Editorial

Understanding others through empathy

It goes without saying that the 21st century is a fascinating, albeit disquieting world. Old ways are being replaced by the new and this “creative destruction” has generated some interesting phenomena—one being the election of America’s first black president. Not only was the election distinct, but Barack Obama’s political style is different. He’s described as always eager to work with friends and foes alike; at the same time he seems intellectually detached, neither here nor there...

Curiously, little has been said about the making of his mind. Applying concepts pertaining to “third-culture kids”, we attempt to explore his mind-set (pages 5-7), in order to better understand the way he perceives, and deals with, the world.

Also, our book review of Empathy in the Global World examines how modern media is radically changing our compassion for others. Violence and acts of hatred worldwide—from the attacks of September 11, 2001 to wars in Afghanistan, Darfur, Iraq, Pakistan and Palestine—call attention to the critical importance of logic, comprehension and empathy in international affairs.

Dan MacLeod, an American expatriate and contributing editor, provides an interesting take on the current populist backlash against interculturalism in the USA with his piece Teatime in America. And articles about communicating across borders via music, and Filipino culture as seen through the eyes of a woman of mixed race, will hopefully perk your interest. Not to mention our interview with the president of SIETAR-U.K. ...

Enjoy the read!

Yours,

Patrick Schmidt
Matthew Hill
A short portrait

The captivating President of SIETAR UK

British people are infinitely interesting to Americans and one big reason is their unique way of communicating — they are nothing if not clever. The Beatles’ song (and movie) “A Hard Day’s Night” is a perfect example of how the English mind loves to juxtapose contradictory ideas.

It’s also a culture where the direct display of feelings is suppressed, however. Embarrassment or anger is usually expressed via understatement. Queen Victoria’s “We are not amused.” comes to mind.

Matthew Hill is a product of this environment. Displaying a superb ease with words, puns and proverbs, he dazzles his listeners with wit and, at times, Churchillian eloquence. It’s a talent he uses in his cross-cultural training sessions.

The pen is mightier than the sword after all, and a humorous understanding of how mankind constantly deceives itself makes him a popular trainer. And sometimes brings real cultural change to his students.

Raised in the birthplace of both Chaucer’s “Tales” and the Church of England, Matthew vividly remembers his first intercultural encounter. He and his young schoolmates fought with French kids who’d come to Canterbury to learn English. (Nothing serious, they threw candies at each other.)

His mother taught him to take intercultural misunderstandings with a grain of salt and a dose of humor. But his desire to comprehend them came from his father, a “pathological truth-teller” who challenged him to look beyond the surface for the motivation behind the gesture.

Not surprisingly, he went on to study psychology before launching his career as an international head-hunter and management consultant, working with half a hundred nationalities in over 20 countries. For nearly six years in the late ’90s he was based in Prague, recruiting and training Eastern Europeans to do business in the West.

Matthew came into intercultural field accidently. He was asked to put together a five-day workshop for an English couple leaving for the Czech Republic. Having no idea how to teach “culture”, he did some homework. He took a look at Hofstede and Trompenhaars and discovered a new way of understanding human behavior. He’s been an active intercultural facilitator ever since and, in 2009, became president of SIETAR UK.
How do you see your role in facilitating cross-cultural change?

I see my job as helping people challenge basic assumptions. We are all trapped in our cultural ways. Consciously and unconsciously, we agree to obey to a set of rules, sincerely believing our culture and morals are right. What I do is expose the Emperor’s nudity.

I ask my participants to question the core meanings of integration, religious practices, gender roles, racism... I seek to provoke but never to offend. In the end, I want them to transcend their invisible cultural trappings and see reality from other perspectives.

How do you actually go about this?

Well, I once had to get a group of male financiers from Pakistan to work better with female consultants in England. The women complained they were being stared at and sexually harassed; the men said they were provoked by the women’s tight skirts and low-cut blouses. The tension was, to say the least, incredibly high. Management was at end’s wit.

I got the women to articulate their reaction to being stared at--they felt they were being ravished by their colleagues. And they imagined Pakistani women hidden behind the burka, victims of male control.

The Pakistanis saw just the opposite. They said the women weren’t allowed to dress with modesty even if they wanted to because British fashion was meant to be provocative. Pakistani men, as a rule, feel that traditional dress insures women a healthy separation from male desires.

Both sides were surprised to learn how far apart they were in their perceptions. The somewhat-embarrassed women were discreetly doing up buttons on their blouses while the men looked away out of a new-found “respect”. Both transcended “cultural invisibility” and both felt relieved.

This one-day encounter was an amazing physical and emotional experience. It generated real attitudinal change.

So, a real success...
Mathew Hill
A short portrait — continued

Based on Milton Bennett’s Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, yes. You could say I bumped them up at least one level. From another perspective, the key to good training is empowerment—teaching people to take responsibility for their own powers of perception and thought.

All humans seek surface similarities, items we feel comfortable with. But it means we often lie to ourselves. Person X is okay, but person Y is not. It depends on the level of perceived threat in the other person’s skin color, religion, appearance, perceived wealth.

It’s all about expanding your powers of perception, how you transcend cultural biases. You can be a giant in one country, a midget in another. How does my counterpart perceive me? How am I reacting?

I try to get my students on their own journey of consciousness. If an expanded level of thinking is achieved, the course can be considered somewhat of a success.

Given your world-view, what do you strive for in life?

I rehearse to be the person I want to be. My goal is personal development. And I want to provide my two young sons with tools so that they can go twice as far in terms of consciousness and sense of self, which leads to a certain freedom of the mind.

In the business world, I strive to re-engineer the workplace so that everyone is more connected, authentic and... funny! Humor plays an important part in my life and can be a powerful tool in training. When we joke, we release tension and bring teams back together.

When we mock the extreme, we make the extreme seem remote and create an expectation of moderation. It’s a learning aid in terms of bonding and sharing. Humor also shapes our expectations. A greater unity comes from your adversaries mocking themselves and you mocking yourself. If we all decommission our weapons, we can co-exist.

Interviewed by Patrick Schmidt
Obama’s Mind

Born across boundaries, the US president is a master of intercultural sensitivity, yet his intellectual detachment leads some to wonder what he believes in.

by Patrick Schmidt

Barack Obama has often been described as the ultimate compromiser, continuously seeking to work with friends and foes alike. When addressing controversial issues, he usually begins with a respectful nod toward the view he’s about to reject—a line or two that suggests he understands and even sympathizes with the concerns of his opponents.

In The Audacity of Hope, he writes about trying to comprehend his adversaries’ beliefs through empathy; he’s willing to connect to his counterpart by intentionally shifting his frame of reference. His capacity to see and feel the relative of beliefs, to know that there is no absolute standard of “rightness”, is a clear sign of intercultural sensitivity.

At the same time, this intellectualized detachment leads some to say—often cynically—that he doesn’t believe in much of anything. “No-drama Obama”, the ultimate political chameleon.

But where did he acquire his ability to empathize with others while remaining so detached?

Barack Obama was a child of many homes, the first modern president to have spent a good part of his childhood outside the United States. And not only did he live in Asia from age 6 to 10, his father was from Africa and his mother, America.

Someone who spends part of his or her developmental years outside the “passport country” is often referred to as a third-culture kid (TCK). And children who experience abrupt changes of culture are forced to grapple with very basic questions about identity.

Imagine yourself as a six-year old living quite happily in Hawaii, then abruptly finding yourself transplanted to Indonesia and surrounded by people you can’t even talk to. It goes way beyond what adults call culture shock!

Just when you’re coming to grips with what constitutes “normal” or “acceptable” behavior, everything is ambiguous. You’ve barely begun to define yourself as an individual entity on this strange planet and you’re already forced to redefine yourself. The center cannot hold...

But growing up between different worlds is also a gift, generating an “ethno-relative” mindset which usually blossoms in early adulthood. Studies show that TCKs possess a high degree of social and intellectual flexibility, are quick to think outside the box and have an uncanny
ability to appreciate and reconcile different points of view.

Obama’s colleagues on the Harvard Law Review were among the first to note his exceptional skill in mediating competing points of view. (The jealous ones suggested he had a quasi-neurotic need to be liked by all sides.)

Then again, another characteristic of TCKs is detachment, sometimes perceived as being “above it all”. Nearly all of Obama’s classmates described him as aloof and hard to decipher. In a sense, they’re not wrong: a person who looks at all angles and listens to all sides is someone whose values and norms are forever in a state of flux.

Studies show that the primary challenge for maturing TCKs is to glean a sense of personal and cultural identity from the various environments to which they’ve been exposed. “This is who I am, no matter where I am.”

Obama’s vivid memoir, Dreams from My Father, is a classic search for self-definition and the understanding of roots. Finding his identity proved to be extraordinarily difficult but, in succeeding, he became all the stronger.

In Obama’s case, non-defined cultural identity wasn’t the only problem. He was abandoned by his father, who returned to Kenya when his son was two years old, then separated from his “second father” in Jakarta when his mother sent him back to the to Hawaii to live with her parents when he was ten.

People who lost a parent at an early age often appear cool; they don’t often show emotion. It’s a coping mechanism designed to get on with life “as normal”. No-drama Obama is the logical consequence of childhood experience.

At the same time, one can understand his need to write “Dreams from my father” as a healing mechanism—a way to reconnect to his African father and that African heritage, both biological and cultural.

Growing up in the U.S.A., Barack Obama’s life was also shaped by the color of his skin. Caught between the margins of White and Black America, he spent a long time wondering who he was. He was surrounded by white people in the family home but he was, himself, seen as black once he stepped outside.

From age ten on, he was acutely aware of the need for dialogue between the races — even in his own family.
Obama’s Mind — continued

His “Race in America” speech from the 2008 campaign mentioned his maternal grandmother’s fear of black men.

Despite everything—and because of it—he managed to forge what seems to be a perfectly-balanced dual identity. It’s painfully obvious that Black and White America still don’t speak the same language but Mr. Obama speaks both. More importantly, he can speak to both. And his own “self” is far beyond the simple binary equation of black and white. It is, in fact, the most stupendous example of what interculturalist Milton Bennett calls “cultural marginality” in the history of the country!

Barack Obama might smile if he were to read what I’ve written thus far. “Yeah, that sort of describes my mental state...” But his remarkable upbringing definitely gave him a unique feel for a nation made up of some 200 different races. The dislocated child was free to invent a new self — a strong American theme.

Empathy combined with detachment, an insider who’ll always remain an outsider at heart, a modern Soloman regarding compromises...

The problem is that such people aren’t generally feared. And “other-worldly wisdom” can inspire both reverence and scorn. If Barack Obama plans to go down in history as a true leader who brought about great changes, he might want to take another look at Machiavelli.

If a Prince must choose to be either feared or loved, it is better to be feared, for “love is held by a chain of obligation which (for) men, being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails.”

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Does Barack Obama have the mindset to be a true leader?
The Devil is in the difference
Communicating between cultures with music

by Michael Spencer

If I were to say ‘Shave and a haircut...two bits’, doubtless many of you with US connections would understand its connotations. Others in Europe might not make an immediate connection, but I am fairly certain that recognition would be instant if you thought of its rhythmic equivalent (dum didi da da - dum dum!).

In fact, not only in Europe and the US do people respond to this basic rhythmical expression of musicality, it appears to be something of a global phenomenon. Korea, Japan, South Africa, Scandinavia, East Europe - no matter where I have tried it, to date, it seems to be known by everyone. Interestingly, however, no one seems to know how they acquired this knowledge. Musicologists suggest it has its origins in the cliché cadences of English music hall songs in the 19th century, but how it came to travel, almost virally, across borders is unknown.

Moving up a level, do we witness the same universality with regards to melody? Research has shown that prosody, the musical inflections of the spoken word which can influence meaning, is common to all cultures and essential to comprehension and the gauging of emotional intent. Research with young children has shown that if words are removed from spoken sentences but the modulation of the voice is preserved, irrespective of the language or national culture, the reaction of the child is identical. This is well documented and know as Infant Directed Speech, or sometimes ‘mother-ese’.

At this basic level, is some credence lent to the claim that ‘Music is an international language’? Every society has its music, often inextricably linked with movement. But whilst fundamentals may be held in common, as we move up in levels of sophistication, to what extent does music reveal the differences between societies as well as the commonalities. Do we, for example, listen to each other’s music in the same way? My work in Japan has thrown up some interesting examples which suggest that perhaps we don’t.

A short while ago I ran a series of training projects with one of the Japanese orchestras as part of their outreach programme. The core music resource was to be Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring; the composition which radically changed the direction of musical development in the 20th century. Its translation into Japanese is ‘Haru no Saiten’; literally ‘Spring Festival’. I have asked many Japanese musicians and music lovers, all who know the piece well, what they consider the underlying narrative to be.

It’s rare that they refer to the ritualistic and primitive ceremony intended by Stravinsky, which culminates in a virgin...
The Devil is in the difference - continued

Music is an international language — Mozart’s famous “Rondo alla Turca” is based on the rhythm of Turkish military bands.

dancing herself to death to propitiate the gods of Spring. They generally paint a picture of newborn creatures taking their first steps and meadows full of flowers. The music tells a different story and it is surprising that its mystical rites and primeval passion are confused with something rather more pastoral. This difference in perception is not a matter of error of judgement, but of cultural difference. And it is a graphic demonstration of what happens when Art is viewed from a different cultural perspective.

For musicians and composers this disjunction is something with which they are familiar, if not always conversant. Examples abound of their ability to accommodate and adapt external influences, enriching their output as a result. Where would Haydn and Mozart have been without the added spice of Gypsy and Turkish influences? How would 20th century music have evolved if Ravel and Debussy had not heard the gongs and chimes of the Balinese gamelan ensemble at the Paris Exhibition in 1889? Where would any of the popular musical styles we hear around us today be but for the synthesis of African music into jazz and blues?

The ability to adapt is not restricted to the theoretical amalgamation of musical styles alone. Being a musician is very much about practical involvement and authentic collaboration. This means adapting to the musical cultures within which one is performing even if they are, to an onlooker, similar. For example playing with the London Symphony Orchestra requires a completely different approach from playing in the London Philharmonic. This difference is even more marked when you cross genres.

As a violinist I have been fortunate to be given the opportunity to explore musical territories away from my classical background. Working with rock, jazz or folk musicians has taught me the importance of listening in the ‘right way’. A way that is suited to the subtleties of the genre. But it is not solely about how one listens. Equally important is how one takes the information and transforms it into appropriate action. Something crossover artists frequently attempt, but with questionable results.

As musicians we share a basic lingua franca which means that we can converse as artists across musical cultures, often up to a reasonable level of proficiency. To convey authentic understanding however, as with language, fluency comes only from a deep and sustained immersion in the underlying traditions and values.

Music can act as a passport between cultures, but the devil is in the difference.

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Neither Fish nor Fowl

Reflections of a young German-Filipina woman

by Isabelle Mena

I was born in Germany - as a daughter of a German business economist and a Filipina immigrant. Actually, I considered myself as quite ordinary until I started school. Suddenly, I heard comments such as “Chinese girl”, “Chink” or simply “foreigner”. But we know how children are, so I forgot about that quite fast.

But while growing up and making new friends, I always had to introduce myself in this way: “Where are you from?” – “From Speyer” (which is my hometown), “No, I mean where were you born?” – “In Speyer” (didn’t I just say that?), “But you don’t look German!” – “Because my mother is from the Philippines.” And there it was – the question that only few said out loud, but most of them were thinking: Where did your father buy your mother? At that time I started asking myself why do people think like that.

My mother came to Germany in order to work as a nurse. My father got to know her in the city center, they fell in love, got married and got two children. I didn’t see any difference to other married couples in Germany.

But in my teens, I was again confronted with this prejudice. My mother went regularly to Filipino festivals, and it was quite obvious that the average age of the husbands was 55 and the nationality was, without exception, German. It was not until I made my first trip to my mother’s home country, when I started to understand and reject this prejudice.

The first impression was overwhelming and it was the exact opposite of Germany. For the first time I met my family and relatives. Whereas in Germany I have only four cousins, I could hardly memorize the names of my over 50 cousins in the Philippines. In Germany I have my own room, of course. In the Philippines, however, I shared my mattress with at least two cousins. In Germany we have bread for breakfast; in the Philippines we have — surprise — rice. Actually, every meal contains rice.

My culture shock was almost perfect. But at the same time, I felt home because now I got answers and explanations to my mother’s “peculiar” behavior in Germany.

It started with mimic and gestures. Filipinos use a lot of non-verbal communication. Raising their eyebrows means “yes” and they typically point with their lips rather than with their hands. The tighter the lips form an “o”, the further away the person or item is they’re pointing at.

Also the communication style differs a lot from the German
Neither Fish nor Fowl — continued

man one. A loud “Ssshhh”, that’s how my mother used to call my sister and me in public when we were five me-
ters away. While in the Philippines people react to this, Germans immediately were looking for our non-existing dog and I felt more than embarrassed. Another example is the small word “no”. “No” means “no” in Germany. As Filipinos don’t want to hurt the feelings of others, they use “maybe”, “I’ll see” or “I’ll try”.

Filipinos are a very religious people. More than 80% are Catholic and the archipelago is the only Christian nation in Asia. As a matter of course they go to church every Sunday, so did my mother in Germany. This was nothing unusual, but to explain to my friends the fact why we have a huge statue of the Virgin Mary at home was more difficult. My aha-moment came when I saw them in almost every house of my Filipino relatives.

Considering this at first as fanatic, I noticed that being deeply religious in the Philippines doesn’t correspond to the German idea of being devout. During a trip, I saw a simple picture on a poster inside a bus that helped me understand this: Jesus with a mobile phone in his hand and above it was written: “Wanna be my text mate?”

The Filipino idea of family ties differs strongly from the German one. In order to support your family, your mother respectively, it is quite common that older siblings are charged with the upbringing of the younger ones. For me, it was quite normal to see my 8-year-old cousin taking care of her 1-year-old brother while their parents were going to the grocery store. When I was at that age, my mother left me once home alone with my sister for one night and some neighbors called my father, threatening to call the youth welfare office.

But the Filipino family offers even more. Despite the fact that most families live in great poverty, they care for their children as long as it is necessary, giving them all they have. However, when they have grown up, they have to return the favor and support their parents. And it also has to be said that this idea runs in the family – the whole family along with cousins, nieces, grandsons and so on.

But how is this affordable? If you’re lucky, you are born into a wealthy family or you can afford to pay university and find a well paid job. However, this is rarely the case. Even so there’s another option: going abroad.

Either you go by yourself, if you can afford it, or you have to find somebody who is living already abroad — be it a family member or a distant relative. But especially the Fili-
Neither Fish nor Fowl — continued

Pina has one more chance to accomplish this goal. She simply gets married to a foreigner. I asked some Germans what is, in their mind, a typical prejudice concerning Filipinos. And it was always the same answer: they get married to foreigners in order to leave the country and to protect themselves financially.

This is partly true, but most don’t know why. Every Filipino/a who works abroad sends regularly money to support his/her family. There is even a term for them: OFW – Overseas Filipino Worker. And this is also true of the married Filipinas. They often benefit from their husband’s financial situation, which is mostly better than their own in the Philippines and support their families by sending them money. This is why Filipinas leave their mother country and their family behind.

But of course, it’s not always that tragic. We also have to consider that just as the Filipina is an exotic figure for the German, the German is also one for the Filipina. So you needn’t speak of convenience marriage. On the contrary, this kind of intercultural marriage can be enriching for both and also for their children, as I could experience firsthand.

On my trips to the Philippines, I not only learned a lot about the origins of my mother, but also about my own roots. Nevertheless, I was confronted with the same question again: “Where are you from?” But the reaction to my answer, namely that my father is German, was different. Worth admiring. Without prejudice.

But I also had to realize that due to my European features, my white skin and my “long nose” I was, as in Germany, again a foreigner. Neither fish nor fowl. However, I learned that finding myself between two cultures doesn’t mean that I don’t have a home, but instead I am able to choose and combine the best of both cultures. And by the way, both fish and fowl taste delicious with rice!

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**Book Review**

**Empathy in the Global World**

*An Intercultural Perspective*

by Carolyn Calloway-Thomas  
U.S. $34.95, 250 pages

As any good trainer knows, empathy is deeply embedded in, and inseparable from, intercultural sensitivity. And it’s no surprise that an increasing number of books on the subject have been published in recent years. But *Empathy in the Global World* goes beyond the usual examination of “the cultural other” by touching on geopolitics, class issues, international NGOs and national disasters. Simply put, it’s an excellent distillation of the historical, political and psychological aspects of empathy.

The first two chapters provide some fascinating background. We learn, for instance, that the Roman philosopher Cicero (106-43 B.C.) warned “the whole foundation of the human community is threatened by treating foreigners worse than fellow Romans.” And Immanuel Kant noted in the 18th century that “respect for dignity is owed to all humans regardless of their standing in the community.”

His Scottish contemporary David Hume developed the idea of concentric circles of empathy, meaning people are loyal to their family first, then their village, region and nation in diminishing degrees. But as the world has continued to evolve, the concept has been turned on its head.

Given our modern, media-consumption lifestyle, we often find ourselves identifying with people in the outermost circles. Virtually everyone on the planet with access to television or the Internet was horrified as the twin towers of the World Trade Center cast up their columns of smoke on Sept 11th, 2001. When they finally collapsed, horror was transformed into a sense of profound sadness--somehow personally felt--among hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Conversely, as Chapter 4 points out, globalization is changing our attitudes toward empathy in another way. The shock of 9/11 and subsequent train and subway bombings in Madrid and London have led--as terrorism is wont to do--to a pervasive atmosphere of suspicion and fear of “the cultural other”. Additionally, massive immigration coupled with high birth-rates among minority cultures has generated permanent demographic changes in both North America and Western Europe. Calloway-Thomas points out that when numerical balance poses a threat to indigenous society, empathy takes a back seat to national identity.

All this provides the groundwork for her concluding chapters on how we, as global citizens, can develop knowledge and information-based skills--or empathetic literacy--to better respond to cross-cultural encounters. “Ten Basic Rules of Intercultural Relations” is an excellent summary and can be used in any workshop.

All in all, the work is a goldmine of information for students, professors, trainers and even politicians searching for new ways to understand and address human problems on a global scale. *(Please see the commentary, Teatime in America, page 15)*

Reviewed by Patrick Schmidt
Cinema Reviews

Shutter Island

"Shutter Island" is a most interesting film from a cultural perspective. It is a study of a returned veteran of World War II who has become a US marshal. In the opening scenes he is a lawman now sent to investigate a missing person incident in a mental institution for the criminally insane.

Throughout the film he is plagued by flashbacks of the trauma of military engagement, the liberation of concentration camps and his own family life as he navigates in the confines of Shutter Island during a hurricane.

The context is the culture of fear in the USA in the 1950’s. No doubt this is a setting in which to explore the fear of post 9/11 USA, using as a surrogate the Communist Threat that penetrated everything and that time, and which lead to the McCarthy Era in the US. I can remember those times and even the little anti-communist tracts that were handed out in church every few weeks. Everything and everyone is suspect in the madness surrounding these eras and the government, which manages the population by fear, most of all.

The ultimate question in this film is can we face and live with reality and our roles in it, i.e., come to grips with the values and behaviors of our own culture, be realists without either paranoia or playing Pollyanna, or must we lobotomize our memories and fears to be happy and insouciant in a world that seems too threatening to manage if we try.

Avatar

Despite the Oscar mentions in Hollywood, I did not find "Avatar" a great film or even a pretty good film. On the other hand, it wasn’t the technology that threw me off. It was the reiteration of the endless US Western novel/movie theme. Mining company (rustlers, aliens, etc., i.e., bad guys move into town. A good guy (the US common man, rising from the ranks) appears on the scene, sees the problem better than anybody else, puts on a white hat, and teaches the naive villagers how to kick backsides. We are confirmed in our identity by the hero.

It is the same old box office story of Independence Day, a future harkening back to such US classics with actors such as cowboy John Wayne and cop Eddie Murphy. "It is déjà vu all over again," as Yogi Berra would say, When will we stop reinforcing and passing on the cultural message that USians are the heroes of the world’s story and everybody has to be and act like us? Yes, the hero goes native at the end of this film rather than riding off into the sunset; bless his little cojones or whatever avatars have...

Examine the feelings that are pandered to by the film. Justice is served by the renegade because government and commerce are unable, unwilling or corrupt. Self-righteousness is reaffirmed by ones identity with the underdog heroes. Feel good movies make money of course, as this one did.

Both films reviewed by George Simons
Teatime in America

A comment from our contributing editor

Dan MacLeod

As of July 23, 2010, in the United States of America, you can be stopped and questioned by the police if your face happens to be any color but northern-European white. I happen to be three-quarters Boston-Irish so I’m probably okay but the Italian part of my family, all citizens for nearly a century now, might not be so lucky. Fortunately, none of them happens to be in Arizona at the moment...

Of course, Arizona is a marginal state to begin with, famous for refusing—for five years—to honor a national holiday in honor of the African-American civil rights’ leader Martin Luther King, Jr. That was 20 years ago but nothing much has changed in the way Arizona views “colored people”.

The new law allowing the police to arrest anyone who doesn’t have proof of citizenship (or a valid visa) is about brown-skinned folks from south of the border but Arizona still doesn’t like blacks either. Another bill before the state legislature calls for proof of citizenship on the part of presidential candidates and this one is all about Obama.

They’re called “birthers” and they say he was born in Africa, that he’s illegally occupying the White House. According to U.S. law, the president must be American-born.

It doesn’t matter that his home state of Hawaii produced his birth records months ago, that they’re on-line for all to view. It’s a profoundly racist accusation which even right-wing politicians and media stars admit, when pressed, has been proved to be false. But that doesn’t mean they’re above fanning the flames...

Which is what Arizona is doing in a very official way, lending credence to a color-based lie by proposing to force presidential candidates to bring birth certificates to Arizona before they can get on the ballot. Of course, the Republicans behind the bill say they just want to make sure the question doesn’t come up again. But Mr. Obama, albeit the incumbent, will be also be a “candidate” in 2012.

Brown- or black-skinned, it doesn’t seem you’re very welcome in Arizona. But this piece isn’t about Arizona.

When people from around the world (including Canada, where I’ve lived for the past 35 years) say “America’s first black president” it’s usually with an exclamation point at the end, celebratory. But for some 15% of Americans across the country, mostly in the South and Southwest, Obama—precisely because he’s black—may not actually be the president!

All across America, these days, there are rallies called Tea Parties, an incredibly cynical use of the term. The original Tea Party took place in my hometown and featured people like Paul Revere and Sam Adams, the fathers of the American Revolution of 1776.
Teatime in America — continued

They—and Tom Jefferson and Ben Franklin and George Washington—built a country based on the separation of Church and State. But today’s America is very much a religion-based society with Born-again Christians leading the way since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

This past year’s “Tea Parties” have taken place all across the country and feature an interesting panoply of what passes for citizens. Many dress in outlandish costumes which might be humorous or even “cute” if it weren’t for some of the signs they carry: Obama with a Hitler mustache, Obama as a Muslim terrorist, Obama as an African witch-doctor. That and the fact that some of them also carry firearms.

The overt racism exhibited in these “patriotic” rallies is the ultimate proof of bad faith concerning democracy, racial equality and the American Dream by a (relatively) marginal fringe of the populace. And yet...

In terms of concentric circles, my “tribe” is neither my ethnic sub-division nor is it any sort of “nation”, rather it is a family of thought: Americans like me who truly believe in Democracy and the Dream.

I find it normal that my tribe is composed of the entire spectrum of human colors and languages and religions (or lack of one). I find it instructive that virtually every last person attending the so-called Tea Parties is white, that most are Republicans, that many are born-again Christians. And I find it both invigorating and almost miraculous that my America was able to put a person of mixed race into the highest office in the land.

Even as integration is not working, it is.

Intercultural empathy is truly the way of the future, the way of the planet if the future is to be good. But evolution is the on-going story of friction overcome. Just as so many still cling to “guns and Bibles” (or Torahs or Korans), the backlash against that empathy by those who cannot see beyond homogenous tribalism comes as no surprise.

As Ms. Calloway-Thomas has shown in her book *Empathy in the Global World*, societal reaction to perceived threat is often virulent. The Taliban throw acid in the faces of little girls who want to go to school. The American militia-fringe is armed and preparing for a “race war”. In both cases, they’re fighting for their lives. Because the ultimate goal to global interculturalism is the logical extinction of homogenous tribalism.

Dan MacLeod is, among other things, a former foreign correspondent for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and its French-language counterpart, Radio-Canada. He can be contacted at dnmcld@yahoo.ca
Human Rights and Diversity

From civil society to organizations

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted the 10th December 1948.

Sietar France in collaboration with Sietar Europa has decided to dedicate this congress to the position of human rights in our complex diverse world, reflecting on all sectors of society; politics: business, education, social and medical.

• How are human rights understood and how do they affect the diversity of cultures, ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, age, and gender within in the multicultural society?
• How are human rights respected in the diverse workplace?
• How do we deal with social injustice and equity?
• What ethics are needed in intercultural relations in order to respect the dignity of all?

These questions and others need to be addressed or revisited for all professionals working for better intercultural relations. Whether they are HR professionals, trainers, consultants, teachers, academics, social workers, NGO or intergovernmental personnel, interculturalists can benefit from discovering innovative initiatives and finding ways to put them into practice.

The Congress program will provide 4 new formats

• Key note speakers and discussion panels with experts and practitioners from different sectors
• Learning Communities: All participants are invited to join in group discussions and other experiential activities over the 3 days in order to share ideas and methods. These groups will be led by trained facilitators.
• Training workshops: Participants are invited to sign up to one of several workshops on a chosen subject, which will meet each afternoon (total of 9 hours of training). Each workshop will be led by 2 talented trainers in their respective fields. This will be a true learning experience providing principles, methods, techniques, and practical tools.
• Film festival: New and innovative documentary films will be shown, followed by debriefing sessions with the filmmakers.

These different situations will provide a rich interlocking experience for the participants, with each part nourishing ideas for the other parts, resulting in a coherent and stimulating program.
Events, workshops, congresses

London, Great Britain
June 26, 2010
“Summer Drinks” event. Enjoy an evening of sophisticated excitement and exchange in the company of other interculturalists, our colleagues from SIETAR Europa. This will be the best opportunity for you to contribute to the current dialogue on the topics of the day that matter. All this and much more.... Starts at 7 pm on the rooftop of Café Rouge, Lancer Square, Kensington High Street, London SW1., £5 for members, £10 non-members. Further information at www.sietar.org.uk

Barcelona, Spain
May 21-22, 2010
Non-Violent Communication of Marshall Rosenberg in Intercultural Training NVC helps to understand the destructive force of verbal violence. In this workshop, participants will learn how useful NVC is as a tool to help resolve conflicts in different cultures, what words and sentences can destructively influence interpersonal communication, leading to escalation of a conflict, and how to implement NVC in an intercultural context. €80 for members, €140 non members. Workshop will be held in English. Further information at www.sietar.es

Istanbul, Turkey
September 16-19, 2010
Young SIETAR 11th Annual Congress “Interculturalism Reloaded” This year Young SIETAR is going to Istanbul, Turkey designated as 2010 European Capital of Culture. We will spend four fun-filled days immersing ourselves in the local culture and through innovative methodologies seek to discuss and to challenge the way that we approach our intercultural work. For further information, go to: www.youngsietar.org

Lille, France
October 28-30, 2010
30th Anniversary of SIETAR France “Human Rights and Diversity”
To celebrate its 30th anniversary, SIETAR-France is planning a congress in conjunction with SIETAR-Europa. Themes will be human rights and diversity, dealing with questions on how are human rights understood and how do they affect the diversity of cultures, how are human rights respected in the diverse workplace, what ethics are needed in intercultural relations. Languages will be French and English. Registering and opening cocktails on Wednesday evening, 27th October, starting at 6 pm. More information about the congress on the SIETAR-France website: www.sietar-france.org

SIETAR-Forum 2010 in Bonn — a runaway success!
With over 180 participants attending, SIETAR Germany last February put on an exciting and well organized event on the theme “Resource Diversity”. Three keynote speakers were on the agenda: Beatrice Acheleke, founder of the Black European Women’s Council, discussed her experiences as a black citizen in Austria. Diversity management expert Hans Jablonski talked passionately about how corporate Germany was dealing with diversity. And lastly, Silke Helfrich spoke engagingly about how we can use “common goods” (natural resources) more effectively for the betterment of mankind. Many outstanding workshops on diversity were offered, along with a fun rhythm dancing evening, directed by muscian Michael Spencer. It was, as one participant summed it up, “an exceptional Forum”.

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