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Assignment 1 - Forces of Power in Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is the communication that happens between two people of different cultures or cultural backgrounds. Different cultural ideologies, power forces, and hegemonies that are embedded in our lives shapes who people are and how we communicate with others. As a Taiwanese and a Panamanian, I have had the opportunity to explore these intercultural ideologies, hegemonies, and structures of power that shape mine and other people's life from different perspectives, not only through personal experience but also through history and today's media.

Many of our cultures and cultural views are created and maintained by different forces of power. These forces of power can either be visible or hidden. Visible power is what we take for granted due to it being so normalized in our culture and daily life. While invisible, or hidden, power is what is hidden beneath the surface. There are obvious structures of power such as the government, media, law, family, educational institutions, economy, and many more (Halualani 7). Below, I will mention a few forces of power that surround everyone's life in Panama and Taiwan.

As Panama is a diverse, multicultural country, there are different forces of power that surround the people daily in different settings. Family in general has a great influence on our lives. People tend to buy into their family's culture, world views, religion and many more. For example, a child born in a Christian or Jewish family, will tend to follow along to what their family believes. There is also the framing in historical context, especially family experiences with cultural, ethnic, or racial groups (Halualani 56-59). As a child living in an

Asian family in Panama, I was always warned by my family to not make friends with black people as they may rob you, or not be too close to Panamanians as they are lazy and it was not good to learn their ways. These are mainly from the family's experience with the cultural groups, such as with robberies, or through media depictions. But over time, my perception of colored people, Panamanians, or other groups of people changed as I made friends with them throughout elementary school to my university years. Similar things could be said about depiction of Asian communities, such as all Asians being Chinese, or that Asians eat everything. Or, with historical myths where any Asian is stereotyped to be good at math and into business.

As for Taiwan, it is a country that is made up of mainly Asians (from China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia, etc.) of different backgrounds, and the country's aboriginal groups. For Taiwan, I would like to mainly mention the sociopolitical framing they have since the government and media are two powers that dominate a lot in their society. Many people know that there is a debate on whether Taiwan is a country, or a part of China. Throughout the years, the Chinese and Taiwanese government and media have been at each other's necks, and similarly with the citizens. Government's media also have a lot of control on people's current views depending on what they report and put out into the population. At the same time, bad experiences with the cultural group due to tourism has also influenced people's views on each other. An example I have as a Taiwanese is about the rage it causes when Chinese travelers go to Taiwan and damage cultural relics. In the simplest terms, many people can say that Taiwanese and Chinese are not compatible historically, socially, and politically, but this does not prevent us from making good friends with each other's citizens.

The textbook also mentions ideologies and hegemonies. Ideologies can be defined as world views and cultural groups made up by and are in line with authoritative power forces (government, economy, media, etc.) and their interest. It consists of dominant, negotiated,

and oppositional ideologies. Dominant ideology is the one that holds the most power and is maintained as the status quo (Halualani 74-77). As I am not familiar with ideologies in Panama, a Taiwanese example that I am familiar with in my life, is in relation to the example from the textbook talking about the Japanese way of life. In Taiwanese culture, there is something similar, where collective success is more valued than individual success, so that one should not stand out (although this is slowly fading out in recent years). This ideology has been taught in early childhood from family members, then reinforced through educational institutions, and lastly normalized in the working society. A major part of why this exists is through history, where Japan used to rule Taiwan for a period of time. This example can be seen in the workplace by comparing western and eastern work culture. In many western countries, being able to speak out opinions and contribute ideas in the workplace is important and supported by the culture. In many cases, these actions are encouraged throughout the school years and finally brought into the society. In various Asian countries, what employees do is listen to the superiors and accomplish what they instruct without much questioning. During meetings, questioning can be seen as disrespectful to the superiors, although clarifications may be asked at the end or by asking individually outside the meeting time. Contributing new ideas can be deemed as risks that companies take, in which responsibility towards the failure of a project or idea is an issue that many do not want to take up. In a sense, it can be deemed to be very conservative and traditional.

Then there is the negotiated and oppositional ideology. The negotiated ideology is when the dominant ideology is accepted but the meanings are negotiated, while oppositional ideology is when there is a conflict with the dominant ideology (Halualani 84-85). One example that I can remember happened a few years back. It started with the fight for marriage equality (for LGBTQ+ people) in Taiwan around the end of 2018 and continued until 2019. The dominant view many traditional Taiwanese people have is that marriage should be

between a man and a woman. As the government tried to implement laws for marriage equality for same sex couples, they were met with various conflicts. These conflicts were strikes or protests with people on either the traditional or the LGBTQ+ side. At the end, Taiwan did become the first Asian country to legalize same sex marriage (Leung).

Meanwhile, hegemony is when dominant view points are more authoritative or powerful, and are taken as common sense (Halualani 85). One example that I can really think of (working in conjunction with negotiated ideology) is similar to meritocracy, but it is set in the Taiwanese (and Chinese or Korean) education system. Many people have heard of the "gaokao" which is the college entrance examination (Taiwan also has examinations to enter middle and high school apart from the college exam). These types of exams emphasize talent and work effort, in exchange for some status as the better the grades, there is the right to attend a university that offers the best resources. In a sense, although many people are against this type of education system as it does not benefit their interest in attending a prestigious university, there are also concessions made as this concept gives people the image of equality and fairness, along with status, and is widely accepted in the country's culture.

Throughout the paper, different examples of ideologies, hegemonies, and structures of power that are in our everyday life in different settings and different identities were given. All of the different structures of powers mentioned above can be visible or invisible depending on the context, and can be both permeable and changeable. As for the degree they are permeable and changeable, some forces are more changeable than others (education, economy, law, etc) and vice versa. Overall, intercultural communication is something that we experience as we communicate and interact with the people and surrounding around us, and it can be analyzed deeper than what we see on the surface.

Bibliography

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