CHAPTER 4

Nation and Culture

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter will enable you to:

- Understand the central role played by nationalism in intercultural communication as well as in the literature about intercultural communication, and to engage critically with methodological nationalism in intercultural communication.
- Familiarise yourself with the concept of 'banal nationalism' and use it to engage critically with the concepts of 'cultural values' and 'cultural scripts' and the intercultural communication advice literature.

STEREOTYPES

As most readers will be aware, intercultural communication advice is a well-established genre that fills shelves and sections in bookshops and your local library, and has, of course, an established presence on the Internet and in training workshops. On my bookshelf, for instance, I have titles such as *Beyond Chocolate: Understanding Swiss Culture* (Oertig-Davidson 2002), *Don't They Know it's Friday? Cross-cultural Considerations for Business and Life in the Gulf* (J. Williams 1998) and a few *Xenophobe's Guides* (Bilton 1999; Hunt and Taylor 2004; Yang 1999). These last are part of a 'series that highlights the unique character and behaviour of nations'.[1] The website lists the available *Xenophobe's Guides* by nationalities from 'the Albanians' to 'the Welsh' and in this way is typical of many websites that provide intercultural communication advice and that usually provide intercultural communication advice sorted into

national categories. Reading such literature reminds me of those silly national stereotype jokes most of you will also be familiar with. To give you an idea of what I am talking about, I shall start with an example of such a joke; I imagine that most of you will easily be able to add your own favourite (best-loved or best-hated) examples from the genre. I will follow this with two examples which I am quoting from intercultural communication advice.

> An Englishman, a Frenchman, an American and a Mexican are on a plane that is crashing because it is too heavy. They all throw their baggage from the plane but it is still too heavy. Realising that this calls for extreme heroism, the Englishman shouts, 'God save the Queen!' and jumps out. The Frenchman shouts, '*Vive la France!*' and jumps out, too. Then the American shouts, 'Remember the Alamo!' and chucks out the Mexican.

This joke is based on national stereotypes and you need to be familiar with the national stereotypes invoked to get the joke. National stereotypes are used to achieve a humorous effect and it is the very reduction to a stereotypical type of an Englishman, a Frenchman and an American that makes us laugh. Now consider the following example from a Swiss newspaper article that offers advice to readers on how to communicate with Chinese tourists and business people:

> Chinese communication style. A 'no' can mean 'yes' and a 'yes' doesn't mean anything, as in the following example:
>
> *S (Swiss person): Can I offer you a cup of tea? // C (Chinese person): No, thank you. // S: Are you sure you don't want a cup of tea? // C: No, thank you very much. // S: But a cup of tea would make you feel better in this cold weather. // C: I don't want to cause you any troubles.*
>
> The Chinese person had wanted a cup of tea from the beginning but it would have been impolite to say so directly. Whether you offer a drink, support or a present: the Chinese will always say no. All other questions will be responded to with yes. (Müller 2006; my translation)

The next example comes from an advice booklet produced by the Japanese External Trade Organization (JETRO), which is aimed at 'Western' business people operating in Japan or working with Japanese colleagues internationally.

> When the French want to say 100 things, they will verbalise 150 things. When Japanese say 70 things, they are trying to get the other person to understand 100. (JETRO 1999: 9)

Just as with the joke in the first example, the advice in the two subsequent examples 'works' because it reduces characters to national stereotypes. Disparate as the joke and the pieces of intercultural communication advice may seem, the three examples have one thing in common: each text relies on stereotypes to make its point. Those stereotypes are of a typical national in each case: it is the stick-figures of an Englishman, a Frenchman, an American and a Mexican who are meant to make us laugh in the joke, and it is the stick-figures of a Swiss person and a Chinese person, and a Japanese person and a French person who are meant to teach us about intercultural communication in the advice samples. The national character stereotypes which populate jokes and intercultural communication advice alike are completely mono-dimensional and are not inflected by any other aspects of their identities. The national characters in these examples are presented as free of class, gender, ethnicity, regional background, personal traits or any other individuating aspects of their being – all that matters for the purposes of the joke and the intercultural communication advice is their national identity.

Due to their common reliance on national stereotyping the three texts share textual effects as well: they all create, re-create and sustain national belonging as a key aspect of contemporary identity. Ostensibly, the joke and the examples of intercultural communication advice seem to have completely different aims: it is the central function of a joke to produce humour and to make us laugh, while it is the central function of intercultural communication advice to teach us better communication skills, to make us more aware of difference and diversity. However, despite these seemingly very different aims, both text types actually do the same kind of additional discursive work: they sustain the nation as a key category, they present national belonging as overriding any other aspects of identity, and, consequently, they render other aspects of identity invisible – in short, they are examples of banal nationalism.

BANAL NATIONALISM

The term 'banal nationalism' was introduced by the social psychologist Michael Billig 'to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced' (Billig 1995: 6). Many people think of nationalism as extremism and as extreme forms of national ardour such

as those of Nazi Germany or the disintegrating Yugoslavia. However, Billig points out that nationalism is the endemic condition of established nation states, that it is enacted and re-enacted daily in many mundane, almost unnoticeable, hence 'banal', ways. It is these banal forms of nationalism that lead people to identify with a nation. Examples of banal nationalism are everywhere although they often go unnoticed. Typically, the discourses of banal nationalism emanate directly from state institutions. However, they are then taken up by non-state actors and become enmeshed with a range of discourses that at first glance have nothing to do with nationalism at all, such as the jokes and intercultural communication advice I quoted above. In order to exemplify the concept, I will now discuss two examples of banal nationalism in detail: one comes from the context of schooling and the other comes from the world of food packaging and consumer advertising.

The discourses of banal nationalism are often embedded in the practices of state institutions. Schooling is a prime example of the way in which children are socialised into a national identity. It is school where we become members of the nation and where we are taught to think about ourselves as nationals. The Pledge of Allegiance in many public schools in the USA is an oft-quoted example. The Pledge of Allegiance is often part of the morning ritual, with a class standing to attention, facing the flag and, with the right hand over their heart, jointly reciting the Pledge:

> I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

On the other side of the world, in Australia, many public schools hold a weekly assembly, where the school community comes together to listen to a speech, watch a performance or be part of an award ceremony. The joint singing of the national anthem plays a central part in the school assembly. In yet another example, Indonesian public schools conduct a flag-raising event every Monday morning and also on every 17th of the month (in commemoration of the national Independence Day, which is celebrated on 17 August). Pasassung (2004: 182–183) describes such a flag-raising ceremony as follows:

> It is imperative for every school member to attend this 'flag-raising' ceremony. [. . .] It is part of school formal and regular activities throughout Indonesia. In this ceremony, the *Pancasila* – the philosophical foundation of the nation that contains the five

> philosophical and ideological principles of the nation: believing in one God, civilised and just humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy, and social justice – and the Preamble of the State Constitution are read. The remembrance of and praying for the national heroes are also essential parts of the ceremony. The ceremony participants are required to repeat the five points of the *Pancasila* after the inspector of the ceremony, who is usually the principal. In every ceremony there is time provided for the ceremony inspector to deliver a speech.

The induction into a national identity is part of the hidden curriculum in many schools around the world. The term 'hidden curriculum' is used in the sociology of education to refer to the values, dispositions, and social and behavioural expectations inculcated through schooling without being explicitly taught. In addition to ceremonial activities such as those just described, the socialisation into the nation is also part of teaching content in many schools around the world: consider, for instance, the lyrics of national poems that are used to teach students how to read and write, the national anthem that is taught in music and recital lessons, the focus of much teaching on national history, or the valorisation of the national language as the only legitimate medium of educational activities. Let's look at an example to examine the ways in which socialisation into the nation is enmeshed with the teaching of reading and writing. The example comes from the Persian-language primer that has been used in elementary schools across multilingual and multicultural Iran for generations – both during the Shah regime and the Islamic Republic – and that is also used in many Persian-language heritage schools outside the country (*Farsi: Aval Dabestan* n.d.: 74f.).[2] The exercise begins with a reading passage titled 'Motherland' and set against an outline of the map of Iran:

> Our country is Iran. // We live in Iran. // We are Iranian. // The land of Iran has many cities and villages. // Some Iranians live in cities. // Some Iranians live in villages. // Wherever Iranians live, they are Iranian. // Our motherland is Iran. // We love our very own motherland. (My translation)

The passage is followed by a poem called *Farzandan-e Iran-im*, 'We are the Children of Iran' by the progressive educator and children's author Abbas Yamini Sharif (1919–1989). The poem is followed by a drawing of children dressed in the costumes of various ethnic groups of Iran and dancing together in a circle so as to represent national unity in diversity:

> We are smiling flowers. // We are the children of Iran. // Our country is to us like our body. // We have to be wise, // Watchful and alert. // For the protection of Iran // We've got to be strong. // Oh Iran, develop well! // Oh Iran, be free! // Oh Iran, may your heart // Take pleasure in us, // Your children!

The power of the poem 'We are the Children of Iran' to produce national identity is beautifully illustrated in the Iranian film *Bashu* (English title: *The Little Stranger*), directed by Bahram Beizai (1989). *Bashu* tells the story of a ten-year-old boy from Southern Iran, who becomes orphaned during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988). The boy flees his home on the shores of the Persian Gulf and, as a stowaway on a truck, travels north across the country, for almost 2,000 kilometres, and winds up in a little village in Northern Iran. There he hides in a little granary, where he is found by a village woman: the two look at each other across a social, cultural and linguistic chasm: a traumatised, Arabic-speaking, dark-skinned child and a no-nonsense, Gilaki-speaking, light-skinned farmer and mother, who has never been outside her village. The woman tries to catch the little boy as one would try to catch an animal, all the while asking, in her language, who he is, whether he is an animal or an evil spirit, and the boy shrieking as he tries to escape. Finally, as the woman corners him, the boy starts to chant *Farzandan-e Iran-im*, 'We Are the Children of Iran'. It is only at that moment that the woman recognises the boy as human – the national poem from the primer becomes their common bond. Although both have only a very limited grasp of Persian, the official language of Iran and the language of the poem, they form a strong relationship, and the woman takes Bashu into her family.

Schooling is widely controlled by the state and the fact that it is used as a vehicle to socialise students into the nation is maybe not particularly surprising. However, the discourses of banal nationalism also emanate from less likely sources. Billig's (1995) example of the daily weather forecast on TV is a particularly convincing one: the daily weather forecast is usually presented against an image of the national map – as if national borders were meaningful to weather patterns. Banal nationalism in sports has also been widely studied (for example, Bishop and Jaworski 2003; Darnell 2014; Koch 2013): sporting competitions are typically framed as national competitions and most spectators are more likely to support co-national competitors on the basis of their nationality rather than using more pertinent criteria such as sportsmanship or elegance of the game.

Yet another domain of banal nationalism can be found in consumer advertising, where national imagery is used to create positive associations with a product or service or consumption in general. At the same time,

the use of national imagery in consumer advertising increases the presence of national imagery in the mundane spaces of everyday life and thereby continually reinforces the message of national belonging. The discourses of banal nationalism that come associated with consumer advertising have come to pervade our private lives. For instance, a cornflakes box[3] that has graced my very own breakfast table countless times sports the following 'poem':

> Sanitarium corn flakes are as Australian as . . . // A Didgeridoo // and a Kangaroo // As a Rubber Thong // and a Billabong // As Uluru // and a Cockatoo // The Barrier Reef // and a Eucalyptus Leaf // The Harbour Bridge // and Lightning Ridge // A Melbourne Tram // and a Merino Ram // A sun that Blisters // and those Three Sisters.

The poem lists a number of Australian icons against a blue background. Blue is widely considered to be the Australian national colour, an association reinforced in collocations such as 'a true blue Aussie' meaning a 'real' Australian. The words of the poem are set against the background of the Australian flag and surrounded by pictures of all the national icons referred to in the poem. Associating products with national imagery is a widely used marketing strategy in Australia, just as it is in many other countries.[4] Through everyday items such as a cornflakes box – and many other similar items of product packaging – national symbols enter mundane everyday spaces such as supermarket shelves and the breakfast table in our homes. They keep circulating in those spaces as constant small reminders of national identity.

In sum, the discourses of banal nationalism socialise people into seeing themselves as members of a particular nation who live in a wider world of nation states. These discourses of banal nationalism train us to see ourselves in national ways and they become part of who we are to such a degree that they enter our emotional make-up. Internet comments in response to national songs, videos or images often provide evidence of national belonging as a deeply felt emotion. For instance, 'top' comments on a rendition of the song *I Am Australian* include the following:

> I love this song it should be national anthem im born here and mixed blood. Dutch, indonesian, english, irish, aboriginal, south american. // *puts my hand on my heart and sings along with a tear ^^ * // I'm an Aussie and bloody proud of it!! I love this country!! // Another fiercely proud Australian. I always get that same shiver down the spine and a tear in my eye.[5]

References to 'love', 'pride', 'tears' and a 'shiver down the spine' all testify to national identity as a deeply-felt emotion of the posters. While these commentators' feelings of community may be heartfelt, the community they belong to is an 'imagined' one (Anderson 1991). That means that members of a nation imagine themselves and are imagined by others as group members. However, the groups themselves are too large to be considered 'real' communities, that is, no group member will ever know all the other group members. Critical theorists have written extensively about the ways in which identity is socially constructed and intimately linked to power relationships in society, as the socialisation into particular subject positions – those of national subjects in this case – predisposes us to certain kinds of activity that fit with the demands of a particular national society and of a global society of nation states in general. As we become nationals and live out the requirements of the ideologies of a particular national identity and that of the importance of being national in general, 'we are under the illusion that we have freely chosen our way of life' (Widdicombe 1998: 200).

In this section, I have shown that national identity is a discursive construction – a highly pervasive one but a construction nonetheless. However, while this point is basic to most of the contemporary social sciences, it is rarely acknowledged in the literature on intercultural communication, where national identity tends to be treated as a given. In the following section, therefore, I will consider intercultural communication advice as another instance of banal nationalism, a discourse that reinforces readers' sense of national belonging rather than one that leads them to genuinely engage with difference and diversity.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ADVICE

In Chapter 2, I introduced the work of Leeds-Hurwitz (1990), who shows how a major strand of intercultural communication research grew out of the need to train US army and diplomatic personnel for their missions abroad. As a consequence of that applied focus, much work in intercultural communication is predicated upon a conflation of culture, nation and language. It is a simple equation: Australian culture can be found in Australia, where people speak Australian, which is an expression of Australian culture; Chinese culture can be found in China, where people speak Chinese, which is an expression of Chinese culture; Zambian culture can be found in Zambia, where people speak Zambian, which is an expression of Zambian culture; and so on. Those readers who are familiar with any of these countries will probably find what I have just written

absurd. Regarding Australia, they could point to the fact that Australia is a country with high levels of immigration and that in the 2011 census more than twenty-three per cent of the population spoke a language other than English at home ('2011 Census Quickstats' 2016). Regarding China, they could point to the fact that two countries claim to be 'China' – the People's Republic of China or 'Mainland China' and the Republic of China or Taiwan – and that consecutive waves of Chinese emigration have established a Chinese diaspora across Southeast Asia, and, more recently, internationally (S. Lee and Li 2013). Regarding Zambia, they could point to the fact that a language called 'Zambian' does not actually exist, and that the state of Zambia is home to more than forty different indigenous ethnic groups with their own languages. The official language of Zambia, incidentally, is English, although only a minority of Zambians can speak it and even fewer are literate in it (E. Williams 2014).

It is obvious from these examples that the one-on-one mapping of culture onto nation onto language is factually wrong. However, it is a staple of the intercultural communication advice literature nonetheless. The one-on-one mapping of culture onto nation onto language is discursively constructed in a number of ways. The most obvious one is through titles in the intercultural communication advice literature that conflate 'culture' with nation. Examples include the Halls' classic *Hidden Differences: Doing Business with the Japanese* (Hall and Hall 1987), or more recent titles such as 'Communication with Egyptians' (Begley 2015), 'Russian Cultural Values and Workplace Communication Patterns' (Bergelson 2015) or 'Some Basic Cultural Patterns of India' (Jain 2015). Another way to make the nation the scope of culture (see Chapter 1) can be found on websites and smartphone apps devoted to intercultural communication advice. There, intercultural communication advice is most frequently organised in lists of national names or national flags. A smartphone app called 'CultureGPS',[6] for example, has a world map on its entry page and allows users to look up country profiles. The app is described as 'a global positioning system to navigate through intercultural differences' and is supposed to help a user 'predict to a certain degree, which interactions evolve when people from different nationalities meet'. Despite a somewhat cryptic disclaimer that '[not] everyone in a given society is programmed in the same way', the iconic association of country names with communication advice creates the impression that communication style is nation based. The app creates a strong image of banal nationalism and essentialises the nation as the locus of culture and communication.

The 'CultureGPS' app is typical of a substantial segment of intercultural communication scholarship, where the nation is the basic unit of intercultural communication. The nation is salient to intercultural communica-

tion researchers for the same reason it is salient to most people: because of the pervasiveness of the discourses of banal nationalism. However, intercultural communication scholarship that simply takes the nation as given does little more than reproduce the discourses available, that is, those circulating in society at large, rather than analysing those discourses critically. Much of the academic justification for treating the nation as the basis for culture in the intercultural communication literature rests on the work of the Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede. I will introduce Hofstede's work in Chapter 7. Here, my key concern and argument has been that intercultural communication advice premised on monolithic and essentialist views of the nation as the foundation of culture are not useful to understanding and appreciating difference and diversity, but are little more than instances of banal nationalism, much in the same way that a flag-raising ceremony in Indonesian schools or an Australian cornflakes box adorned with national imagery are examples of banal nationalism. Such understandings are theoretically and practically inadequate. Theoretically, they are inadequate because there is no acknowledgement of the multiplicity of our identities. We are never just members of a nation but perform many other identities, too, simultaneously and at different points in our lives. Practically, they are inadequate because national identity has lost some of the sway it once held in an age characterised by globalisation and transnationalism.

GLOBALISATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM

As I have shown in this chapter, nations are discursive constructions. However, that does not mean that they are not important. When I lived in Basel, a Swiss city that borders France and Germany, even mundane activities such as grocery shopping (cheaper in Germany) or attending a children's birthday party (school friends of my child living in France) reminded me of national borders on an almost daily basis. They also reminded me of, and inscribed, my identity as a German citizen because this is the passport I carry, and this is the passport I must not forget to put in my car in case I was checked as I crossed one of those borders. Furthermore, in comparison with an Indian friend of mine, those reminders and ascriptions of my national identity were relatively benign: Indian citizens cannot just cross those borders by only showing their passport. Rather, whenever my friend wanted to cross into Germany or France, she would first need to travel to Berne, the Swiss capital, and apply for a visa to the Schengen Area – the union of European countries that form one 'visa area' and of which Switzerland was not yet a member at the time – at one of the embassies there. This involved paying fees, completing paperwork

and providing various types of evidence, queuing for a significant amount of time outside the embassy, and so on. Predictably, she did not take advantage of cheaper grocery shopping in Germany or let her child attend birthday parties in France. State practices such as these obviously powerfully construct my friend and me as Indian and German, respectively, and both of us as non-Swiss, and they make national identity a salient aspect of our identity to us. So, national identity is obviously real and powerful. However, it works in ways that are quite different from those imagined in the intercultural communication advice literature, where national identity is made to rest not in institutional practices but in an individual's speech styles, behaviours, values and communicative preferences. As a matter of fact, those speech styles, behaviours, values and communicative preferences which are the locus of intercultural communication advice are increasingly decoupled from the nation in the context of globalisation and transnationalism. In today's world, the coercions of bureaucratic practices, 'the passport identity', have become increasingly more powerful due to the ascendancy of security concerns. However, cultural and communicative styles and values have become diluted and have acquired a mix-and-match flavour as more and more people travel and migrate and as mediated cultural flows criss-cross the globe.

The obvious point is that, given the state of connectedness of our world, no (national) culture exists in isolation. In a magazine article in *CNN Traveller*, for instance, a Thai informant explains Thai culture to an American journalist as follows:

> The Thai people like cowboy films. We identify with them. We grew up with *Stagecoach* and *Wyatt Earp*. The first film I ever saw was a Wayne – *Rio Grande*. 'You must learn that a man's word to anything, even his own destruction, is his honour,' he quotes. (Taylor 2006: 54)

The example is mundane: I could have chosen any number of examples making the same point, and each reader will be able to add their own examples to show that culture is in a constant state of flux and cross-fertilisation. Given that each of us belongs to many cultures in this sense, and that all these combinations are slightly different, it is possible to argue that, seen this way, all communication is intercultural, as Holliday, Kullman and Hyde (2017) have done.

Identities are always complex, multiple, hybrid and diverse and cannot simply be reduced to the national. We live in a world where people cross in and out of cultural styles (Rampton 2011), engage in cultural fusions (Pennycook 2007), are part of third cultures (Moore and Barker 2012),

and where hybridity carries enormous identificatory and analytic purchase (Maher 2010). There is a strong sense today that identities are becoming ever more complex – a phenomenon sociolinguistics has attempted to capture with terms such as 'super-diversity' (Blommaert 2015), 'metrolingualism' (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) or 'translanguaging' (Garcia and Li 2013). The sense that contemporary diversities are more complex than ever before may be a fallacy as diversity has always been central to the human experience (Piller 2016b). However, the perception of complex, multiple, hybrid and diverse identities demonstrates that homogeneous, nation-focused intercultural communication advice is not only stereotypical, it is also out of touch.

Explorations of crossing, cultural fusions, third cultures and hybridity are often conceived as challenges to dominant accounts of a uniform national culture. Even so, these accounts still take the nation and/or ethnicity as their point of departure. This approach has been called a 'big culture' approach by Holliday (1999), who argues for a shift of focus to 'small culture'. We sometimes speak about a 'company culture' or a 'family culture', and it is groups such as these that a 'small culture' orientation focuses on. 'Small cultures' are characterised by 'relating to cohesive behaviour in activities within any social grouping' (Holliday 1999: 241). As I have done above, Holliday takes issue with the essentialism and reification of culture that mars a lot of what is being written and said about intercultural communication, both inside and outside academia.

While researchers such as Holliday (1999) conclude that in a globalised and transnational world all communication is intercultural, others have concluded that the concept of intercultural communication has become completely meaningless as decontextualised discourses float around the globe in a time- and space-free manner (Kramsch and Boner 2010). Just as the global flows of images, discourses, ideas and lifestyles call static views of intercultural communication as communication between people from different cultural backgrounds into question, so do actual people flows. The former are often discussed under the heading of globalisation whereas the latter are more typically discussed under the heading of transnationalism (and also migration studies). In the following, I will present a detailed case study of transnational migration between Mexico and the USA and explore its implications for the national basis of intercultural communication studies.

Mexican migrants are often seen as one homogenous group in the USA. However, in the title of the study I am drawing on here neither 'Mexican immigrants' nor 'the USA' appears. Instead Marcia Farr's (2006) fifteen-year-long ethnographic engagement was with *Rancheros in Chicagoacán* – that is how the transnational people she studied described themselves

('rancheros') and the place they inhabited ('Chicagoacán). The literal translation of ranchero is 'rancher' and the emergence of rancheros in the Americas is related to European settlement and particularly to the development of cattle ranching, with North American cowboys as the 'cultural cousins' of the rancheros. Rancheros are a recognisable group within the rural population of Western Mexico, where they are different from wealthy *hacienda* ('large estate') owners as well as indigenous *campesinos* ('peasants'). Rancheros have their own cultural norms and practices, and it was one of the aims of Farr's research to raise awareness of rancheros as a distinct subgroup of Mexico's rural population. Reading her account of the identities performed in this group and their language practices, it becomes quite apparent that reference to Mexicans as a cultural group is quite meaningless. What is more, rancheros are not a uniform group, either: 'If Hispanics are diverse, and Mexicans are diverse, rancheros are diverse as well', as the author points out (Farr 2006: 270). Gender in particular is a key aspect of internal variation, and gender identities themselves are shifting in the migration context where migrating husbands often leave their wives behind as heads of the household. This, together with the fact that migrating ranchero women are likely to be in paid employment in Chicago factories, has resulted in women taking on responsibilities and roles of authority that were traditionally considered male in this community. The lives of rancheros are far removed from the pseudo-scientific description on an intercultural communication website, which has this to say about Mexicans and their 'culture':

> Mexico is a hierarchical society. [. . .] subordinates expect to be told what to do [. . .] people 'live in order to work' [. . .] there is an emotional need for rules (even if the rules never seem to work) [. . .] Mexican culture is normative. People [. . .] exhibit great respect for traditions, a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results. [. . .] Mexican culture has a definite tendency toward Indulgence. People [. . .] place a higher degree of importance on leisure time, act as they please and spend money as they wish.[7]

In her fifteen-year-long engagement with a group of migrant ranchero families, where the researcher was a participant observer both in their homes in Mexico and in the USA and where she also recorded and analysed almost 200 hours of naturally occurring conversations, Farr came up with a much more complex picture of the values of her participants. In direct contrast to the statement about people expecting to be told what to do quoted above, *franqueza* (frankness) emerged as a highly prized

way of speaking in this community. *Franqueza* was considered an expression of individualism, serving the dual purpose of establishing a person as a unique individual able to defend themselves and, simultaneously, to defend their place in the family.

> [T]he importance of both individualism and familism among rancheros disrupts another stereotype based on the commonly perceived dichotomy between (U.S.) individualism and (Mexican) familism. [. . .] The unexamined stereotype of Mexicans as communal (and even worse as submissive) likely derives from generalizing all campesinos as Indian and, in turn, from generalizing (and romanticizing) Indians as communally oriented or, more importantly, as different from 'us.' (Farr 2006: 269–270)

The USA to which rancheros migrate is of course not a mythical homogenous country, either. Most of them spend most of their lives in *el Norte* (the North) – as the USA is commonly referred to in Mexican Spanish – living in a close-knit network with other ranchero migrants who inhabit a few closely circumscribed quarters of Chicago. The name they have given to this area, *Chicagoacán*, is a blend between the name of their destination city, Chicago, and the name of their province of origin, Michoacán. To make the story even more complex, Farr's participants do not simply migrate from Michoacán to Chicago: not only do they create a new space and a new community in Chicagoacán, they also travel back and forth and 're-migrate' with some regularity, leading transnational lives.

In sum, in order to remain relevant, intercultural communication studies need to engage with globalisation and transnationalism and place them at the very centre of their enquiry. Not only have these processes increased the potential for intercultural encounters to take place exponentially, they have also changed the ways in which we need to approach intercultural communication as an object of enquiry. They demonstrate quite clearly that nation-based ways of approaching intercultural communication have become obsolete. In order to overcome the banal nationalism that can be found in a large segment of the intercultural communication advice literature, ethnographic studies of communication and identity making in context, such as the one by Farr (2006) I have just described, are of paramount importance. The fallacies of banal nationalism in intercultural communication research can only be avoided by a commitment to studying language, culture and communication in context. Rather than taking the 'nation equals culture equals language' formula for granted, the key question of intercultural communication research needs to be: Who makes culture relevant to whom in which context for which purposes?

KEY POINTS

This chapter made the following key points:

- Stereotypes underlie much intercultural communication and as participants in intercultural encounters we often approach each other through stereotypes. We need to understand stereotypes for what they are – interested generalisations – in order to engage with people from different backgrounds in a meaningful way. Elevating stereotypes to heuristic devices is not only useless but also damages our capacity to engage with others.
- Banal nationalism is a ubiquitous way of stereotyping which socialises us into national belonging in mundane, often overlooked, but pervasive ways. National socialisation is part of the baggage most if not all of us bring to intercultural encounters.
- A large segment of the intercultural communication advice literature is nothing more than an instantiation of banal nationalism. Such advice often purports to teach about intercultural communication but peddles nothing more than national ways of seeing the world and stereotypes about essentialist and homogeneous national identity.
- Globalisation and transnational migration further throw nation-based approaches to intercultural communication into question. As the media broadcast cultural styles and values around the globe and as more and more people travel (or are travelled to), intercultural communication itself is best seen as a mobile resource and the question of who makes culture relevant to whom in what context for what purposes is ever more important to gain an understanding of the interested nature of communication.

COUNTERPOINT

I have argued here that intercultural communication research needs to escape from the trap of methodological nationalism through ethnographic and discourse-analytic work that examines who makes culture relevant to whom in what context for what purposes. However, does it actually make sense to retain such a tainted and overburdened concept such as 'intercultural communication'? Or have globalisation and transnational migration resulted in all communication being intercultural? Have they resulted in making the intercultural meaningless as dominant cultures impose their discourses on others as supposedly culturally-neutral texts?

FURTHER READING

It is well worth reading Billig (1995) in the original. The contributions to *The Handbook of Language and Globalization* (Coupland 2010) provide a wide range of perspectives on globalisation and communication. An in-depth study of 'super-diversity' in the linguistic landscape of Antwerp provides an intriguing 'chronicle of complexity' (Blommaert 2013). Holliday et al. (2017) is a collection of resources of intercultural communication that engage with and go beyond nation-based approaches to intercultural communication.

ACTIVITIES

Banal nationalism around you
Document instances of banal nationalism in the spaces you frequent and the activities you engage in during the course of a day. If possible, use a digital camera or mobile phone to record all displays of your country's name, the flag and any other national imagery you encounter on campus, in the street, on public transport, in the mall, and so on. Also, create a record of any other reminders of national belonging you are exposed to as part of your normal activities (for example, during work, while eating, in your study materials, in the media, and so on). Once you have completed your data collection and compiled your documentation, consider whether the number of instances of banal nationalism differs from your expectations. Are there instances of banal nationalism that you must have encountered already but that you had never noticed before? Who is included and who is excluded by the instances of banal nationalism that you have encountered?

Banal nationalism in intercultural communication websites
Choose an intercultural communication advice website or a smartphone application and analyse which scope of culture is encoded in the design. How is that encoding achieved (for example, through maps, lists of country names or flags as organising devices)? If the scope of culture is not the nation, what is it? If you want to turn this activity into a more substantial exploration, you might want to read up on multimodal analysis, to which Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) provide an excellent introduction.

Global and local intersections in your life
Keep a close record of the local or global origins of what you do for one day. Where do the things you use come from (for example, clothes, food,

furniture, books, computer)? Most of these will have multiple sources (for example, clothes designed in one place, material grown in another, assembled in yet another); can you determine all the sources for the things in your life? What about the practices and ideas that you engage in? Where do they come from? On the basis of this record write a short essay about global and local intersections in your life.

NOTES

1. See http://www.xenophobes.com/
2. An image of the page can be viewed at http://www.languageonthemove.com/the-banal-nationalism-of-intercultural-communication-advice/
3. An image of the cornflakes box and can be viewed at http://www.languageonthemove.com/the-banal-nationalism-of-intercultural-communication-advice/
4. For a collection of images of products and streetscapes infused with national imagery of the United Arab Emirates, visit http://www.languageonthemove.com/happy-birthday-uae-2/
5. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD3SkTyXzcE; spellings as in the original.
6. Published by Itim International; last downloaded from the Apple App Store on 2 January 2017.
7. See https://geert-hofstede.com/mexico.html