

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Module 2

Activity 3: Stories of encounter

A visit to a Moroccan household

It was in the afternoon and evening in the autumn of 2009. I was on a lecture tour and visited the home of my host - an academic - and met his family. There were several persons in the family - I was surprised by their use of French despite having been told about it. They had lived in Brussels in the past and their oldest boy was studying French. He had been to school in Brussels and had a strong Brussels accent.

I keep thinking about this visit because it raises interesting questions about language learning and identification with foreign languages. Although I have met similar situations and people before, the question of identification with a foreign language was very strong. I was overwhelmed by their hospitality - although I expected this, it is still sometimes difficult to respond appropriately and I am not sure if I did.

I was curious about seeing a family home and their relationships. I was tired by the end of the evening because of the lectures earlier in the day but also being polite and involved all the time. This was perhaps a very special privilege to be invited home. I tried to do what I thought was expected, taking an interest in the francophone affiliation and answering questions. They said explicitly that they were happy that I was there.

I did not know how traditional the family would be, but in fact I found the house 'modern' in style but with local materials and craftsmanship, and the family too on the whole, although mother was wearing a traditional dress. I was a little surprised by the high standard of living and compared it with my earlier visit to Morocco many years ago, and with what I might expect in the home of a Belgian.

The hospitality is something which would be normal in a similar situation for me - I always invite foreign guest teachers to our home. Father seemed to be quite authoritarian and this is a relationship I do not feel comfortable with. But I am aware that there are many authoritarian fathers in my society and others too.

In a small way this visit changed my views and understanding of Morocco today after a long period of absence. I have begun to tell people about this and other experiences because I think the perceptions of Morocco are probably out of date.