

Aspiring to a postcolonial engagement with the Other: an investigation into postgraduate students' 'colonial signatures' from their intercultural experiences during a university-led South Indian study visit to Kerala higher education institutions (0136)

Simon Hoult

Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

Over the last decade there has been considerable focus on the internationalisation of higher education within a neo-liberal agenda (Harris, 2008) and global partnerships between schools have been promoted by the UK Government. One significant aspect of such development has been the inclusion of international study visits into university and school teaching programmes. Such visits are controversial matters and there is a growing body of literature that reviewed the influences of study visits on participants' thinking, which often showed limited exposure of the global powerbase on which these thoughts were constructed (Martin and Wyness, 2013; Martin and Griffiths, 2012).

My research aims to contribute to the discussions about international study visits through an exploration of how intercultural experiences from a short study visit to South India may have the potential to develop university students' thinking and actions especially through intercultural triggers to their learning. The research begins from the premise that to varying extents, and in different ways, we in the 'West' are written through with the colonial (Sharp, 2009; Wa Thiong'o, 1986) in conscious and unconscious ways. Consequently, my research considers the ways a study visit may alter students' view of the Other and in doing so cause a reconsideration of the Self through 'Westerners' ontological and epistemological repositioning as privileged and knowledgeable subjects.

Taking a critical ethnographic approach (Carspecken, 1996) informed by post-structuralism and using postcolonial theory (Andreotti, 2011; Bhabha, 1994/2004; Said, 1978), the research draws on my reflexivity and empirical data focused on the intercultural learning performed by 14 postgraduate students from a 2014 study visit to higher education institutions and schools in South India. The students reflected on their learning in a semi-structured journal that they used to write a reflection about their learning after returning 'home'. The journal and reflection, alongside later unstructured interviews, constituted the empirical data that informed the research. My research, however, also used 'fictional' data to augment the empirical data drawing on creative accounts of intercultural learning performed by 'Western' film characters in their travels to India, arguing that it is possible to work between the binary of 'fact' and 'fiction' within a post-structuralist methodology (Richardson and Lockridge, 2004; Cixous 1975/86).

Diverse narratives of intercultural learning emerged from the data that highlighted how the intercultural engagements became opportunities for reflexive reconsiderations of Self and Other. Such significant shifts in 'being' have rarely been identified as emanating from intercultural study visits (Martin and Griffiths, 2012) and these reconsiderations were often triggered by critical moments I call 'Colonial Signatures'.

The Colonial Signature is the signifier of language, symbols, products or other images that are personally significant to us as a consequence of one's unique knowledge, previous experiences and underpinning values which Frosh (2013) calls our 'hauntings'. The Signature potentially provokes reflection and readjustment of perceptions about the 'Self' and 'Other' and provided a two-way connection for the students between India and the UK which acted as a conduit or inhibitor, and at times simultaneously both, to deepening intercultural learning. For some this evoked links to a former colonial time, or provided conduits to expose highly personal situations at 'home'; whereas

for others it provided a link to globalisation and the neo-colonisation of multinational corporations.

A number of my findings have implications for pedagogies associated with higher education intercultural study visits. Students were able to deepen their expression of the implications of the Colonial Signature and their learning more broadly when equipped with a theoretical lens, which most commonly in this research was postcolonial theory, which enabled them to contextualise their learning in local and global power relations.

The deeper learning from the visit was evident in those who were willing and able to be strongly reflexive, and who were thus able to consider their personal role in the intercultural learning experience and review the Self, in respect to the Other, as an outcome to their learning. Reflexivity led to an exposure of assumptions and a reconsideration of Self and the Other through which Colonial Signatures deepened learning, rather than acted as a barrier and through which worldviews changed. Conversely where simpler transcultural comparisons formed significant parts of the learning process, Colonial Signatures remained more firmly within a colonial framework more akin to Said's (1978) Median Category. Pedagogical approaches that were used pre-, during, and post-visit, aided intercultural learning through an aspiration to the 'decolonial' (De Lissoy, 2010) and by providing a safe 'liminal space' (Meyer and Land, 2003) to hold conflicting ideas while resisting making easy conclusions.

The nature of the visit challenged neo-liberal notions of the primacy of economic gain from the internationalisation agenda and focused more on deepening international awareness through a 'cultural internationalisation' (Harris, 2008). Furthermore, as an example of the practice of embracing an international agenda in university-based teacher education, the visit illustrates how such a visit may reach beyond more technical-rationalist forms of learning.

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