

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters



Module 2

Activity 2: Sharing intercultural encounters – transcript of the video

As the speakers are using casual forms of speech, they frequently use common interjections ('you know', 'kind of') with no real meaning. These are bracketed in the text.

Who we are ...



OK my name is Marcos Avlonitis. I'm a writer, director and producer.



My name is Shirleny. I've lived in London for four years and a half now. I work in a college as a biology technician and also in a pub in the evenings as barmaid. I love it. And, yeah, I love London. I'm from Brazil. Yeah.



My name's Ben Ipgrave. I'm from England – originally from Leicester, but then I moved to London about eight years ago, and I'm an assistant manager at a pub and kind of do projects on the side.



My name is Sarah Jama and I work as a teaching assistant in a special education school for special needs and I am from Holland but of Somali heritage and I've been here I'd say about since I was seven.

Intercultural encounters



One instance I can think of was during my childhood in Greece. Me and my sister on a school bus and there's been this Greek [tv] programme where people had said this catch phrase; I think it was like... it was this idiomatic catch phrase that didn't really make sense, but everyone was saying it as quite a big cultural thing and then – of course me and my sister had missed it completely – but suddenly these other kids started saying it to us and we had no idea what they were talking about and, because it was so idiomatic, it was almost like another language entirely; so, even though we understood Greek, it was like they'd suddenly picked up a third language which we couldn't understand.

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Me, I think in the relationship when you had a boyfriend or girlfriend that's different cultures. At first time you think that's going to be fine; you like it because it's different from you, but when you are really together, both of us we see completely differently the same point, the same situation - it's two different views and two different experiences about it, and opinions, so that's difficult.

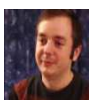


After school – because I went to a largely Indian school and particularly Islamic school – rather than (kind of) hanging round with my friends ... or I'd hang around with my friends that I met at school for like an hour or so, but then they would all have to go off to mosque – I think it was five o'clock mosque of something – and so suddenly the whole streets would be empty, and obviously my friends wouldn't be around anymore because they would have all gone to mosque.



So when I went to Austria there was a – we went to a small little village where we were holidaying and I felt very much (erm) black and that I stood out, and also our family (you know) my mum's Somali, my stepdad's Dutch, my sister's mixed and I'm Somali, so I think for them not only was it, 'Oh, some of them are black!', but it was a case of, 'Oh, there's mixtures and we don't get it'. So I remember in particular people asking us, 'Oh, are you a family', or people wanting to know, and you'd get a lot of glances and (you know) whispering (erm) and that made me – it made me quite conscious about the fact that 'Oh, I .. Oh, my God, yeah I'm black, God!'. So in that sense it was quite a surprise because in London you kind of forget that (you know) it becomes something right at the back of your mind; whereas in Austria I was very much aware that they saw me in a very different light.

Reflections on encounter



For a while I found this quite lonely and quite upsetting in a way, because I couldn't kind of mix with these people, and I felt slightly excluded from this part of their life which was clearly such a major part of their life, and so for a while I really found that quite hard to live with (and stuff like that), but I think, if anything, in time it actually helped me to get to know my own culture a little bit, and I know that's a bit of a leap, but I think it actually helped me appreciate how much this religion means to them and so it (kind of) made me want to (kind of) encounter more of my culture and more of my religion, so I (kind of) read much more into my own religion because of the example that my friends set.



I love – as I've been saying, I love it because I'm learning every day every minute and I think ... I think that I'm getting to a point that I always wished to be – a better person in my point of view and I think I'm reaching it.

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But in a way that was almost self defence. The alienation helped you feel immune to any comments people made about being of a different nationality because you knew that you weren't in the school year you were meant to be, you knew that you were in a different country, you knew that you had been born and raised in England, and knowing that fact kind of made it alright that they would tease you or think you were different, because you knew that you weren't, but you also knew why they thought that you were.



I mean there were some glances that were more intrigued, they were more, 'Um, I wonder what ...?' (you know), they were more interested, and then there were some that were quite, 'Oh, what's happened?' or 'Who are they?' (erm), so those looks made me feel uncomfortable. When they were genuinely interested and you could see they genuinely were asking questions that were quite private and personal but they were more, 'Umm, tell me more' or 'Who's mixed?' or 'What happened?' or 'Where are you from?', then that wasn't so much of a problem. There was more explaining and talking about it, (erm) but it's just very different because I haven't come across that and I'm 26 and it's quite shocking because you think, 'Wow! ... Ok...'

Reflections on a multicultural London



I think you really not only appreciate your own, but realise how your own is so much a part of the whole world as a whole, and you realise how the (kind of) worldliness of your own culture is so important for all these different people, and all these different lives coming here and trying to find like their perfect life in London, and not all of these different kind of people find it, but they always feel a kind of closeness to their own community and a closeness to their own home because of the freedom that they feel here, and I think that's a wonderful thing – it kind of it makes London a home for the whole world and I like that



It is what I really like here because when I meet those different cultures it makes me understand more about myself and also learn more and see my limits, and it is what I like, and I always want to try to be my best, and with those shocks of cultures it makes me think to stop to think of something and why and, yeah, with the reasons, and I like it.



I think for me being half Greek and half English, and being proud of both halves, has made me feel the irrelevance of heritage in a way; I feel that it doesn't change who you are, it doesn't change what you can achieve, and doesn't change how you should react to other, sometimes differences are good – sometimes it's good to talk about differences, sometimes it's good to accept and

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to celebrate your differences – but for me (kind of) being torn between two countries has always made me feel that people should just get along.



One thing that I really appreciate about London – and I didn't realise how important it was to yourself as your set individual, whatever race you are – is the fact that it's not so much about race or culture or any of that, it's the fact that we do have a sense of belonging as Londoners. I hear people throw that term around and say (you know) 'We're Londoners', and I really do think there is a lot to that term. I think a lot of people do feel so much as a Londoner that sometimes we look past the race and (you know) you expect to meet someone who might not speak English or somebody who's from a different culture or ... and actually build a tolerance and be able to live side by side and be like, 'OK, I'm not going to say anything about that because I have a difference of opinion' (you know). We're very much aware of that (you know) someone might think one opinion is fine and (you know) we've become accustomed to, 'OK, yeah...' (you know, erm) but I think difference here is the norm.