

Same View, Different Lens will discuss cultural awareness in a world wherein countries, and some peoples, are reverting to an insular and intolerant outlook. How identity, and the inherent need to belong to a 'tribe', need not negate acceptance or a willingness to learn of another's beliefs. How literature and music can play a part in cultural knowledge, and how the fear of cultural appropriation can lessen that awareness.

Why I can talk to the topic of cultural awareness..... 12 countries, and worked in 7

Ryszard Kapuscinski, the Polish journalist, reporting on Africa, from Africa, words relevant anywhere.

“Often the native and newcomer have difficulty in finding a common language, because each looks at the same place through a different lens.”

Lens blurred - even, at times, when moving within a country. Mainland US to the VI.
Changing cultures -the PolVan Cultural Identity Model - 4 distinct categories:

Foreigner: Look different, Think different (Vietnamese moving to England)

Adopted: Look different, Think alike (Chinese adopted as a baby by US parents, but if a Chinese child is adopted as an older child he / she would fall into the foreigner category) This is where the lens blurs.

Mirror: Look alike, Think alike (black baby adopted by black parents)

Hidden Immigrant: Look alike, think different (black man born and bred out of Africa sent to work in Africa)

Maya Angelou - *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* time spent on African continent - Egypt and **Ghana** where she was part of the expatriate African-American community - searching for 'home'.

Dichotomy. Mixed with expatriates from the US and yet considered herself a 'returnee'. Can't repatriate if that country not one's birth country. Might consider a country their ethnic home, might consider their DNA part of a culture or country **but it is not where they grew up.** That doesn't mean elements of a particular heritage can't be absorbed into their birth culture but they are **not of that country.**

Ms Angelou wrote with searing honesty and said,

“If the heart of Africa remained elusive, my search for it had brought me closer to understanding myself and other human beings. The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.”

Recognized that whilst there was a connection to Africa, growing up in the US would always make her a visitor to her perceived motherland.

Whoopie Goldberg “Honey, I’ve been to Africa but I’m an American.”

Samuel L Jackson, Jamie Foxx, Kanye West - been fêted in Africa, granted honorary citizenship and a passport but guilt wears off and the reality of being Hidden Immigrants comes to the fore.

I am a hidden immigrant. Automatically fit into other predominantly white, English-speaking countries. Not the case. Hardest to adapt to: Australia, England, Scotland, and the US.

Expectation that because I looked the same, I was the same. But I did not grow up with the culture of my peers in those countries - Britain, Australia and the US.

While I might have fitted in colour-wise, I certainly didn’t culture-wise.

(On leave - School in England)

Culture not just between races and nationalities

Even as a child **find a point of contact.** Enid Blyton at NEGS

Boarding school has a culture of its own. **A resilience is born, along with an adaptability.**

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, where the boys tried, initially at least, to live under some kind of order... to form their own culture. The fact they became savages highlights the importance of the moral strength of a leader -

Every group and sub group, and sub sub group forms their own culture - normally it is **somewhere one feels safe, accepted for exactly who we are.**

(inbuilt safety system for adaptation, certainly as children - NEGS + Dad/English)

TCK - Third Culture Kid —born in England, raised in Africa and Asia, and took elements of those cultures, wholly unwittingly, to form own unique culture. **The sense of belonging is in relation to others of a similar background.** It has little to do with what colour we are or how we speak. **Norma McCraig**, another sociologist, said - TCK's are global nomads who **spread their roots horizontally rather than vertically.**

Cultural perspective at work is to attend a church service, any denomination, in one country and then see the same liturgy in another. Same faith, different cultural lens.

(EG nuns/toenails)

Audre Lorde, the black, lesbian feminist and civil rights advocate and author and, later in her life, a resident of St Croix, said, **“When we create out of our experiences, as feminists of color, women of color, we have to develop those structures that will present and circulate our culture.”**

True of every culture?

In Britain - **integrated society** - many immigrants to the UK have come from former colonies. The **Windrush Generation**. Their **expectations** of instant acceptance were quickly **dashed**. Neither did their actual image of Britain live up to those expectations - there was poverty, racism, and all the subtexts of any society.

Prefer to believe in a **plural society** rather than an integrated one. That doesn't mean there can't be connection, no interaction, but rather an acceptance of all our different foibles. But we should all be looking to achieve a greater cultural awareness.

Museums / docents

But what is the key to global cultural awareness? I think it's **curiosity**.

The Prophet Mohammed said, **“Don't tell me how educated you are; tell me how much you've travelled.”**

Not everyone can travel the world. Privileged. But in this day and age of limitless access to knowledge there is no excuse for becoming inward-looking, parochial.

Mark Twain's wise words resonate:

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

By traveling less, even as an armchair traveller, we are **curbing our curiosity**, denying ourselves the opportunity of seeing different cultures, different religions, different peoples - of maybe understanding just a little better the world around us.

Travelling helps us gain a nuanced cultural awareness, a recognition the world is not black or white but different shades of grey.

The travel writer, **Bruce Chatwin** said, **"Travel doesn't merely broaden the mind. It makes the mind."**

So what limits cultural awareness? Fear.

Concerned about **countries closing their borders** and denying access to immigrants, why the **rise of a nationalistic fervor** gripping many countries is truly worrying. It's not just under the current administration in the US. Great Britain - EU in an effort to regain control not just of her laws, but her borders through **tighter immigration laws**. Germany, where the AfD (Alternative for Germany) largest opposition in the Bundestag with 12.6% who embrace anti-Islamic sentiments and have broken decades-old anti-Nazi taboos. New **bloc of 9 far-right parties** have formed in the EU, called Identity and Democracy (ID.) Brazil, Australia, Singapore.

Often, maybe even invariably, when a country's immigration stance is toughened, religion is in the mix. Islamophobia is not just from western countries - consider **Myanmar** and the attempted expulsion of the **Rohingya** from a predominantly Buddhist country. Anti-Semitism - is on the rise.

Confuse patriotism with nationalism. Ask a **Sikh**, born and bred in England, how he feels about England. Five tenets of Sikhism = loyalty to the Queen. He will serve in the army or the police as long as he is allowed to wear his turban - an outward

representation of equality and justice. So in order **to assimilate, exceptions, compromises**, have to be made.

Much of the **fear and animosity of other cultures is due to the unknown**, to a lack of awareness or, sadly, even lack interest in learning about another's culture and yet people are still searching for common ground. A tribe.

Rabid evangelical movement has swept the US. People searching for something to believe in - sometimes it seems as if we are searching for anything to believe in, which is why pseudo pastors like **Joel Osteen** of the Lakewood Church in Houston gets away with saying things like:

“We live in a culture that relishes tearing others down. It's ultimately more fulfilling, though, to help people reach their goals. Instead of feeling jealous, remember: If God did it for them, He can do it for you.”

The first part of that quote is great. It is fulfilling to help others, it's called empathy and kindness. My question is, why should God do anything for you? It's not a payback system. What happened to altruism?

Or, and this is my favourite Osteen quote,

“God loves a winner, not a whiner!”

Crucian expression, speak out of both sides of their mouth. Who this?

“There's such cultural rot taking place, such a disintegration throughout our culture. Values, morality, you name it. Standards have been relaxed, and people are not being held to them. People's intentions, if they're said to be good and honorable, that's all that matters.”

Rush Limbaugh, master of derogatory commentary, and recent recipient of the Medal of Honor.

Instead of trying to become inclusive, more understanding, more hopeful for the world, we are getting more insular, more parochial, more fearful.

How can we embrace some elements of different cultures - FGM female genital mutilation. Can't and shouldn't. But we have to remember that in order to change a culture or tradition that has been in existence sometimes much longer than some countries, we have to be an active participant. Change only comes from within. **The bleating of the righteous does very little good. It takes time, it takes education, it takes openness, it takes communication, it takes cultural awareness.**

Remarkable people who have crossed cultures - **particularly in the arts.** Think of **Yo-Yo Ma**. Classic TCK - Leonard Bernstein introduced him to an audience which included JFK by saying, **"Now here's a cultural image for you to ponder as you listen: a 7 year-old Chinese cellist playing old French music for his new American compatriots.**

Ma's **Silk Road Project**. So named for the land trading routes connecting East Asia to Southern Europe. He described his Project as an **"arts and educational organization that connects musicians, composers, artists and audiences around the world" and "an initiative to promote multicultural artistic collaboration."**

Yo-Yo Ma called the original Silk Road the **"Internet of antiquity"** along which commerce, religion and people passed, exchanging ideas along the way. He believes **"Our cultural strength has always been derived from our diversity."**

VI - quelbe, and **quadrille** - an amalgam of all the European countries and cultures under which the islands have flown. **Bamboula** is the more spiritual and true embodiment of who these islands now represent.

Pico Iyer, TCK - born in Britain to Indian parents - lecture called *The Global Soul*, **"politics is too often local while fiction travels the world."**

True - tome on Japanese history, or the Incas of ancient Peru. But put that history in novel form and you might have a best seller.

Element in society who believe that those outside a culture have no right to write about another's culture. They call it **cultural appropriation**. 'Bollocks!'

André Alexis, (Hidden Keys) a writer born in Trinidad, brought up in Canada, agrees with me and believes **"the most influential and living spiritual doctrines we know**

are precisely those that are widely disseminated and interpreted in the widest variety of ways.....”

Who gets to be the judge?

Many of those arguing against the term cultural appropriation are like André Alexis. He considers himself a **“Nowherian”**, a term coined by St Lucian writer and poet **Derek Walcott**.

And that’s a classic TCK conundrum. **Where is home?**

Home is wherever I happen to be. But whatever we call ourselves we are creatures of a slightly different ilk. We are chameleons. **We adapt to fit into any given environment but are never entirely of that environment**, because we bring all our other cultures with us. **André Alexis** says, **“Canada was the country to learn home in, not to be at home.”**

Pico Iyer has also chimed in on cultural appropriation. A keynote speech in India at the Jaipur, **“Banning cultural appropriation as a literary tool would mean giving up on trying to understand those who are different. It can be a very dark form of nationalism.”**

Another author and prize winning novelist, **Leila Slimani**, author of the Prix Goncourt-winning novel *The Perfect Nanny* is a Moroccan living in France and is fed up of being told she shouldn’t write outside her experience. **“When I write, I’m not a woman, I’m not a Moroccan, I’m not a Muslim, I am whatever I want ... because in the end we are all human beings. Melancholy has no nationality. Despair has no nationality. Love has no nationality,”**

There is, of course, the other side to the story.

Palestinian novelist, **Susan Abulhawa** believes she has **“been robbed of home and heritage and history and food and culture.** She argues, **Palestinians ‘don’t share one mind’ but are united by ‘this wound we all share.’ When somebody whose life has not been so profoundly affected by this wound then comes and narrates from**

that wound, they're colonizing a space that they have no business being in. And that becomes renewed oppression."

It's an interesting take from a Palestinian because it could so easily apply to neighboring Israel.

That sense of renewed oppression would appear to be a thought, an emotion, felt by some **African American writers** who rail at others writing about the institution of slavery. Still **many inequities between many black and white**, none of us were alive in those dark days and therefore we all write our own approximation of that time.

And **where is the line drawn?** What about **fashion?**

American Dirt, by **Jeanine Cummins**, run into issues about cultural appropriation. Outcry - Latino community arguing for greater representation of Latin American authors in publishing houses, meanwhile **attacking a writer** for writing what they consider **'to be their story'**.

Toni Morrison "If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." Her comment would seem to end all discussion on cultural appropriation, and in not just fiction.

Jeanine Cummins, in the author's note in *American Dirt* says, **"If you're a person who has the capacity to be a bridge, why not be a bridge?"**

Not same lofty realm as aforementioned writers, perhaps why **I have chosen to write historical fiction** based in different parts of the world. Back to **TCK roots spreading horizontally**. Life touched by many cultures, **a patchwork taken from all the elements** to which I have been exposed.

My life attempting to be that bridge - The key is **curiosity** and remembering we all look at the world through **a different lens**.

Wherever we are on the colour spectrum, wherever we are in our faith, our gender, our sexuality, whatever our traditions - good and bad - **curiosity breeds a cultural awareness that is a step to finding our common humanity**.