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9. IGNORANCE IN A KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY: UNKNOWING THE FOREIGNER IN THE NEOLIBERAL CONDITION

INTRODUCTION

Foreigner: a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis (Kristeva, 1991, p. 1).

The sheer plurality of communities, and the shifting nature of their formation make any appeals to knowledge ... absurd (Todd, 2004, p. 349).

Globalisation has thrown imagination and creativity into turmoil. The creative space of tertiary teaching struggles with conflicting ideals, as real and imagined boundaries are crossed, and educational borderlines change. Immigrant early childhood teachers have flocked to Aotearoa New Zealand in recent years, supported and desired by immigration policy and neoliberal institutional needs. In this paper I draw on Kristeva's (1991) suggestion that there is a foreigner within each of us, and that it is only by "recognizing him within ourselves" that "we are spared detesting him in himself" (p. 1). I problematize the notion of knowledge in relation to immigrant student teachers' selfformation as academic subjects with the suggestion of unknowability and ignorance as a realistic orientation to subvert the need for certainty. I represent the uncertainty of the erratic, seductive neoliberal condition with Bauman's notion of liquid modernity, and argue that knowledge of the other, even if it were possible, would be superseded and obsolete as rapidly as it is acquired. A fresh conceptualization of ignorance stretches the imagination of what is, inherently, a boundaryless educational space.

Turmoil abounds in the university, as clashing ideals simmering in its globalized teaching spaces draw attention to conflicting knowledges. This paper problematizes knowledge, and highlights tensions arising from knowledge of the self and of the other. It complicates this tension by responding to Kristeva's (1991) suggestion, that there is a foreigner within each of us, and that it is only by "recognizing him within ourselves" that "we are spared detesting him in himself" (p. 1), as an intruder into our milieu. I examine influences of foreignness on the reverence of knowledge through an interplay of Kristeva's abstract illustrations of foreigners, juxtaposed with tensions

in the university. The examination draws on and responds to the critical multicultural discourse that informs globalized university teaching spaces, and its common call for increased knowledge of cultural foreigners. In an apparent effort to produce just, ethical teaching environments this discourse promotes supporting and knowing, even celebrating, diversity amongst students and teachers. In disturbing the tensions that simmer in this environment I concur with Todd's (2004) opening quote, and argue that upholding knowledge as a cure for diversity is absurd. Accordingly, socially just teaching rests not on obliterating the problem of diversity in teaching environments, by following an intense and unrealistic drive for increased knowledge about those who are other. Instead a reorientation, to confront otherness as a natural part of social existence, everyday relationships and interactions appears more useful (Todd, 2011). This paper is an exploration of orientations towards knowledge, contextualized in the neoliberal climate of globalized university environments. In its conclusion, it points to an alternative orientation towards the unknowable other, as a romantic victim or an intruder, which involves adopting a conscious stance of ignorance.

SIMMERING TENSIONS

The urgency of this confrontation of tensions lies in the university's role as an integral cog in the unpredictable, market driven, multinational educational machine (Codd, 2008; Dale, 2008; McLeod, 2012). This analysis shows how concepts of knowing and knowledge, and the tensions arising from foreignness within the university environment, are heightened by and perpetuate the neoliberal social and political context. Kristeva's (1991) probing suggestion that by acknowledging the foreigner within each of us we can avoid detesting others raises the question of what it means to know and to be an other, and, more intimately, ourselves. Kristeva illustrates the turmoil and rawness of abstract foreigner experiences which distinguish themselves from but also illucidate the unpredictable situations with which immigrant foreigners grapple in the university (Li, 2007; Rhedding-Jones, 2001). The dichotomous space between these distinct, abstract foreigners and the neoliberal context provides a freeing space in which this analysis of knowledge can play out. Kristeva's foreigners foreground and underpin the analysis.

KRISTEVA'S FOREIGNERS

Instead of mourning their loss, Kristeva's (1991) newly independent foreigners have become other, engulfed in the intoxication of independence, freedom from orders, responsibilities, inhibitions and restrictions by which they were previously controlled. Totally immersed in the "happiness of tearing away, of racing, the space of a promised infinite" (p. 4), the newly independent foreigners have already transcended what previously was, abandoned familiarity, now disengaged by their own uprooting. Off the rails now, they loosely follow unknown, previously unimagined tracks, inventing, coping with, trying, failing and reinventing knowledge and new ways of

being. They may originate from different places, having cut loose, from a time, place and life, to escape and start fresh, from nothing. Now, they revel in being a nobody, in a new place, paying scant attention to their own history, records, or direction. With an unclear or, as yet, undefined new life purpose, the transient, loose foreigners live by different meanings to the locals (Kristeva, 1991).

Masked and Protected

Some foreigners mask their sensitivity, whilst internally they bleed “body and soul” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 6) from the humiliation, isolation, degradation, of a new world where they are now the underdogs. Is this mask an image to the outer world, sheltering the thickening skin growing beneath, protecting the bubble in which they develop the emotional strength and immunity to see them through? Unattached and uncaring, do they use this mask to allow themselves to make judgments, secure in their own superiority? Neither really true, nor completely false, underneath this mask, they revel in chaotic states of transience, freely attuning to new loves and hates, short term commitments and tasks, deeply self-absorbed and narcissistic, with no one public or private identity. In love with their distance, for now they remain blissfully foreign, blissfully depressed, constantly roaming, un-belonging and commitment free. Riding out the highs and lows associated with becoming in a new context, struggling with remnants of the past, and integrating them into their ever evolving present, Kristeva’s (1991) foreigners reveal the remarkableness and “non-banality in human beings” (p. 3). Their essential unknowability is central to this paper.

TENSIONS IN THE DISCOURSE

In direct contrast to the abstraction of Kristeva’s foreigners’ entire being, the multicultural discourse reveres knowledge as the necessary skill which will enable effective teaching and learning with and within culturally diverse contexts (Ho, Holmes, & Cooper, 2004; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May & Sleeter, 2010; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Walsh, 2007). The argument in this paper, that counting on knowledge alone is an unrealistic expectation, that insufficiently recognizes the complicated reality of culturally knowing others, is a direct response to the tensions caused by this discourse. Whilst there is certain value in the compelling endorsement of knowledge in the multicultural teaching and learning discourse, it also signals a lack of appreciation of the real and difficult issues with which immigrants struggle as others in a foreign environment, and thus of the difficult task of knowing those who are other. These complications of knowing are compounded by Kristeva’s (1991) suggestion that, unless we have recognized and know the foreigner within each of us, it is quite likely that we will detest the foreigner in our milieu!

Government guidelines and the multicultural discourse call for celebrating diversity and difference in education (Ho et al., 2004; May & Sleeter, 2010).

The very complexity of cultural otherness, however, suggests that this is both premature and of questionable value. As an example, the first goal in the section entitled *Guidelines for dealing with cultural difference in multicultural classrooms*, in a report for the Ministry of Education and Education New Zealand, which aims to support the management of cultural diversity is “[t]o acknowledge, value, and celebrate cultural differences” and “developing a policy and mission statement; preparing and supporting teaching and learning; monitoring changes; and providing appropriate orientation programmes” to support the celebrations (Ho et al., 2004, p. xiii). Such guidelines appear to be focused on developing knowledge, rules and processes, but unconcerned about foreigners’ complicated lives, intoxicatingly free, or tumultuously bound by interim, transient rules. If the aim is more than managing diversity, and includes offering just opportunities for teaching and learning together, then the suggested practices may in some way promote useful alliances to bridge the gap between university locals and foreigners. They do not however, pay attention to the multiple and sensitive issues involved in foreignness, or recognize that we can therefore “not have firsthand knowledge of another’s life” (Todd, 2004, p. 339). Such an unknowability of otherness reduces these guidelines to surreptitious endorsements of dominant orientations and practices, leading to a reinforcement of (or hope for?) simplistic stability and security. On that basis, this paper argues that presuming to know others well enough for celebrations to be meaningful is an elusive goal, as such celebrations can ever only represent the hegemonic realities and ideologies of those who hold the power in teaching environments. It is suggested that such celebrations are unable to support a just and inclusive education for all cultural others in the setting, let alone enable intimate investigations of internal foreignness, as suggested by Kristeva. Instead they inadvertently become superficial and isolating practices, and not the positively inclusive, bridge building experiences they are (most likely) intended to be. This argument adds to the tension between being able to know the other, and what could be a more realistic and sensitive alternative, the acceptance of a state of unknowing and confusion. These tensions fuel the examination of the quintessential unknowability of otherness, and an alternative orientation, of ignorance.

THE LIQUID MODERN CONTEXT

The concern for immigrant otherness within the university and foreigners’ formation as subjects must be contextualized in the instability of the continually changing neoliberal environment within which it is located. Bauman (2009) conceptualizes the fluid nature of this condition through a notion that he calls liquid modernity. He describes it as embodying the volatile, unreliable nature of society, where stiff standards are abandoned, all tastes are catered for, but none privileged or perfected, and fitfulness and flexibility are encouraged, to the detriment of perseverance, consistency and long term commitments. In this condition, education holds on precariously to its importance in raising future citizens and preparing them for life in

a society, which itself is barely able to adjust to the rapidly changing circumstances with which it is surrounded. In liquid modernity, the very art of life itself is in constant disarray, over-saturated with unprocessed information, in constant competition with itself in its complicated variations and seductions. This condition heightens the tension in this analysis through its influence on the relationships within which others are situated, known about, recognized, lived and worked with. It places on the university the precarious responsibility of socializing and educating immigrant others, simultaneously engulfed in and extenuating the insecurity and short term affiliations of the condition itself.

The liquid modern context complicates the analysis of knowing or not knowing, the self, and the other (Bauman, 2009; Codd, 2008). It embraces and creates a state of unknowing, rather than of knowing, based as it is on constant evolution, disruption and uncertainty. It impacts on knowing another by directly opposing definable boundaries to cultural, social or historical knowledge and thus this entire context is pitted against an epistemological orientation of being able to know and understand an individual. It recognizes that “there are no longer fixed categories, whether external realities or in the construction of the self” (MacEinri, 1994, p. 3). Immigrant students and academics struggling with the unsteadiness of their new realities and their formation of themselves therefore embody and reinforce the indeterminate nature both of themselves as others and of society.

Similarly, the liquid modern condition amplifies the unknowability of educational contexts, as it symbolizes a state where knowledge is constantly redefined and defied with new inventions of the truth. In overtly acknowledging cultural difference and diversity, the critical multicultural discourse recognizes the historicized, experiential nature of individual realities, and that individual genealogies are complex (May & Sleeter, 2010; Mohanty, 2003). There is a misalignment then between simple goals to celebrate diversity, and the multifaceted “world of instant and erratic change” (Bauman, 2009, p. 160) enveloping the educational contexts and society in which the universities operate. Liquid modernity thus complicates the apparently straightforward expectations of the educational discourse, and substantiates the futility of presuming to be able to know, in these multiple, uncertain social and political milieus. A state of liquid modernity then defies the aspirations for possessing the knowledge and understanding, whether of individuals or of contexts, that is inherent in “conventional modes of togetherness” (Todd, 2004, p. 349). Calls for celebrations in the educational critical multicultural discourse represent such conventional orientations, seemingly contradicting the very condition it seeks to represent.

The uncertainty imposed by the liquid modern condition on the knowability of others, and on society, mirrors the loosely imagined pathways followed by Kristeva’s foreigners, some seeking new rules and guidance, whilst others happily roam, unclear and off the rails, prepared to fail, ready to retry. The erratic unsettledness of the political climate and policy shifts (Codd, 2008; McLachlan, 2011) demonstrates the necessity to adapt to short term commitments, adaptable rules and fluidity, which

characterize the liquid modern society (Bauman, 2009; Marotta, 2002). Similarly to Kristeva's foreigners, immigrant students and academics are the actors in this "theatre of self-invention" (MacEinri, 1994, p. 3). They must act within a script of fluctuating policy statements with a plot focused increasingly on economic rather than citizenship objectives. Knowledge cannot be universalized in such a context, as it not only welcomes, but depends on, complex cultural others to affirm and perpetuate the ambivalence of its fundamentally unknowable condition (Bauman, 2009; Marotta, 2002). To reify knowledge in this condition is to suggest the impossible, and could result in a lack of concern for knowledge, accompanied by an unintended lack of commitment even to brief bursts of relevance and momentary truths before any knowledge becomes superseded and obsolete.

KNOWING THE OTHER

Kristeva's (1991) utopian challenge to recognize the foreigner within ourselves becomes unsettled by assertions that "of ourselves we are not 'knowers'..." (Nietzsche, 1956, p. 149), and so also does the desire for any epistemologically justified truth. Kristeva's foreigner, and immigrant others in Aotearoa New Zealand, embody not only the border-crossing and shifting norms by which the liquid modern social order is defined (Bauman, 2009), but also the impermanent and on-going nature and formation of individual subjects, influenced and constituted by the power and government within which they are situated (Juniper & Jose, 2008). The constant formation and critique of one's self, referred to as a critical ontology, can be seen to take a number of forms, including inquiry into how individuals constitute themselves as subjects, how they are constituted by the power relations with which they are surrounded, and how they form themselves as subjects by their own actions (Wong, 2007). All of these categories indicate an engagement with a transient form of knowledge about the self, and highlight the unfixing nature of power relations and truths, and the complex, individualized historical, social and political influences on the formation of subjects. Kristeva's foreigners, in chaotic transience, in love with and simultaneously depressed at their foreignness, metaphorically incarnate these unfixing, indeterminate truths and power relations.

Immigrants are formed as subjects by their own inherited, personal, moral manner and beliefs, as well as by the ways in which they are governed within their context, in this on-going process of becoming and self-formation (Besley, 2007). Villenas (2000) claims, that individuals are subjugated to social and political influences, and that they are constantly written by their culture, in a process of normalizing the acceptable, and othering what is not. To illustrate, for example, instead of writing themselves, bare-breasted women are written by the dominant culture as acceptably exotic and photographable, to be displayed in National Geographic magazines, but not as writers, anthropologists, or any other valued contributor to Western normalized society. If we privilege knowing and knowledge, which part of

this othered subject should we expect to know? At which point of their formation would we value knowledge, which, in the liquid modern minimal attention span, will shortly be superseded and obsolete? Which would we act upon, for example, with celebrations? And how could we know what is worthy of celebration, and for whom it will be valuable? The understanding and determination of subjects themselves and the power relations by which immigrant subjects are constituted are constantly shifting and being redefined. Kristeva's (1991) foreigners and their interim short term focus and directionless, still-becoming lives illustrate these points and help to refute the notion of knowledge as a requirement for being and living with others.

Echoing the focus of the liquid modern condition, immigrant others' subject formation demands acceptance of interference and disruption. Following this, any knowledge of the self and of the other must thus be seen as impermanent and constantly troubled, rather than as certain and stable. An on-going attitude of experimentation and critique supports individuals' adaptations of their habitual thoughts and actions to keep pace with shifts and changes in themselves and in society (Wong, 2007). It illustrates how, at the same time as their formation of themselves as subjects remains vague and incomplete due to the constantly shifting conditions, immigrant students' and academics' very presence in the society disturbs the stability and thus also perpetuates its, and their own, incompleteness.

IGNORANCE, NOT KNOWLEDGE

Blissfully foreign, blissfully depressed and constantly roaming, Kristeva's foreigners embody the liquid modern incompleteness. The disruption caused by immigrant otherness returns the focus of this analysis to Kristeva's challenge to know ourselves, in order to avoid detesting the (unknowable) other. If the dominant focus on transparent ways of acquiring specific, often predetermined (and therefore rapidly irrelevant) knowledge about others is insufficient, then different orientations to individual complexities and otherness in education are necessary (hooks, 2009; Mohanty, 2003). The tensions simmering in the university, arising out of the dominant expectation that diversity can be managed by celebrating cultural differences, require creative examination.

An alternative conception of otherness and knowing the other is offered by adopting instead of knowledge, a conscious orientation of ignorance. Todd (2004) contests the expectation of having knowledge of others as a requirement for effective engagements, and, in keeping with the liquid modern frailty of knowledge, suggests that knowledge alone will always remain insufficient to address all the concerns with otherness. Furthermore, the knowledge one individual has of another can never be as extensive as the complexities of each individual's inherited and lived realities, and is therefore only ever likely to be incomplete, inappropriate or out of date. On this basis, Todd suggests that appealing to knowledge is absurd, and that it is not for any individual to claim to know another, but, rather, for the other to feel

understood. Her radical alternative, then, is to suspend the presumption that it is possible or desirable to know another, and, instead, to approach being together with others with ignorance. In this sense, it is the not-knowing, in that conscious stance of ignorance, that opens up to the complex accidental and contingent revelations arising from individual genealogies, the others' narrated life stories, rather than any removed, predetermined, second hand or short lived truths and certainties (Ailwood, 2004; Mohanty, 2003; Todd, 2004). By consciously not "laying claim to another's experience" (Todd, 2004, p. 349) individuals thus not only maintain, but heighten their responsiveness and receptiveness to others' genealogies, in all their complex, unclaimable intricacy, and avoid the dominant reliance on knowledge.

Approaching encounters with ignorance, and with an orientation and expectation of increased receptiveness and openness to others, could support immigrants in the university environment. Perhaps, forming an attentive commitment to respect the differences in all others would raise immigrants' perceptions of others' recognition of their own singularity and specificity (Mohanty, 2003; Rhedding-Jones, 2001; Todd, 2004). How is it possible, for example, to understand and make decisions about when and how culturally specific dress, behaviours or rituals are acceptable on campus, and when they are not? What is achieved when locals are allowed to engage in familiar activities, and immigrants, whose activities may look or feel different, are not allowed to follow theirs? The possibilities conceivable by approaching foreigners with ignorance highlight the numerous fluid, contradictory perspectives on truth involved in being other, and the impact of past and present experiences, of comfort or terror, surprise or confusion.

By invoking a sense of ignorance perhaps the university would elevate its educational end above the liquid modern focus on qualifications, aimed predominantly at increasing economic gain, or even above an intention for socialization. It could be that this orientation draws the educational end of the university to one of subjectification, where the focus is on each person as an individual (Biesta, 2012) and even, as Kristeva suggests, on the inner awareness that an openness to the unknowable subject could lead to. Whether they are building bridges between cultures, or relegated to work from the margins, positioned somewhere alongside their local peers and standard, familiar practices (Rhedding-Jones, 2001), immigrants in the university embody knowledge far more complex and individually irrational and specific than that which can be known by another, even fleetingly. A state of normality is impossible therefore, and a more honest approach could be to protect and transport individuals to a space similar to that achieved by the reality-obscuring mask worn by Kristeva's foreigners, through ignorance. Approaching encounters consciously with ignorance is likely to encourage the commitment and openness required for sensitive, respectful engagements with all individuals' inherited and lived realities (Mohanty, 2003; Todd, 2004). Perhaps *this* is the key to not detesting that which is foreign.

Not presuming to know others, in a state of ignorance, opens a minefield of further questions, such as which aspects of difference should be acknowledged, and which can be ignored? If they should be acknowledged, in what ways should that

be done? How does an expectation to celebrate diversity support the responsive, responsible commitment to encounters with others that is required to learn from and with others' stories? Is the intention of government guidelines and reports to promote an orientation that all diversity and all differences should be seen as easy, comfortable celebratable contributions to educational settings? Or, perhaps the expectation to celebrate diversity purposely disregards the intricate, intimate, often chaotic experiences of immigrant others, creating, by implication, a further expectation that they actually *will* be overlooked, to create precisely that desired simplicity?

Immigrant otherness is mostly not easy, comfortable (Lewin et al., 2011; Silva, 2009), or even clear enough for individuals to deal with, much less to celebrate or be celebrated (Li, 2007; Rhedding-Jones, 2001). This brief analysis affirms Kristeva's (1991) recognition of the brutal complexity of redefining oneself in a new context, and indicates that it is a process too difficult to know. In addition, university study and teaching are themselves intimate, personal endeavors, and, for immigrant students and academics, they are often the reason for their migration to Aotearoa New Zealand (Immigration New Zealand, 2010; Tan, 2012). These foreigners are, therefore, not likely to be content with "working from the margins" (Rhedding-Jones, 2001, p. 136), being overtly celebrated by others, whilst internally struggling on a daily basis with reconciling multiple positions in their formation as new citizens in a new, liquid modern country. Clearly, then, celebrating differences can ever only be superficial, incomplete and dangerously close to being dominating and meaningless for both the immigrant others and the locals. And above all else, simple solutions or celebrations create banality, instead of recognizing the non-banality, particularly of the foreigner within each human being.

Foreigners in the globalized, neoliberal spaces of academia challenge the notion of knowledge as the magic cure for the tensions simmering and causing turmoil in the university. Kristeva's foreigners highlight the impermanence that is invited by and that perpetuates the liquid modern, tumultuous environment of the neoliberal university. This paper has contested the common reverence of knowledge by drawing out the unknowability of human beings. In keeping with the condition in which it is located, it does not offer, nor consider there to be, a solution. It does however expose some cracks, through which, perhaps, knowledge may become dethroned at least a little, in favor of a tentative, somewhat terrifying alternative of ignorance.

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