the world of his or her original self. This is exactly the kind of psychological positioning that many a postcolonial critic of anthropology has lamented, because it can easily lead to an abuse of the positive potential of cross-cultural critique.

The 'going native' strategy

It took me several years after my return from a two-year journey to India in my late teens to realize fully that much of the knowledge I had acquired there was not just irrelevant for practical reasons, but downright troublesome, interfered with the task of survival and was impossible to integrate with a Western life-style. In short, I had 'gone native', as anthropologists disdainfully describe this state of affairs, and was paying the price in the form of a massive re-adaptation problem. 'Going native' means becoming attached to a newly acquired cultural self to the point of being unable to let go of it upon one's return to the world of the original self. This strategy should not simply be dismissed because it does not suit anthropologists, for it may suit others well enough. Migrants, for example – assuming they have neither the hope nor the desire ever to return to their former homes – will benefit from 'going native' as much as possible, because this may minimize the suffering of a sense of loss in relation to an earlier self, some residue of which always remains. This strategy is rejected by ethnographers, however, because it undermines the very idea of anthropology as a bridging exercise, as a being-in-two-worlds.

The fragmentation strategy

The most effective coping mechanism for anthropological fieldwork and for other cross-cultural immersion experiences in my view is to adopt a stance of inner dissociation. This psychological strategy tends to embrace and intensify the naturally already fragmentary structure of the self (and of our concept of the world). It fundamentally differs from the avoidance or 'going native'-strategies in that it requires a profound capacity for detachment from the original self. This kind of detachment is usually missing in those who avoid either exposure to difference, or inner change in the face of exposure by resorting to an avoidance strategy of a more subtle kind.

An anthropologist who wishes to become genuinely bi-cultural, however, must also remain detached enough from the new cultural self that is being acquired through immersion in order to be able to shrink this self when it is time for the original self to return to the foreground again after fieldwork. Becoming irrevocably attached to the 'native point of view' is not productive because it simply amounts to a transference of the attachment one had to one's original self across to a new cultural self. Nothing much is gained in this way because the thought-provoking tension of internalized cultural difference, dissociation, fragmentation and cognitive dissonance is erased before it can be utilized.

One might well ask at this point, why are the 'going-native' and avoidance strategies used at all? I suspect that the root cause of attachment to one cultural self or another is the desire for a unified mind, no matter how. A detached and dissociative approach, on the other hand, is probably truer to the reality of the mind, and the mind's perception of the world, and will be more attractive to people who have a desire to grow and expand themselves by embracing new experiences. This suggests that, while ultimately there may be no such thing as a unified mind to be had, there are various degrees of fragmentation. Attachment to one's self-concept therefore simply represents one's resistance to embracing more difference than one absolutely has to. In its purest form, this resistance to internalised cultural difference and subsequent craving for unity may take the form of a coercive integration strategy.

The coercive integration strategy

Given that the body is a unified living entity, it is perhaps not surprising that humans tend to have a futile but nevertheless powerful desire to accomplish a sense of integration within the Egoic self, the virtual body that is constructed by our minds, all the more so because the physical body is perceived to be mortal. Another basic incentive is the force of reality itself, given that action and associated decision-making processes require at least a partial and temporary sense of integration within the mental concept of the self, and similarly, within people's cosmological concepts. In a way, our tendency to seek integration is therefore necessary and very useful at a practical level. There is also a positive way of integration through a transpersonal mode of being, which involves non-identification with any of the different states of the Ego.

The issue of integration also arises within the process of producing anthropological knowledge. During fieldwork we allow ourselves to be put in a position from which it is very hard not to experience some glimpse, at the very least, of the fragmentary nature of the individual human mind and of the social worlds which our minds have constructed collectively. The task of writing ethnographic texts, however, demands that we present this experience in an integrated trans-cultural manner so that it is intelligible to our audience, while also, one hopes, remaining intelligible from within the world-view of our informants. It is useful to recall here some of the insights of James Clifford and George Marcus (1986) and their colleagues, who were among the first to warn against the dangers of taking this quest for integration too far. The idea of writing ethnographic texts, they rightly argued, is to build bridges between cultures rather than conflate or appropriate them, to capitalise on rather than exhaust the differences between various ways of living.

As a result of their self-fragmenting cross-cultural experiences of immersion, most anthropologists have an intuitive understanding of the fact that the specificity of cultures as lived experiences cannot be resolved at a level of the lone individual if it is not first resolved politically at the macro-level of societal change. Many of us, however,

would see the removal of cultural diversity that would be necessary for this macro-level integration to occur as a loss for humanity rather than a gain, except in some situations where (and only insofar as) close cohabitation and interaction among groups of people with different cultural backgrounds creates a natural demand for cultural integration and where this integration is allowed to proceed in a gradual and non-coercive manner. As I suggested at the beginning and will discuss further below, such cross-cultural encounters are becoming more and more common, with unfortunately, coercion all too often being applied in one way or another in the name of integration.

Note that the kind of integration we may arguably achieve in anthropology on a purely theoretical level by creating a meta-language for discussing cultural difference is of a different order and not likely to have much impact on the *Realpolitik* of culture in the world at large. Anthropology cannot provide a truly universal and value-neutral language for the purpose of discussing cultural differences in any case, or, at least, not as long as the discipline is based predominantly in the most powerful nations. In my opinion, the best we can provide is a space and tools for an engagement with difference that is fuelled by a desire to learn from others and expand oneself, as well as to promote the attitude of curiosity and detachment that makes such learning possible.

If the desire for integration is taken too far, however, it can take a coercive, authoritarian and often extremely destructive turn. For all its flaws, it is thus unfortunate that some world leaders do not yet care to look at cultural diversity with an open-minded, anthropological attitude. Rather than celebrating human cultural diversity as the sediment of human choice and freedom, as integral to what it means to be human, some political groups seek to integrate everyone into a whole that is conceived in the image of the dominant part. In their vision, all that is different is to be subjugated to create conformity to a singular, authoritarian understanding of what ‘our’ culture should be – by means of either subtle or brutal force, if necessary – and all this in the name of ‘freedom’. Those who espouse such models of coercive integration of the world writ large may secretly hope that their own cultures will rise supreme from the battlefield of civilizations.

Few anthropologists would succumb to the longing for a culturally homogenized world, and those who would are likely to be precisely those who have fallen into the trap of avoidance, who have not been able to face the truth of their own so obviously fragmented minds or to draw a sense of integrity from the ocean of compassion and appreciation for life that lies beneath all our Egoic constructs of the self. In my opinion,³ we need to embrace the difficult truth that (at this level) each individual consists of a bundle of multiple selves belonging to and refracting multiple socio-cultural realities if we are to be good anthropologists or, for that matter, if we are to be good citizens of heterogeneous global, national or local communities. While the need may be evident and pressing, is the time right for such a shift in perception?

Cross-cultural conflict: coping with a fragmented world

“When the realization of their multi-fragmented nature dawns in especially talented and delicately organized human souls – when they, like every genius, break through the delusion of a unified personality and experience themselves as composite, as a bundle of many ‘I’s – then they only have to proclaim this and the majority will lock them up, call for scientific advice,

³ See also Alfred Schutz (1976).

ascertain schizophrenia and protect mankind, lest they receive a call of truth from the lips of these unfortunates.’⁴

The sunrise effect, warm-up dreams and the *Doppelgänger* effect all point to a basic condition of fragmentation that is natural to all human concepts of the self but is also heightened significantly by intense experiences of cross-cultural immersion. This conclusion clashes with the Enlightenment notion of cosmopolitanism and with similar, contemporary versions of the same idea. A recent example is Ien Ang’s (2003) contention that cross-cultural conflict could be avoided if only people were more willing to aspire to a state of cultural hybridity. My observations do not support the notion that the mind of a multicultural individual is a cognitive blender in which different cultures are pulped into a homogeneous mush which constitutes a new kind of hybrid culture. What they reveal instead is that individuals’ minds are fragmented into a community of selves which reflect their different experiences and competencies relating to the specific social contexts or different cultural worlds in which they participate (but which they can never hope to reconcile by themselves).

The term ‘hybridity’ is potentially useful, however, and I shall attempt to define it more carefully for the purpose of this article. I shall then argue that hybridisation is not something for the individual to achieve simply because it is a social and political process. This in turn leads me to consider what it means for individuals whose minds are fragmented by multiple cultural experiences if a political conflict arises between the societies concerned.

Akin to the equally problematic term ‘syncretism’, ‘hybridity’ implies a simultaneity of different cultural experiences and responses on a ‘gradual spectrum of mixed-up differences’ (Geertz 1988:148). ‘Hybridity’ is thus used to describe the character of a new society and culture which owes its existence to a blending and synthesis of traits derived from two or several other cultures. This definition is almost meaningless, however. What is true of ‘hybrid societies’, thus defined, is also true of all other societies: their genesis is always a historical process, their cultural origins always heterogeneous.

The term ‘hybridity’ is nevertheless useful for highlighting different stages within processes of cultural change that are triggered by migration or other forms of cross-cultural contact between societies. ‘Hybrid societies’ may be a suitable term for those societies in which the heterogeneous cultural origins of the population or their material culture are very obvious because the historical cause of this heterogeneity lies in the not too distant past and the effects are still highly visible to everyone involved. Post-hybridisation societies are different only in the sense that their hybrid origins may not be immediately obvious any longer to the participants.⁵

I would also argue that we need to recognize the existence of a pre-hybridisation stage in which the two or more separate cultures concerned continue to exist side-by-side. This is not to imply that all evidence of cultural difference is indicative of a pre-hybridisation or early hybridisation stage. While cultures may be as mutually susceptible as individuals in principle, there is no reason to assume that they must cross-fertilise and hybridise within a given period of time, or that significant hybridisation will occur at all. Nor is there any reason to assume that the world becomes a better place whenever it does occur. In many cases, cultures can co-exist peacefully within a shared

⁴ See Hermann Hesse (1971:40; aphorism no 84; translation T.R.).

⁵ Some of the effects of a particular inter-cultural influence, however, may still be evident to a linguist, anthropologist or historian, even after several millennia have passed.

national, regional or local space for long periods of time, yet remain intact as distinctive social spheres with distinctive cultural codes. Among the populations of such continuously heterogeneous spaces, however, one is likely to find numerous individuals (sic) who have found a need to build a bridge for themselves and who may also act as bridges between communities. Such individuals will not be ‘hybrids’ but instead will have developed a sense of self that is deeply partitioned. They may simply have the misfortune of being subject to associated tensions or they may choose to seek some form of transpersonal integration, and they may enjoy some of the benefits of having the power to translate and mediate, but they are rarely able single-handedly to unite the worlds outside that separate them within.

When G. McLennan, for example, notes that hybridity ‘does not easily produce a people’ (1995:90, my emphasis), he misses the point, because all cultures or ‘peoples’ are hybrids. Individuals on their own, however, can never be hybrids, because cultures are blended in the streets rather than inside particular heads. The crux of the matter is that, wherever a societal process of hybridisation is simply not taking place, or where it has not progressed very far, there will be no encompassing cultural code for the individual to pick up. Instead, he or she may have to pick up several separate codes in order to get by. And these codes cannot be mixed together by the individual subject without a loss of intelligibility because their meaning is context-dependent.

This is obviously so in the case of ethnographic fieldwork or travel abroad. If individuals attempt to apply a cultural code outside the context in which it was learnt, or attempt to apply a hybrid code of their own creation, they are likely to be subjected to social sanctions and suffer from a host of other related problems of cultural adaptation or re-adaptation. Even if one were to concede that individuals who find themselves in an alien world need time to adapt and learn its code, so that whatever they produce in the first days and months is likely to be a kind of inter-language and ‘hybrid culture code’, this hybridity is accidental and declining over time. The productions of these individuals will approximate the target code more and more, the longer they are immersed in it, thus losing much of their pseudo-hybrid character. Rather than developing into better hybrids, the individuals concerned become more thoroughly fragmented, or in other words, better code-switchers.

What needs to be acknowledged, however, is that social change is obviously borne by individuals acting together or in similar ways. Hence, if numerous people all make similar attempts at creating a hybrid code at the same time and in the same place, then this may well illicit a hybridisation process in the societies between which they are caught. At a site of mass migration, for example, the degree of fragmentation the individual will experience depends on the degree of culture-code difference that persists on the basis of restrictive patterns of social interaction. Cultural boundary crossings of one kind or another can occur on a massive scale in such a setting (through marriages, for example). This may eventually lead to the emergence of a new, hybrid culture, whose explicitly ‘hybrid’ status will gradually recede into a state of mere normality (which still includes some degree of heterogeneity).

Nothing should be assumed when it comes to historical processes of this kind. Many great port cities of the world, for example, have long traditions of people of diverse origins living side by side, and have in fact reaped enormous material and intellectual benefit from the maintenance of cultural differences and associated identities. Having a culturally fragmented mind and being a good code-switcher can be of as much advantage to traders as it is to anthropologists.

As Kant rightly noted, the possibility of becoming multicultural in the sense of accentuated mental fragmentation only arises when free association across cultures is

made possible by ‘hospitality’, no matter how Eurocentric Kant’s notion of cosmopolitanism may have been. This raises a final question: what happens to otherwise happily fragmented individuals when the peaceful conditions under which hospitality can be assumed no longer apply, and when conflicts at the societal level threaten to disturb the peace among the community of cultural selves in their own minds?

Whether receiving a foreign researcher and *kaffir* (infidel) as a guest or ‘making excuses’ to the Australian public for what was happening in the ‘terrorist haven of Indonesia’, my Javanese informants and I were frequently made aware that what we were doing was not the flavour of the day in the context of the ‘War on Terror’, that we were swimming against the current, that indeed some people strongly disliked what our friendly interaction stood for. The normally already difficult process of establishing an inner ecology of cultural difference that would allow a new, Javanese ‘me’ to emerge and join the community of previous selves within me was thus clashing with processes of negative cultural type-casting in the world outside. This experience could be described as a miniature ‘War of the Worlds’ happening inside this anthropologist’s mind, and not just there. Many bicultural individuals in Muslim communities throughout the Western world would have been experiencing similar discomfort.

At times of political tension, when hospitality becomes difficult to maintain, anthropologists may have to reveal to themselves some of the tricks they do not normally care to reflect on, and may attempt to share some of their strategies for accommodating cultural difference between self and others. Indeed, they may find that their message, although hardly new, needs to be heard again. We can speak out publicly against the politicisation and distorted portrayal of cultural difference by undermining ideology with empirical fact. While we may have to acknowledge that such differences are not always palatable, we can also explain to people that it is better to live in a heterogeneous world in which we do not like everything we see (and are now increasingly able to see) than to live in a brave new world whose false promise of peace rests on coercive homogenization. We can also remind ourselves and the general public of the paramount value and critical potential of human cultural diversity and of other peoples’ right to freedom of cultural expression. Anthropologists, in my opinion, have a professional duty to defend this human right, particularly at times when demagogues are actively amplifying popular fears of cultural difference to serve their vested interests and to justify the use of political violence. This is such a time.

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