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CORE VALUES AND HUMAN VALUES IN INTERCULTURAL SPACE¹

ABSTRACT This paper considers the issue of human values in intercultural space through the writings of Professor Jerzy Smolicz. It begins by explicating Smolicz's concept of core values, developed from research on Australian ethnic cultural groups over more than three decades. Core values, he argued, were those central to the survival of viable and identifiable cultural groups. Where these values were lost, individuals assimilated into the mainstream cultural group. Intercultural space can be understood as places where individuals of different cultural backgrounds communicate, interact and co-operate. Such spaces may be transient and targeted to a specific purpose; develop over generations of different cultural groups inhabiting the same geographical region; be fostered in school classrooms; or even occur when an individual experiences 'the cultural other' in imagination through a literary or visual text. In such contexts, it would seem most appropriate for human values, those cultural meanings shared by all people as human beings, to prevail. However, Smolicz's multicultural model for Australian society was based on a balance between the core values of the various minority groups and the overarching values shared by Australians of all cultural backgrounds. It is argued that a similar balance between core values and human values is required, if any intercultural space is to achieve dialogue, communication and fruitful interaction.

Keywords: core values, human values, intercultural space

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I wish to approach the topic of human values in intercultural space through the writings of Professor Jerzy Smolicz and the studies he and his research students carried out with participants from more than fifteen different ethnic cultural groups in Australia. In pursuing this line of argument, I am making an assumption, which I will return to later, that Australia over the last four decades can be regarded as an example of intercultural space at the societal level. This is in spite of the many ways it has fallen short of its multicultural ideal. Nevertheless, I consider that Professor Smolicz's Australian studies can make a useful contribution to any consideration of human values in intercultural space. Let us begin with the concept which has been most associated with Professor Smolicz – core values.

BACKGROUND FACTORS

Professor Smolicz's academic interest in the core values of cultural groups can be seen to have had its roots in his own personal biography. As a child in 1940, he was deported with his parents from their home in what was then eastern Poland. Over the rest of World War II he spent time in places as different as the collective farms of the Kazakhstan steppes, the ancient Persian capital of Tehran and the cosmopolitan sea coast of Lebanon, to eventually settle after the war in the remote highlands of Scotland. His higher education at the universities of Edinburgh and Oxford included contact with students from many countries. These experiences gave him a lively interest in different cultures and a delight in interacting with people from widely diverse backgrounds (SECOMBE 2006).

Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to suggest that Professor Smolicz's positive attitude to cultural diversity had also been fostered by being born into a family which looked back to the centuries old Jagiellonian tradition of multicultural dialogue, interaction and creative co-existence (ZAMOYSKI 1987; DAVIES 1981). Between the wars this tradition continued to be upheld in the eastern Polish borderlands around Wilno and Nieśwież, as well as in the University of Krakow. In my judgment, his knowledge of this practical Polish experiment in multicultural community living had a considerable influence on the way Professor Smolicz thought about the possibilities of cultural maintenance and interchange in the Australian context.

When Professor Smolicz took up a position in the Department of Education at the University of Adelaide in 1965, he found that the local schools were just beginning to be aware of the learning situation of children who came from post-war immigrant families. Many of these children did not speak English at home and maintained patterns of living which were rather different from those families whose descendants had come from Great Britain. Such children found themselves confronted in the Australian school with curriculum and pedagogy which were geared to the English speaking majority group (SMOLICZ 1971). No matter what school they went to, private, Catholic or state, the children of the newcomers had no option but to learn English and the

Anglo-Celtic Australian culture which dominated the curriculum, the pedagogy, the organisational and relationship patterns of the school.

Within a few years of his arrival in Adelaide, Professor SMOLICZ (1970:,40) was pointing out that such an approach would result in an inestimable loss of cultural resources, for the individual students and immigrant families concerned, as well as for Australian society as a whole. An early article directly on this issue discussed the benefits of encouraging in Australia what he called cultural interaction, the positive and potentially creative interchange among people brought up in different cultural traditions (SMOLICZ 1971).

From 1970 he embarked on pioneering research in Australia, based on interviewing immigrant parents and their student children concerning their views of schooling in Australia and the sort of learning opportunities they would like to have access to. It was pioneering in the sense that no-one previously had thought of asking the new arrivals what they thought. These studies were intensified and extended after a period of study leave in Poland in 1972 had introduced Professor Smolicz to humanistic sociology and the memoir method of gathering and analyzing research data. This proved to be a particularly appropriate method for understanding, from their own perspective, the experiences, the aspirations and the feelings of participants of minority ethnic background (SMOLICZ 1974; 1979, 1999(a); 1999(b)).

CORE VALUES

Over the next thirty years Professor Smolicz and his research students used written or oral memoirs or personal statements to investigate respondents from many different ethnic cultural communities: Italian, Greek and Armenian; Polish, Croatian, Ukrainian and Latvian; Ethiopian and Arab; Chinese and Indian; Vietnamese, Cambodian, Uighur and Filipino, as well as Welsh and mainstream Anglo-Celtic Australian (SMOLICZ 1979, 1999(a); 1999(b)).

There was a consistent pattern of responses across all the immigrant communities, regardless of when they arrived over the period 1948 to 1998. Despite the overwhelming dominance of English in most contexts in Australian society, many – but not all – parents and their children continued to speak other languages at home and in community gatherings. They wished to maintain their home language and culture in Australia, alongside the learning of English, which they recognised as necessary for communication with others, as well as for participation in the wider society. Many expressed their fears of losing their homeland culture and not being able to share it with their family, as a result of their children learning only English at school and assimilating to the cultural patterns of the dominant Anglo-Celtic-Australian group.

To make sense of these findings, Professor Smolicz proposed that some cultural values (that is, meanings shared by group members) were more important than others for the solidarity and survival of a given cultural group. These he called “core values” in that they were central to the life of the group and had an integrating function for the

culture as a whole. Although his focus at the time was ethnic cultural groups, he recognised that the term could also be applied to other sorts of groups at various levels of social organization.

The solidarity and survival function of core values was most evident when forces, such as colonial conquest or assimilationist pressures, resulted in a particular cultural group losing its core values. All the younger generation could activate were cultural residues which were no longer linked to the central meanings which had held the group and its culture together. The end result was the loss of the culture concerned as a viable and creative way of life for the group. At best, the younger members of the group maintained some residual values, such as food and festivals, on the periphery of their activation of the dominant group's cultural values, which by default, had replaced the values of their own heritage in their day to day living (SMOLICZ, 1979; 1999(a); 1999(b)).

In addition, Professor Smolicz considered that core values were those which over generations had come to be regarded by group members as their identifying values. The acknowledging and activating of these core values distinguished those who belonged to the group from those outside the group. Hence the loss of core values not only portended the disappearance of one more culturally different pattern of life, but had disorienting and alienating repercussions for those whose sense of personal identity was deeply rooted in these values.

Professor Smolicz argued that for most, but not all ethnic cultural groups, their own distinctive language was a core value. In other cases religious values were linked to the group's core, as for example, Greek Orthodox religion for Greeks, Islamic religion for Arabs, Catholic values for Polish people. Strongly collectivist family values were also evident as core values for Greek, Italian, Arab and Vietnamese groups, in contrast to the individualism in family life and personal relations, which was taken for granted as a core value by those of Anglo heritage. His judgment on these core values was based on the fact that the responses of participants in the small scale Australian studies were consistent with the findings of wider research studies on these cultural groups in their ethnic homelands (SMOLICZ 1979; 1999(a); 1999(b)).

This is not to say that all people identify themselves in ethnic cultural terms. The range of responses in some of our Australian studies indicated that some participants preferred to identify with gender, socio-economic, rural or professional groupings. A few defined themselves in terms of their psychological characteristics. It may be worth recognising that the majority of those who claimed no ethnic identity would have been identified, on the basis of the concrete facts of their birthplace and parental ancestry, as members of the mainstream Australian group (MANIAM 2011).

If we return to the issue of human beings communicating and co-operating in "intercultural space," the key question is whether the concept of core values has any relevance in the modern context of a globalizing world where human values would appear to be most appropriate. The answer to this question depends largely on how the terms "intercultural space" and "human values" are understood.

INTERCULTURAL SPACE

I take the phrase “intercultural space” to refer to a social context or cultural domain where people from different cultural groups meet, communicate and interact. This interpretation is focused more on actual intercultural outcomes, rather than just their possibility. It is not the physical, geographical location of such encounters which is important, although this may make them more or less possible. In the age of the internet, however, partners of different cultural backgrounds, who are separated by continents and oceans, may actively engage in interchange for a common project. Such “virtual” intellectual space can also be regarded as intercultural in terms of the people involved and what they achieve. At an even simpler level, intercultural space may be created within the mind of a single individual as he or she engages with a literary or scholarly work, or views a film or television program which presents common life experiences through the eyes of individuals of another culture.

An intercultural space may be deliberately contrived through bringing together a group of people from different cultural backgrounds in a given geographical spot for a specific purpose. The June symposium held at Krakow was one such example. Participants were carefully chosen and invited to be part of a “meeting of scholars of many different cultural traditions” from the first announcement of seminar.

On such occasions it is important to ensure that not a single cultural group dominates. For then the cultural values of the dominant group prevail in terms of the language of communication, the organizational patterns, the academic traditions, even the ways of greeting and relating to one another. This is a common experience for those attending conferences in the English-speaking world. Under these conditions, the meeting space cannot be considered intercultural, but rather monocultural, even when the participants come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Professor Smolicz was acutely aware of this dilemma. In two key committees he chaired on the implementation of multicultural policies in South Australian education institutions, he adopted strategies to ensure that the committees concerned were genuinely intercultural spaces and not dominated by those from the mainstream Anglo-Celtic-Australian group. He arranged that those who came from various minority ethnic cultural backgrounds outnumbered on the committee those who came from the mainstream group. As a result, almost all members felt comfortable in contributing to discussions, while decisions were reached by finding a consensus, rather than passing formal motions, as in the British tradition.

Another possibility is that an intercultural space emerges as a more stable phenomenon under favourable social and cultural conditions. There are some societies and regions where different ethnic cultural communities have lived side by side in the same geographical region for generations, for example, parts of Central Europe, or the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, or international ports or key centres at the crossroads of trade and migration in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. In such spaces each group maintains its own culture, while at the same time interact-

ing with the others in the ordinary business of daily living. In maintaining the region as intercultural space, the members of each group come to some understanding and appreciation of the others' cultures so that the possibility of creative interchange is facilitated.

Such communities create possibilities for intercultural space at a more micro level through long term friendships, relationships or marriages which cross cultural borders. Such spaces can only be regarded as intercultural when both partners have brought their particular cultural values to the relationship. When one partner, by choice or by default, assimilates to the values of the other, the cultural space of their relationship is monocultural, not intercultural.

Perhaps it is here that we can return to our initial assumption that since the adoption of multicultural policies in the mid 1970s, Australia can be regarded as an intercultural space at the societal level. In practice, it is closer to actual reality to say that Australia's multicultural policies have helped to encourage the emergence of spaces where those of different cultural backgrounds can interact not only on meaningful and inclusive terms but in ways that creatively use cultural variations. Ethnic communities such as Italians, Greeks, Germans, Vietnamese, Chinese and Indian, have established well-patronised annual festivals in which they aim to share their aspects of their culture – food, music, dance, art – with Australians of all backgrounds who are interested enough to attend. Although the interchange on such occasions is at a fairly superficial level, they are important as a public proclamation and acknowledgement that these minority cultural communities are an integral part of Australian societal space.

At the University of Adelaide, the Centre for Intercultural Studies and Multicultural Education (CISME), of which Professor Smolicz was Director for fifteen years, was specifically established as an intercultural space. It provided opportunities for members and others interested, to take part in an intercultural encounter. This experience came partly through the seminar presentations from a wide range of people of varying cultural backgrounds from overseas, other Australian states or remote parts of South Australia, and partly through the interaction among those of many different cultural backgrounds who attended. Other examples of such spaces have been created by some groups of musicians, artists and actors; by students and teachers in the classrooms of some schools; by some churches, some suburban neighbourhoods, and sporting teams in a game like soccer where the majority of team members often come from a range of different minority groups (MANIAM 2011).

There are many other spaces, however, in suburbs, schools, churches, rural towns; many teams in sports like cricket and women's netball, where those of Anglo-Celtic-Australian background predominate and maintain the cultural values of their heritage. The little contact which individuals in these contexts have with those of other cultural backgrounds is always in terms of the mainstream culture. Those of different cultural backgrounds who happen to find their way into this sort of space are expected to follow the patterns of life and ways of thinking of the majority. The space concerned is monocultural not intercultural; no cross cultural exchange, intercultural dialogue or communication is possible (VLAHAKIS 2012).

Australian schools and classrooms also demonstrate the way in which the creation of intercultural space can be a matter of interpretation and attitude. Given their proportion in the Australian population at large, according to the latest available figures (DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION & CITIZENSHIP 2011), individuals with links to minority cultural groups can be expected to constitute up to 30 to 40% of a university tutorial or seminar group, a class of school students, or a whole school, although in practice particular schools can vary between 10% or less to 70% or more. Where teachers acknowledge and understand the cultural diversity of their students and build its reality into their pedagogy, the teaching and learning space becomes intercultural for them all, a space where dialogue, communication and fruitful interaction take place across cultural groups.

One graduate, all of whose family members were of “Anglo-Saxon ethnic background” remembered her high school as having many students from a range of different European and Asian cultural backgrounds. She described the way:

the teachers made good use of this situation, particularly in the social studies and language classes I attended. We often had lessons where we discussed different cultures first hand, as it were, with the students from different cultures. I learnt a lot from the time I spent there, gaining a much better understanding of other cultural values. Certainly the teaching staff encouraged us to learn about each other’s different cultural backgrounds, pointing out the benefits of broadening our minds, trying to break down senseless prejudices, develop awareness of different languages and [their] function, and in turn learning about our own language in the process (SECOMBE 1997: 198).

However, this positive experience of an intercultural classroom was mentioned only four times among a group of 43 graduate participants (SECOMBE 1997).

With other teachers who do not make the effort to find out the background of the students, or who believe in treating all students the same (i.e. as if they were members of the majority group) the teaching/learning space reverts to the cultural monism of mainstream Australians. Even though the class of students and their range of cultural backgrounds is the same, the teaching/learning space ceases to be intercultural – unless the students themselves have reached the point of developing an intercultural momentum of their own in communication and dialogue (SECOMBE 1997).

A recent small-scale study in an Adelaide secondary college with a predominance of mainstream students and a monocultural school ethos has looked at how the school’s curriculum and pedagogy could influence students toward a personal understanding of the multicultural dimensions of Australian society. Over a four year period, a class of English students engaged in an in-depth study of a number of literary texts which were focused on the experiences and feelings of individuals and families from cultural backgrounds different from the students. A comparison of the students’ written comments about their thoughts and feelings toward those of Aboriginal and Italian cultural background students before and after their study of the literary texts demonstrated that the in-depth engagement with the relevant text created an experience of intercultural space

within the minds of some students which led to a marked change in their attitudes to the “cultural other” (VLAHAKIS 2012).

HUMAN VALUES

The other key concept which needs clarification is “human values.” In his humanistic sociological approach, ZNANIECKI (1968) insisted on relating cultural values or shared meanings directly to the group which created, maintained and modified them. If we adopt this approach, then human values would be taken to refer to those cultural meanings which we all share as human beings, as distinct from other animal, or possibly, even extra-terrestrial groups. Human values therefore could be expected to relate to the biological and psychological nature, the social and cultural tendencies which underpin all human life across the globe.

ZNANIECKI (1968) used the term “cultural universals” to refer to those cultural meanings which are found in all social/cultural groups. These relate to what we all have in common with one another as human beings. Over and above the cultural meanings we share with other members of the specific social and cultural groups to which we belong, cultural universals are expressions of what makes us all humans (HALAS 2000).

Nevertheless, it must be recognised that we activate and express these shared human values in different ways, according to the particular cultural groups to which we belong. We may wish to express our sympathy or our sense of oneness with our fellow human beings, but to give voice to these feelings, we must use the words and the linguistic structures of a particular language. At best perhaps, we can follow Pope John Paul II’s example and use a number of different languages for greetings and key ideas, in order to stress the way a common human idea needs to find a diversity of expression among human beings.

The title of the June symposium in Kraków, *Human Values in Intercultural Space*, implied that in intercultural spaces we would expect to find human values prevailing. The varying participants, for example, could expect to identify one another not in ethnic cultural terms, not in gender terms as men or women, not even as academics and scholars in a particular discipline or interdisciplinary field, but more fundamentally as fellow human beings.

CORE VALUES AND HUMAN VALUES IN INTERCULTURAL SPACE

Let us return then to the basic dilemma in relation to our topic. Is there room for core values in intercultural space? Is the concept of core values appropriate or relevant, when we envisage intercultural space as the domain where participants activate human values? If the purpose of the intercultural space is to foster the Jagiellonian values of dialogue, interaction and creative co-existence or interchange, as it would seem from the

use of the term “intercultural,” then my answer is that the concept of core values is essential for this purpose to be achieved.

To justify this answer, I wish to return to the writings of Professor Smolicz. A glance at the totality of his writings makes it clear that his concern was never just core values per se and the need to preserve minority core values in culturally diverse societies like Australia. His ultimate ideal was the achievement of a multicultural society in which cultural interaction among peoples of different ethnic cultural traditions continued over generations – the ideal of what he called “a dynamic and resilient” multicultural society (SMOLICZ 1999(a); 1999(b)).

This ideal almost certainly had its origins in Professor Smolicz’s understanding of the tradition of fruitful co-existence which marked the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth and neighboring countries during the Jagiellonian period. It looks to the emergence of a society which does not simply tolerate (in the sense of allow to exist in private), but actively encourages diverse cultural traditions, languages and religions as an integral part of the nation. Individuals then have an opportunity for cultural interaction where they can enjoy and share in the cultural riches of the community beyond their own family heritage.

In the Australian context, Professor SMOLICZ (1979; 1999(a); 1999(b)) argued, the achievement of such a multicultural society depended on the core values of the various cultural groups (necessary for their survival as viable creative groups) being held in balance with certain key values which all members of Australian society shared. These he referred to as overarching values, reflecting the image of a societal umbrella under which different cultural groups were sheltered and protected. These included the democratic, legal and economic values which make up the framework of society for all Australians; English as the common language, as well as recognition of religious freedom, acknowledgement of cultural diversity as an integral part of society and the ideal of a ‘fair go’ for all.

The achievement of this point of balance which allows a multicultural nation (SMOLICZ 1999(a); 1999(b)) to flourish usually requires modifications or adjustments to both core and overarching values. In extreme cases, where the core values of a minority group are in direct conflict with a value which overarches society as a whole, there is little chance of achieving the point of balance at all. Consider, for example, the hypothetical situation of a group whose members regard totalitarian forms of government or a strictly hierarchical social structure as their core value. Such a group would not be accepted as a part of the Australian nation as long as democratic and egalitarian values remain so strongly supported as overarching values for the whole society. For this very reason, few members of such groups have ever wanted to come to Australia. Nor, in actual present reality, does the legal framework of Australia, in the area of family law, permit the arrival of individuals, let alone groups, who uphold the practice of polygamy as a core value.

However, in relation to the minority core values discussed earlier, there have been modifications to both core and overarching values. In the Australian context, the religious core values of some minority groups have been easily accommodated because Australian society had already accepted the individual’s right to freedom of religious

belief and practice. Strongly collectivist family values, which had caused some conflict with schools and welfare agencies, have been modified by subsequent generations who have been more willing to accommodate individual needs and interests. At the same time, family law under the Australian overarching framework has been modified to take account of collectivist values.

Linguistic core values have required more compromises. Minority groups were willing to accommodate by accepting English as the common language, alongside their own ethnic language. It has proved much more difficult for mainstream Australians to shift away from the ideal of a monolingual English only society toward accepting bilingualism among speakers of minority languages, and even more, recognising the possible benefits of bilingualism for themselves. Now Australian community languages other than English are accepted by the government in a number of ways in educational, social welfare and arts policies, although the amount of resources allocated varies from government to government.

The details of these modifications in core and overarching values to achieve the point of multicultural balance in Australian society are not important in themselves in this present paper. They have been mentioned rather as examples of the way groups inhabiting the same societal space have adjusted to one another in order to maintain and strengthen the intercultural character of their nation. For I wish to argue that Professor Smolicz's model for an Australian multicultural society can provide a useful blueprint for the effective functioning of other intercultural spaces.

The Jagiellonian tradition, I would contend, can only become a reality in any intercultural space, when both core values and human values are recognized and acknowledged. Both need to be taken into account. At the most fundamental level, there can be no intercultural space without core values. A space can only be intercultural when it is inhabited by people from more than one cultural background. Core values mark out those cultural groups which are being actively maintained and modified. It is the maintenance of the various core values which ensures on-going diversity in intercultural space.

On the other hand, without human values, there is no way for individuals to cross cultural boundaries or to transcend the more limited and specific culture of their particular groups. The possibility of effective interaction and communication is greatly diminished, if not lost altogether. Those who inhabit an intercultural space, and wish to achieve the multicultural dialogue, interaction and creative co-existence of the Jagiellonian tradition, need to balance the two – the core values and the human values. Indeed, it is the tension of balancing the two which sparks the possibilities of creativity in intercultural space, as human beings learn new ways of doing things from one another.

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