

# Intercultural Communication

## *Constructions of Cultural Identity Between Young People<sup>1</sup>*

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Intercultural communication studies have traditionally defined intercultural communication as a communication process between members from different cultures. In this article it is argued that the social changes, globally and locally, in the past years have made the field of intercultural communication far more complicated. To understand intercultural communication today we need theories and methods which take the perspectives of globalization, ethnicity and cultural identity into account. The contribution of this article to this redefinition is based upon an empirical study of a communication process between young people in a primary school, who live in the same multicultural community, but identify themselves as belonging to different cultures. It is, inspired by Norman Long, argued that a communication process like this should be seen as an interface, an ongoing process of communication, which also takes the question of power into account. Through an analysis of the actors' life stories the article shows how the young people construct their cultural identities in relation to each other and in relation to their social and cultural backgrounds.

### Introduction

Five girls are sitting in a classroom in Copenhagen. They were all born in Denmark. They are all Danish citizens. And they all live in a multicultural community. The girls are discussing 'Glamour', a TV-serial, comparing it with 'Beverly Hills 90210'. The discussion is quick and the positions are sharp. The topic shifts. They are now discussing their relation to the boys in their class. They all agree that boys are immature. One of the girls argues that she now knows the boys better, because they go to parties together. A girl interrupts sharply "Parties. People just go to parties, get drunk, and don't know what they have done." I ask what kind of parties she likes? "The parties of my own country" she answers. Albania is her 'homeland'. The girl who she interrupted is Danish.

My intention using this example is to focus upon the new ways intercultural communication take during these years. As the example shows the girls are all living in the same society.

They share their experiences of the massmedia and their views of the immature boys in their class. They are all Danish citizens and literally and legally equal members of the Danish society. Despite these similarities the girls are constructing their cultural identities along two very different main poles. Along the one pole we find the girls, who define themselves as Danes. Along the other pole we find a heterogenous ethnic group of 'foreign' girls who identify themselves as persons living in Denmark but not feeling that they are Danes.

To all the girls living in a multicultural community means that their constructions of cultural identities are interdependent. They are all influenced by each other. They construct their identities in relation to their social and cultural experiences with their classmates, the discourse of nationality at the school, and the discourses of racism and antiracism in the massmedia. They construct their cultural identities in a negotiation of the significance of cultural boundaries between them, trying to create an order. This interrelation between the cultures is one of the major challenges of the research of intercultural communication.

This article deals with the question: *How are we going to describe and analyze an intercultural communication process like this?* The article is divided in three parts. The first part describes in which ways this intercultural communication process differs from the traditional studies of intercultural communication. Due to this I shall use the term *intercultural dialogue* as a description of a communication process, seen as an ongoing communication process which takes the perspectives of globalization, ethnicity and cultural identity into account. According to this understanding of intercultural dialogue I suggest, that we use the concept of *interface*, developed by Norman Long, as an actor-orientated approach to analyze intercultural dialogues.

In the second part an analysis of a field study in a primary school in Denmark in an intercultural community is presented. Through an analysis of the actors' lifestories the study shows how the young people construct their cultural identities in relation to each other and in relation to their social and cultural backgrounds.

In the last part I shall discuss how the results of the analysis point to important perspectives of intercultural dialogue and discuss how the results contribute to a redefinition of intercultural communication in multicultural communities.

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## A Different Intercultural Communication Process?

Basically the communication process differs because the communication takes place between members of the same society. Intercultural communication research has by influential researchers as Edward Hall (1976), Geert Hofstede (1980), Gudykunst and Kim (1984) and Samovar and Porter (1985) defined intercultural communication on the basis of a similarity between culture and nation. As a consequence of the assumed similarity between culture and nation, cultures have been understood as ethnic homogenous and as isolated entities without any significant relations or identifications across cultural boundaries. Researchers have in different ways assumed – depending on the scientific school – that members of each culture would share cultural distinctive features as values, beliefs, world views, religion and cognitive schemes (Hall 1976, Hofstede 1980, Applegate & Sypher 1983). The girls mentioned are obviously members of a culture or nation, which rather must be defined as ethnically heterogeneous and having important relations to cultures across the border of the nation.

Second, we cannot use the definition of inter-ethnic communication, which is developed by e.g. Samovar and Porter, as a communication process between members of different ethnic groups living in the same society (Samovar and Porter 1989). Firstly the Danish girls are defining themselves as members of the nation and not as an ethnic group. Secondly the term interethnic communication would only be able to describe the communication between some of the ‘foreign’ girls. As the empirical study shows, only few of the girls identify themselves primarily by an ethnic identity, their identity seems to be negotiated in relation to the Danish society. Third, conventional intercultural communication researchers have been occupied by studies of communication between strangers who communicated for a limited period – strangers who communicate in relation to management, to business, to development projects and to hotel guests. All of these studies of communication processes are limited by a given short or long period of time. This is not the case with the girls. They have known each other for 2 – 9 years and their communication is an ongoing process, it is a part of their everyday dialogues.

Summing up we can describe this kind of intercultural communication as *an everyday, ongoing communication process between actors, who are familiar to each other. Actors who live in the same society but identify themselves as members of different cultural communities (national, ethnic or diaspora<sup>2</sup>)*. In the following I will use the term *intercultural dialogue* when I refer to this process.

## An Empirical Study of an Intercultural Dialogue

The intercultural dialogues are situated at a primary school in a multicultural community in Copenhagen. The pupils are between 15 and 16 years old, and they have been doing a media

project, three hours a week for five months. I did field observations during a period of three months, and made informal and formal interviews with the teachers and pupils during and after the media project. The following analysis is based upon my field observations, interviews with the teachers and two intercultural group interviews with girls only.

Labelling the actors are a crucial aspect of the analysis. In comparisons between the groups I distinguish between Danes and multicultural youngsters. Danes refer to the group of pupils, who identify themselves as Danes. Multicultural youth can both refer to the pupils who identify themselves to the homelands and ethnic groups of their parents and to the pupils who primarily identify themselves to a diaspora. When a specific ethnic identity is central to the actors the terms Pakistani-Danes, Turkish-Danes etc. is used.

### *The Frame of Analysis*

The study of intercultural dialogue is analyzed by an actor-orientated approach. The intercultural dialogue is seen as an interface between the pupils, the teacher, the institution of the Primary School and the Danish society.

The concept of interface conveys the idea of some kind of face-to-face encounter between individuals with different interests, resources and power. Studies of interface encounters aim to bring out the types of discontinuities that exist and the dynamics and emergent characters of the struggles and interactions that take place, showing how actors’ goals, perceptions, values, interests and relationships are reinforced or reshaped by this process (Long 1992:214).

The aim of a study of an interface is to examine *how* the different actors in the interface identify themselves in relation to each other and to the project, and to identify and observe the actual encounters between the actors. The encounters between the actors are like windows to the interface. It is through these windows possible to analyze how different norms, values, knowledge and interests are articulated, constructed or changed. As emphasized in the actor-orientated approach the interface is seen as an ongoing process developed in time. The interface can be characterized by disagreement and negotiations, or by a common acceptance by the actors of the way of organizing it. If we apply the concept of interface to intercultural studies the constructions of cultural identities are central parts of the intercultural encounters. Cultural identity is according to Stuart Hall defined as “...those aspects of our identities which arise from our ‘belonging’ to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and, above all, national cultures” (Hall 1992:274). According to this definition cultural identity is not seen as a permanent identity, but as ‘moveable’; an identity which is formed and transformed in relation to the ways actors are represented or addressed in the cultural system which surround them (Hall 1992). This means that the actors does not have one identity, but several, and their identifications are continuously being shifted about.

The analysis of the interface will especially pay attention to

- the voices of the actors
- the negotiations of cultural boundaries
- order and disorder in the discourse of the social encounters
- the constructions of cultural identity (nationalism, ethnicity and diaspora)

### Three Danish voices

#### *Sophie – The Girl in Opposition*

I don't think, the differences between cultures are so important. Of course, if their religion tells them that they are not allowed to drink, but ... and in relation to sex, I think you will find important differences.

Sophie is by this argumentation presenting the three main items in her construction of her social position in the interface: 1) in opposition to the common opinion, that argues that cultural differences matter, 2) personally occupied with her own experiences of drinking and the regulation of sexuality. 3) unconsciously arguing on behalf of a member of the majority in a position where ethnicity does not influence their position in the society.

Sophie is the most dominant girl in the interview. She is leftwinged, the chairman of the School Council and political-ly organized. Her parents are divorced, and she lives at both places. To be politically correct is a main topic to her, and she has due to this and to her personal experiences of living in two homes constructed a way of understanding the 'foreigners' which follows this explanation.

I believe that's why (that they are living in two cultures ed.) so many foreigners become violent – or, of course that goes for the Danes as well, but I believe that many foreigners become so violent and want to fight because they come to Denmark, a foreign culture, where they are one person at school and another one at home. And that is incredibly ... Of course we are different also when we are at school, but anyway – it's after all the same culture at home at school and in your sparetime.

As we can see, she remarks that "it goes for Danes as well", but she continues her explanation of the confusing of the 'foreigners'. A situation she finds "incredibly". The other *Danish* girls agree with her while some of the multicultural girls disagree with her interpretation. In order to pursue them Sophie changes her argumentation to include the boys only:

I rather think of the boys. If they come from Turkey – or perhaps not Turkey – where women wear large scarfs and long skirts. And then they come to Denmark where girls hardly wear any clothes, then they will ... Well, of course it is obvious that they are confused. It is obvious, they are not used to girls who hardly wear clothes, miniskirts, you know. They are not used to that, and they go quite ... ouf, ouf, let us paw a bit.

Again we see the pattern of reducing her generalization, "If they come from Turkey, or perhaps not Turkey" and she continues as intended. And again she uses an explanation of the 'foreigners' as being confused because they live with two cultures.

Sophie's explanation is interesting because she seems to use another way of categorizing the groups of boys when they are in public, excluding the boys of their class. These boys are categorized as *strangers*, just arrived in Denmark, and as living in a foreign country. Although she had also observed one of the boys in the class pawing a girl at a discotheque, she excludes this experience and she excludes the fact that the majority of the foreign boys she describes as strangers not knowing the rules, were born in Denmark and have lived in Denmark their entire lives, and must in fact be more familiar with girls wearing miniskirts at discotheques than girls in long dresses.

Constructing this explanation, which is well known in the Danish discourse and used by immigrant-friendly Danes, Sophie is able to balance between political-correctness, her identity as anti-racist and her own experiences of fear and anger of the boys at the discotheques. The keyword is tolerance, and underneath it is an explanation, which makes 'the strangers' determined by their culture and their sexuality, which both are general issues of construction of 'otherness'.

Due to her political knowledge and positions as leftwinged it is interesting that she does not give any structural reasons for the violence among the multicultural young ones like e.g. frustrations of unemployment and unequal chances to get a job in a discriminating society etc. She does not mention structural reasons like these at all which we must interpret in that way that the cultural explanation is the most convincing to her – although she is the one who denies that there are important differences between cultures.

#### *Anne – The Decent Girl*

It is often so. If you don't like a person who come from a foreign country, you are called a racist, although you have taken your time to get to know the person. If they are Danes, then it's okay if you think they are stupid. But if they are foreigners, you are immediately called a racist.

In contrast to Sophie, Anne is the decent girl. During the interview she brings up this topic several times. She is mainly occupied by finding a decent way to behave and to get along with her different identities. "I don't think there is anyone who says whatever they feel like ... when they are together with many others. I just don't believe that." The other girls disagree with this feeling, and are teasing her a bit. "You are too shy". Anne is in fact the only one in the group of Danes who actively uses Danish norms as arguments. "We leave home, when we are 17 years old", "What would we say if a Dane wore a scarf ...". It seems like her personal identity work influences her way of speaking about Danes, and the way she uses the norms of the Danish society as her own. In the dis-

cussion between the girls of why foreign boys are so violent she adds:

I also believe it is because in other countries the parents may be used to beat their children when they do something bad – and you may discuss if that is good or bad, but when they come to Denmark and they are told ‘Well, you must not hit your children’ and they have been used to that, so they don’t know how to tell their children. ‘You must not go into the street and beat people up’. Well, they can’t control their children because they must not hit them as we in Denmark think that’s wrong.

As we see Anne uses the same category of strangers as Sophie. She is constructing a category of parents as if they have just arrived in Denmark. In fact, most of them have lived in Denmark for the last 15 – 20 years. Another interesting point in this explanation is that the violence is related to the ‘foreigners’. Given a cultural explanation we see an exclusion from similar problems within the Danish society, which is contrary to the fact that one of the main topics in all the interviews was that violence is part of the language in this part of town. Following the cultural explanation of Anne there must be at least thousands of Danish parents, who are not able to make their children understand that they are not going to beat people up at the street. Constructing categories of ‘otherness’ always includes the exclusion of similar problems in the category you reserve for yourself.

### *Malene – The Different Girl*

I don’t care, where people come from. Thinking about it all my best friends have been foreigners.

Malene is the only Danish girl in the entire group of twenty, who refers to close personal relationship and friendship to foreigners. Ironically she tells me about the difficulties of a cross cultural relationship in the public space of her former school.

At my old school. If you had a Moroccan friend, you were threatened with knives [by the Danish boys], – but if you did not make friendships with a foreigner, then you had trouble with the teachers, then you were a racist.

But Malene was not only threatened by knives because she had a Moroccan girlfriend, but also because she was different in other ways. Her big brother and his best friends were both brain damaged, “And nobody were to speak ill of them ... “ She was also physically different, because she was unusually tall for a girl at her age. A difference the boys also used as a reason to threaten her with knives.

Central to Malene is her identification of being different and her experiences of fighting for the right to be different, to protect her brother, and to protect her right to choose her Moroccan friend as her best friend.

Asked about cultural differences which matter, Malene after a while answered “We disagree whether Marcus (a model of fashion) is handsome or not.” Malene is like all the other actors answering by individual differences. This reaction has puzzled me a lot. The only interpretation I can give is, that

Malene (as Sophie also did), is operating with two categories when she describes and understand multicultural persons. One of the categories are for the girls she knows, and for them culture is not central. The other category are for the persons who are strangers to her and they are seen as determined by their culture.

Forced to answer at a general level Malene is in fact rather critical of the way, ‘foreigners’ show they are proper believers: “It is just too much, that people are going to pray five times a day, to show they are proper believers”. Malene criticizes the arranged marriage too. The arranged marriage is one of the important differences mentioned by many girls, a social action which differs and affect the girls. It affects their right to decide for themselves. Interesting is that the two main cultural differences, the arranged marriage and the religion, which are mentioned at the general level is not specific either Danish or specific ethnic cultural values. These cultural differences could have been mentioned globally, and could in other places have been cultural boundaries between different religious groups or between traditional and modern groups.

Malene is more offensive; in her criticism of the religion and arranged marriage she seems to feel a different right to disagree in cultural respect with the multicultural girls. The reason might be her close relationship to Moroccan-Danes. By listen to Malenes voice we can point to different discourses in this multicultural community. On the one hand we see how the teachers try to integrate the different ethnic groups into the Danish society by encouraging the pupils to integrate, and at the same time the group of socially marginalized Danish boys, (who wear knives) fight for their social positions. They fight to construct a norm of “the meaning of difference” between the Danes and the multiculturals in an attempt to create a new social position, where they are not at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Central to all of the girls is of course their age and their positions being young in a modern society. By analyzing the voices of these three girls it is possible to see connections between their life stories and the way they construct their cultural identities. Listening to the voices reveals a very significant connection between their personal work of identities, and the ways they relate to the topics of racism, differences between cultures and existing rules of sexuality. It is remarkable that the girl who lives in two homes herself, with two sets of family codes, is the one who insists that the foreigners are becoming confused living in two cultures. And it is significant that the decent girl, mainly occupied with getting along with her identities, is the one who uses national cultural boundaries when she is arguing. And the same pattern is significant in connection to the last girl, the one who has always been different from the majority of her Danish friends, because of her brain damaged brother and friend and who is the only one, who prefers relationships to multicultural girls. Although the pattern seems obvious: we act and argue in relation to the experiences of our life stories the pattern illustrates the importance of analyzing the discourses at both an individual and a structural level.

Bauman argues that we construct our system of order by dividing people into two main categories, friends and en-

emies. Persons, who are between these groups are out of place, and overloaded with significance. (Bauman 1991) The Danish girls are negotiating within these two categories. The friends are the ‘foreigners’ who they know and like, – and the unknown are categorized as enemies. Enemies who do not follow the Danish norms of religion, of the education of children and the rules of the dance floor. The Danish girls construct their national identity by excluding ‘foreign’ social actions as not belonging to the culture.

Or to use Andersons concept, they identify themselves as belonging to ‘the imagined community’ of the Danish nation, which also means that they are the ones in the communication process, which have the right to define who to include in the national community and who to exclude. (Anderson 1983, Bauman 1991)

## Multicultural Voices

### *Julia – Belonging to Her Homeland, Albania*

I have lived in Denmark my whole life, but I’m from Albania.

Julia is one of the most dominant girls in the interview. She is insisting on her taste of TV-serials, and is fighting of her opinions. She also insists that the boys in the class are rude to her, a topic she repeats many times during the interview. She is often using her homeland as an authority and something that gives strength. She adds to the Danish girls’ discussion about rules in other countries:

In my country it’s normal to move from home, when you are 17 or 18 years old. By us, the parents don’t have to ...

She is in a position which makes her free to construct her homeland as she likes. Albania is her ‘black box’, to use a rhetorical term, in the discussion. It is difficult to distinguish between her rhetorical use of the homeland and the way she uses Albania in the construction of her cultural identity. But, as we can see in the quotation, she mentions that “the parents don’t have to ...” which means that she articulates the perspective of the parents and not of the youngster. A perspective which is absent in the discourse of young Danes. Asked about her relation to her homeland, she tells me that while she was growing up in Denmark she refused to speak Albanian. When she was 10 years old her family went back to Albania for a period of 18 months, and it seems that she within this period of her life has constructed a frame of her identity with Albania as her homeland.

The life story of Julia shows that her family have actually been travelling between the cultures. The consequence of this is that although Julia has lived her whole life in Denmark, apart from 18 months, she primarily constructs her national identity as a ‘pure’ Albanian identity. A construction which at the personal level helps her to act in the Danish society.

### *Songüll – Belonging to Two Cultures/Nations*

I don’t know whether I am Turkish or Danish. I can’t read the Turkish books we have at home.

To the Turkish-Danish girl the construction of identities is more complex. Her identity is primarily concerned about the signs of *cultural boundaries*. Her input to the discussion is about a girl she has heard about, who, unlike her, was not born in Denmark.

There are some. They come from Turkey ... I was born and have grown up in Denmark. But they were not born here or grown up here, they come up from Turkey to Denmark. And then I know a Turkish girl, she tries to look like Danish girls. She goes to parties, she smokes and drinks, and does not come home and ... I think that’s silly. She comes from Turkey, takes a look around saying that’s the way they look here, now I’m going to look like them, then I’ll wear that kind of clothes. I’ll do like that, I’ll be exactly the same, that’s silly too, isn’t it.

The Danish girls agree with her. “That’s silly”. And by this agreement they are taking part in the negotiation of the signs of cultural boundaries between being a ‘real’ Dane and a Turkish-Dane. As we can see Songüll describes the differences between a Danish way of acting by differences in clothing, smoking and drinking, and of not obeying your parents. Interesting is also her distinction between people, who were born in Denmark, and the newcomers, who seem to have even a lesser right to change their cultural codes or signs of cultural identity. In the discussion of the parents’ right to beat their children in Denmark, she confirms the Danes by telling this story:

It’s 2-3 days ago that I was told about a man, he has a son, and he has grown up here, he is 14 – 15 years old. The boy said: ‘I would like to move from home and get a girlfriend’. And his father said, ‘No, you must not do that.’ And then the father thought ‘I must not hit my son in Denmark,’ and then he sent his son back to their country and then he said that ‘you must not come to Denmark. You must stay here’.

Again she is occupied with the social consequences of crossing the ethnic boundaries defined by her ethnic group. The negotiation of being too Danish is often described in the immigrant studies. In each ethnic community they are very well informed about the members of the community. To wear Danish clothes too often is interpreted as a sign of cultural disloyalty to the ethnic group (Mørch 1993). In relation to the theoretical discourse of globalization and new relationships between the immigrants and their ‘homelands’ it is interesting if the homelands also function as a way of educating your kids to cultural loyalty, as both Songüll and Julia are giving as examples. Songüll’s negotiation of the cultural boundaries and the social consequences of crossing the cultural boundaries demonstrate her knowledge of the space of manoeuvre of social actions. She is not free to choose between the social actions and values of the Turkish and Danish cultures, she has to balance between them.

### *Salina – Belonging to a Diaspora*

Well, I think about myself as what I am. In fact I feel like a ... what to say ... I feel like a stranger like the others. Although

I live here, I don't care. When you got a buscard, then it tells you that you are a stranger. It's a stranger's name, although you are a Danish citizen. When you enter the bus and show the picture of yourself, then you are a stranger.

While the other multicultural girls were referring to their homelands or their ethnic group, she is neither referring to a homeland nor to a place of belonging. Her parents are from Pakistan, but her mother is educated as a dentist in Morocco. She describes them as travelling a lot visiting friends and relatives in Denmark, Norway and Germany. We might call them cosmopolitans, and this might be one of the reasons why Salina never describes herself as Pakistani or is referring to the ethnic group of Pakistans. Salina constructs her cultural identity by identifying herself as a 'stranger'.

Salina is occupied with the fact that her name and her physical appearance differ from the typical Danish names and appearance. Being a stranger is to her related to the visible signs of distinctions between multicultural and Danish groups. She wears, as the only one in the three classes I observed, a scarf. A green scarf which covers her hair and forehead. And that might explain why she emphasizes the visual norms and signs of not belonging. Wearing the scarf is central to her identity. I asked her why she had chosen to wear the scarf:

When I started at my school in the third class (10 years) I had my friends at the school. It was a Pakistani and a Turkish girl, and they were always wearing scarfs. So in that way we were three who all wore scarfs. I'm used to wearing it, so I'm wearing it. And I cannot do without it ...

Salina has chosen to wear the scarf because it gave her an identity when she started at a new school, and it was a mutual sign for the three girls. She has been practicing prayers and religion together with friends and with her cousin, but never with her parents. According to her explanations they are not religious at all, and they think it's up to her to decide if she wants to wear the scarf like it is up to her to decide who she wants to marry. "They don't care". Salina's relatives are well educated and socially integrated in the Danish society, and apart from the cousin, none of them practice religion. Salina has chosen to wear the scarf as a personal strategy in relation to a community with her friends in school, and maybe in opposition to her parents.

Although the religion and the scarf are central to her, and she stresses that she cannot do without the scarf, she chose to leave it while she was at a work experience in a Danish supermarket. She explains that it would not be smart, if:

S: ... the customers arrive at a supermarket saying: 'Well, there is a person with a scarf at the check-out, I'm not going to that check-out, you must open another one' or things like that ...

I: Do you think they will react like that?

S: Yes, I think so ... most ... most of the people who say things like that are the elderly ladies. Each time they see such one .. a ... it doesn't matter, a foreigner, a blackhaired person or one who wears a scarf, so they start to say a lot of things and to

shout at one, so therefore I don't think it's smart to wear a scarf while you are sitting at the check-out.

She is again pointing to the visible differences between Danes and foreigners. And she is again referring to the position of not belonging in the public space. She is, as the quotation indicates very experienced regarding reactions to the scarf. She knows exactly how different social groups react to her: The gangs of Danish boys in the street do not bother her – but old ladies are the worst ones, always nagging at her, asking personal/private questions which annoy her a lot. Salina is discursive conscious of the meaning of the signs in the Danish society. She interprets it as a sign of 'otherness' which is also explicit in the interviews with the Danish girls. She feels like a stranger herself, and the sign of not-belonging equalises this feeling. But as we have seen she is very occupied with the visible signs of not-belonging, and the classical question to ask is: Does she feel that she is not belonging because she wears the scarf? Or is she wearing the scarf actively to show that she is not belonging and has no intention of it? The most sensible interpretation is that both answers are right. She constructs her cultural identities, negotiating her interests and values of being a part of the Danish society, (to leave the scarf if she wants to get a job) and integrate like her brother and mother have done, or to follow her more religious friends and cousin. As we remember, she likes clothes of fashion, "but it does not fit the scarf" – a good illustration of her negotiation.

She seems to construct her cultural identity in relation to her religion, and to her position of being a stranger. In the discourse of globalization Appadurai assumes that one of the strategies of a redefinition of nations will be the growing of global Diasporas; ethnic groups attempt to reconstruct a de-territorial concept of nations, which means a concept of the nation, which reconstructs a loyalty, a patriotism without links to a homeland or to a place. (Appadurai 1990) "I live in Denmark, but I don't care". In the perspective of globalization an interpretation *could* be that Salina is constructing her identity as a postnational identity, which is adapted to the relativism of globalization and has suspended the significance of the place. (Appadurai 1990)

The voices of the multicultural girls give the outline of three different positions in the construction of cultural identities. One girl primarily constructs her identity through her imagination of belonging to the ethnic group and the homeland of her parents. Another girl constructs her identity through a negotiation of the cultural boundaries between the ethnic group of her parents and her own relationship with the Danish society – and the last girl primarily constructs her cultural identity in relation to a religious community, a diaspora, newer including the ethnic group of her parents.

Appadurai argues that the increasing flow of immigrants are constructing more autonomous fields of logic – as more and more ethnic groups, all over the world, develop new family networks and economical networks across the national boundaries (Appadurai 1990). However the differences in the way the multicultural girls construct their cultural identities show the importance of taking the perspectives of ethnicity and globalization into account in relation to their life stories.

## **Intercultural Dialogue in Multicultural Communities**

By using the encounters as windows to get access to the order and norms, values and ways of constructing identities, we can now go back to the question of how to describe and analyze intercultural dialogue in multicultural communities. I listed above three important differences between intercultural dialogue and the traditional understanding of intercultural communication. In the following I shall discuss the results of the empirical study in relation to a redefinition of the research on intercultural communication.

### *– The Communication Takes Place Between Members of the Same Society*

However, the study point to an order in the interface, and to the point that this social encounter includes a paradox: the construction of a category of strangers including the “foreign boys” who are interpreted as just arrived at a foreign country, not knowing the rules – although all the actors are aware that the majority of the boys are multicultural boys who very well know the rules. To explain this paradox we must analyze the reaction of this social encounter to the interface. The logic of this paradox must be constructed in relation to the actors’ everyday experiences living in a multicultural society.

The boys are not strangers in a foreign country, and everybody knows that. But the “foreign boys” represent ethnic minorities in a society, which constructs their cultural boundaries in a national discourse in a way, where they are treated like strangers, who do not belong to the “real” idea of the nation. This happens as we have seen in the school, in the streets. Despite the fact that everybody in the Danish society knows that they have lived in Denmark their entire lives and are equals members of the Danish society they are seen as “foreigners” determined by their culture and religion.

### *– This is not Inter-Ethnic Communication*

The study supports the theoretical point of view that cultures have become a political term. And as a consequence of this politicizing of cultures, cultures also function as signs of social differentiation. The actors’ attitude to multicultural pupils is part of a political discourse also, and has in this way become part of the social positions.

In the space of the primary school all the actors, the teachers, the Danish pupils and the multicultural young accept a social order, in which the Danes have the right to define the norms. So the study points that rather than studying cultures in the respect of common values and beliefs, intercultural communication research should pay more attention to the cultural identity and above all to the national identity of the actors (and in the institutions) and to the social and political meaning of cultures.

Following the conclusion of the significance of national identity, it is obvious that we cannot use the conceptualizing of inter-ethnic communication to define the intercultural dialogue in a multicultural society. But in relation to the ethnic

groups the study also shows, that ethnic minorities, who live in multicultural communities identify themselves quite differently.

The study points at two simultaneous self definitions. On the one hand they define themselves as ‘foreigners’ being different from the Danes. And in this category the ethnic differences between them are a minor significance. On the other hand the majority of the girls in this study identify themselves as parts of an ethnic group, and by this also by the ethnic (national) group in the Danish society. In this study was presented the oppositions between actors who were constructing their cultural identities through an imagination of a ‘pure’ homeland and an actor who constructed her cultural identity through a diaspora. Between these poles we will probably find the majority of the young: constructing cultural identities negotiating between the ethnic society, the homeland and the diaspora and the actual society they live in.

According to this, studies of intercultural communication should pay attention to the complexity of how actors relate themselves to other ethnic minorities, homelands, diasporas and especially to their negotiation of ethnic and cultural boundaries. In other words intercultural communication studies should integrate the perspectives of ethnicity and globalization.

### *– Communication as an Ongoing Process*

Intercultural dialogue is, as mentioned, seen as an ongoing process unlimited by time between actors who are familiar to each others. This study of intercultural dialogue in a multicultural community shows a quite interesting difference between the actors’ way of categorizing actors they know and strangers. In the communication with actors who are familiar they seem to ignore the cultural differences and when communicating about actors, who they don’t know personally they construct a category of strangers. What we see is that in the communication about strangers the cultural significance is enlarged.

The discourse of the interface shows two main results. At first is to be mentioned that all the actors are discursive conscious about differences between cultures, which are central to their actual position in life. This applies especially to their knowledge of the social regulation of sexuality, religion, drinking and parties. They are also very conscious to avoid generalizations about other cultures, which means that although most of them do it anyway they do have an experience from living in a multicultural community, that have shown them that other cultures are not homogenous, but must be seen as different groups similar to their categorizing of their own culture. If we see intercultural communication as an ongoing process, it becomes quite clear that cultural identities are constructed and reconstructed during the cultural encounters.

### *Analyzing Intercultural Communication*

Methodologically interface as a concept seems fruitful as a structure of the analysis.

One of the analytical benefits of the concept of interface is that it takes the aspect of power into account. By using the encounter as windows it was possible to get access to *how* power is constructed. One example is the girl who wears a scarf, and although several people in the Danish society at personal and structural levels try to get her assimilated and give up this sign, she is using the scarf as a weapon in this battlefield. She is not to be seen as a symbol of religion or passive and powerless actors, but rather as a girl influencing and changing the Danish society, using the scarf as a symbol of cultural identity and power.

According to the analysis of the intercultural dialogue in multicultural communities the concept of interface offers an actor-orientated approach and a theoretical position in be-

tween the structuralistic and the individualistic theories, which are crucial to an understanding of intercultural communication today. Living in a multicultural community none of the actors construct 'pure' cultural identities or to use Clifford Geertz' term of culture, none of the actors construct webs of significance isolated from the social organization which surrounds them (Geertz 1973).

One of the new ways intercultural communication research must take is to see a communication process like this from a metatheoretical level also. What we see is not a simple intercultural communication process between members of different cultures, it is a complex and ongoing dialogue about the social and cultural regulation of a new order in multicultural societies.

## Notes

1. This article is a revised version of a paper given to the "20th General Assembly & Scientific Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication Research" in Sydney, Australia – August 1996.
2. Diaspora is in this context seen as a community between people across national boundaries.

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