

(Re)-Constructing Multiculturalism 2010 - Report

Conference participants

A total of fifty doctoral research students from UK, Europe and overseas universities attended the conference. Thirty six of the participants were from the following schools at Cardiff University CARBS, CPLAN, ENCAP, HISAR, EUROS, JOMEK, MEDIC, MUSIC, RELIG, SOCSI, SONMS and WELSH. Other conference delegates attended from the following Universities: Griffith University Queensland Australia, University of Birmingham, Stellenbosch University (South Africa), University of Bristol, National University of Ireland, University of Bucharest, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, University of Reading, Ewha Womans University, Korea, University of Leeds, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens. This broad spectrum of participants reflected the growing interest in multiculturalism in advanced level academic research at institutions worldwide.

Panel 1

Intercultural Dialogue

Chair: Dana Lazarevic (HISAR)

- Caroline Lucas 'The Imagined Folk of England'
- Maria Stathopoulou 'Mediating Between Languages and Cultures: Investigating Hybridity in Mediators' Scripts'

The first panel of the conference considered intercultural dialogue from two quite different perspectives.

Caroline Lucas's paper 'The Imagined Folk of England' addressed contemporary constructions of Englishness and its links to notions of whiteness and English folk music. Focusing discussion on how the BNP have constructed a sense of white Englishness/Britishness with regard to folk music, and the appropriation of the music of artists for their own political agenda, without the permission of the artists, Caroline examined how whiteness functions within this context and how this could be countered by suggesting the definition of Englishness as an ethnically inclusive identity. Any attempt to reframe Englishness as a space of multiculturalism, or at least attempt to engage in debate about how Englishness functions – how problematic this is in terms of how Englishness and whiteness are both caught in complex power relations and on an individual basis – ends up in trying to define the performative aspects of nationness, terms that are shrouded in ambivalence.

The other paper presented by Maria Stathopoulou 'Mediating Between Languages and Cultures: Investigating Hybridity in Mediator's Scripts' dealt with more practical aspects of intercultural dialogue. Explaining the new term of Mediation as a type of intercultural dialogue, in which users of two or more languages are involved, when there are certain communication gaps, Maria specified that mediation involves relaying messages from one language to another for a given communicative purpose which is not synonymous with translation. Analyzing mediation scripts based on detection of creative linguistic fusions and

formations that violate the rules of usage and use of English, she concluded with the notion of hybridity – a natural phenomenon that occurs every time when two languages come into contact.

Distinctly different in their research subjects and research methods, both papers aroused interest amongst the audience. Unfortunately, the length of time for the discussion precluded extended debate.

Panel 2

Re-Constructing Multiculturalism in Policy & Planning

Chair: Jessica Kent (CPLAN)

- Ruth Whiting 'Site Under Construction': Discourse and Local Authority Traveller Accommodation
- Jonathan Bishop 'Multiculturalism in Intergenerational Contexts: Implications for the Design of Virtual Worlds'

The first paper in this panel, presented by Ruth Whiting, discussed the idea of multiculturalism in relation to Gypsies and Traveller groups and their distinctive cultural and ethnic identities. Using the epistemological perspective of social constructionism as a foundation, Ruth discussed the provision of Local Authority Traveller accommodation and the prevalence of debates associated with the suitability of the facilities provided. The paper was formulated around the historical and cultural traditions of travelling communities and the perception of implicit discrimination within Housing and Planning policy and practice. From this, a discussion relating to data collection was drawn out. The need for cultural sensitivity and the difficulties associated with accessing communities as a researcher became central themes within the question session.

Jonathan Bishop presented a paper focusing upon virtual worlds and interactions enabled by technological innovation. The research focused upon the generation of people who had essentially 'grown-up' with the internet. His paper was situated upon an understanding of culture as intrinsically networked and therefore multiculturalism was presented as inevitable. From this position, he suggested that there is an inherent multicultural element associated with internet based interactions. Within the question session there arose a discussion regarding the importance of online interactions due to their anonymity and the opportunities that this presents the individual. The ability to reinvent oneself, as a result of technological mediation, has the ability produce a disassociation from features such as location, race, ethnicity, cultural heritage and religious community if disclosure is not ascertained.

Panel 3a

Multiculturalism in History (part 1)

Chair: Matthew Machin, (MUSIC)

- Dana Lazarevic 'Re-Invention of the Battle of Kosovo Myth: Academic Manipulation to Legitimise the Current Political Situation after the Latest Balkan War'
- Danijela Spiric-Bearđ 'Constructing the First Yugoslavia: Between Cultural Imagination and

Political Reality'

- Suzanne Leedham 'The Minority Subject: Saracens and Contemporary Reactions to the Unspeakable Medieval Text'

The three papers in this panel all situated the twentieth century concept of multiculturalism in varied historical contexts. Dana Lazarevic's paper examined the way in which a particular myth (the Battle of Kosovo in 1389) has been constructed in the present to suit nationalist agendas in the Balkans. She placed special emphasis on the ways in which academics manipulate the narratives of an essentially multicultural historical context, to suit the formulation of a national consciousness. Danijela Spiric-Beard's paper concentrated on the same geographical space however she explored the role of music, sculpture and literature in the formation of national identity. Here, she analysed the ways in which a nationalist discourse was constructed in Yugoslavia during the early decades of the 20th century. She argued that through the use of oral epics and art, national identity was built on the differentiation between Christianity and Islam, by constructing Ottomans as the 'Other'.

In the final paper, Suzanne Leedham continued the theme of 'Otherness' by exploring inter-cultural dialogue within the Middle English Song of Roland. By analysing textual representations of medieval warfare, Suzanne showed how Christians constructed their Saracen foes as an almost sub-human 'Other'. However, through the process of warfare Christians came to respect their enemy and Suzanne argued that inter-cultural dialogue in warfare produces acculturation where the two sides become more and more alike. All the papers tried to apply the post-modern concept of multiculturalism to historical narratives, in order to explore how cultural difference was negotiated in the past. In this way, the discussions in this panel highlighted a need to apply post-colonial frameworks to historical texts and contexts, a process that may shed light on multiculturalism today.

Panel 3b

Religious Display and Performance of Identity and Belief

Roz Warden (RELIG)

- Brooke Storer Church 'British Muslims and Facebook as a site for Identity (Re)formulations.'
- Francesca Montemaggi 'A City of Strangers: the Authenticity of Faith in the Multicultural, Post-modern City'
- Afroze Zaidi-Jivraj 'The Semantics of 'Religious Hatred' versus 'Hatred Towards Religion' in Contemporary Multi-Cultural Britain'

Panel 3b explored postgraduate research involving a variety of faith traditions within a plurality of research domains, including the virtual, the textual and the ethnographic. Common themes amongst the three diverse papers related to the significance of binaries and dichotomies such as 'insider/outsider' and 'public/private' within multicultural dialogue. Such themes were not limited to this panel alone but proved to be interwoven within many of the papers throughout the conference. All three papers stimulated significant discussion, with questions from the audience focusing upon research methodology and the reflexivity of the researcher. The vibrant debate following the papers highlighted the centrality of

issues surrounding the religious display and performance of identity and belief within contemporary multicultural discourse.

Panel 4a

Globalisation and Multiculturalism (part 2)

Chair: Smirti Kutaula, (CARBS)

- Monica Colt 'Identity transformations through affinities in a multicultural society'
- Sang Eun Lee 'The logic of symbiosis in the Civil Right Movement of Zainich'

Globalization is often analyzed as a political phenomenon characterized by the supplanting of the nation-state and by the establishment of transnational communities. Analysis of globalization might be undertaken from many perspectives. This panel focussed on a new historical phase whereby international migrations transform the global city into a fluid "melting pot" of diaspora communities, information technologies and transnational culture. The objective of the panel was to encourage a discussion on cultural aspects of globalization; and reflect on, and become familiar with, the interlocking of the terms globalisation and multiculturalism. The two papers focused on the treatment of globalisation as a cultural phenomenon represented by the Westernization of culture and the emergence of local traditions at the global level.

Monica identified a clear frame of reference of a migrant individual through her paper which drew upon the emotional rather than the statistical description of the same. She argued that Multiculturalism is an interpretation framework of the phenomenon which reveals aspects of ongoing cultural change reflected by the trend of value-orientation towards self-expression values. Thus, the immigrant individual belongs both to an ethnic group and to groups of affinity, which are brought to the forefront in the multicultural context.

Sang's paper borrowed its context from the civil right movement of Korean-Japanese people in 1970s. The paper also had some interesting recommendations, especially the suggestion that the logic of symbiosis" should be magnified to the level of the symbiosis demonstrating rights for the whole ethnic minority groups to cope with the resistance of the Japanese antisuffragists and be fulfilled for the mutual development in Japan. Through her paper, she also examined the interrelation between this principle of coexistence and the activities for the local suffrage by focusing on how both the self-awareness of Zainich people and their recognitions about the fundamental right to vote have changed at every stage.

Both the speakers provided an in depth examination of the issues of Globalisation and Multiculturalism. Their papers also generated an enriching discussion with the audience.

Panel 4b

Regional Identity and the Politics of Place

Chair: Weihua Ye (JOMEC)

- Matthew Machin 'Flamenco in the 'Third Space': Musical Exchange, Regionalism and Inter-Regional Dialogue in Andalucia'

- Corbett Miteff 'Animating Multicultural Colour in the Wonderful World of Walt Disney: Finding Our Existence with the Help from a Little Mouse'

These two papers focussed on two extremely different topics, although both were related to the arts. Matthew's paper considered how flamenco highlights different aspects of regional identity in Andalusia, Spain, while Corbett's paper looked at multiculturalism in Walt Disney's early cartoons. At the end of the presentations some interesting questions were raised and constructive feedback received from the floor. It was suggested that Matthew might want to do more historical background research in order to enrich his project. In relation to Corbett's research, it was pointed out that later Disney products seemed to be going in a different direction from Walt Disney's original thinking, for example in relation to racial issues as highlighted by critics. Discussion was animated albeit rather short due to time constraints.

Panel 5a

Globalization and Multiculturalism (part 2)

Chair: Corbett Miteff (JOMEC)

- Liezel Longboan 'Mediating Indigeneity in Virtual Communities'
- Carl Morris 'British Muslims and Global Islam: Challenging the 'Community Cohesion' Agenda'

The two papers in this panel revolved around the ideas of transcending cultural boundaries. In such, both papers dealt with the construction of a global community and identity based around a particular culture regardless of location. The first paper by Liezel Longboan entitled 'Mediating Indigeneity in Virtual Communities' explored the use of Internet by indigenous peoples from the Philippines. In particular, the Igorots from the North Philippines use the world-wide-web to stay in contact with others from the same area when they are working or travelling abroad. By use of online communities users are able to find common identities, which are specific to region, town and village; thus, ethnic identity functions in a global atmosphere.

Carl Morris discussed the idea of 'umma' in his paper 'British Muslims and Global Islam: Challenging the Community Cohesion Agenda.' The idea of umma as a global Islamic community was discussed in relation to Britain's policies regarding community cohesion. Carl implied that the idea of a Muslim community in Britain is much more complex than just belonging to one national identity. Instead, British Muslims are members of a British-based community, as well as, a more global Islamic community. What this entails is that British Muslims construct their own identity based upon a mixture of various cultures, which identify them locally as British, yet globally as Muslim.

Panel 5b

Multiculturalism in History (part 2)

Chair: Iain Mossman, Cardiff School of European Studies

- Renaud Contini 'Lewis and Clark among the Louisiana Tribes, 1804-1806: Philadelphia versus 'Wilderness'

- Sarah Doherty 'Who did they think they were? Ethnic Identity in Egypt and Levant in the Late Bronze Age'

The two papers in this panel discussed historical examples of multicultural interactions between ethnic groups who lived within the same national boundaries. While the two papers examined time periods which were separated in history by more than 3000 years (!) there was plenty of fruitful crossover as was remarked by the receptive audience.

Renaud Contini's paper, 'Lewis and Clark among the Louisiana Tribes' discussed the interactions between the Lewis and Clark expedition which followed the Louisiana purchase of 1803 and the Indian tribes who lived within the territory bought under the purchase. His paper argued that while most accounts of the expedition have shed a positive light on these interactions, focusing in particular on the positive reception of the 'Corps of Discovery' by many tribes and the cooperation shown by the Corps' Indian guides, a more detailed examination of the diaries of the members of the Corps reveals a power dynamic which showed the attempted 'Americanization' of the Indians – a politics very similar to that of the colonial empires of Britain and France.

While Renaud Contini's example highlighted an inequality in its example of inter-cultural exchange, Sarah Doherty's paper, 'Ethnic Identity in Egypt and Levant in the Late Bronze Age' provided a contrasting discourse of multicultural interactions in Egypt of the late Bronze Age. While the Egyptians often stereotyped other races in their writings and art as an ideological stance to assert their cultural superiority, Sarah Doherty argued that these examples were not necessarily representative of the realities within Egyptian society. She cited ethnically diverse Pharaohs and similarities in the architecture of the Late Bronze Age peoples of the Levant and North African regions as examples of inter-cultural cooperation and exchange which belie the nationalist propaganda set out in Egyptian writings.

Both papers therefore suggested that the realities of the multicultural agendas shown in these historical examples were often divergent from how they have been represented subsequently.

Panel 6

Minorities and Diversities in Language, Art and Culture

Chair: Charlotte Selleck (ENCAP)

- Dialitza Colon 'For a Minor Aesthetic: Reading Puerto Rican Political Art'
- Yueh-Po Huang 'An Emerging Cultural Discourse in Contemporary Taiwan: the Case of the Establishment of an Indigenous College'
- Nanda Klapwijk 'English as Language of Business in a Multilingual and Multicultural Environment: what do employees think?'

The broad title of this session meant that the three papers were not immediately related – although the final two shared a linguistic background. The three papers did however, all deal with minority groups.

Dialitza Colon presented an element of her PhD research – specifically an argument for how Puerto Rican culture has been re-constructed through art in a minority context (Puerto Ricans residing in the United States). She argued that in a politically sensitive context art can provide a somewhat less problematic way of bringing ‘issues’ or emotions to the forefront.

Using the work of Miguel Luciano, a Puerto Rican artist based in New York, Dialitza argued that whilst American culture has long dominated Puerto Rican identity, the ‘heritage’ is now being re-constructed in a new space leading to hybrid art forms. She made a strong argument that art can mediate a multicultural identity.

Yueh-Po Huang, with his background in education in Taiwan, discussed the development of an indigenous college. He discussed recent changes in Taiwan that have led to an increased awareness and acceptance of local indigenous languages. As Yueh-Po was at an early stage in his PhD research a large proportion of his presentation was dedicated to the language and cultural context. He used his question and answer time to draw similarities between other minority language contexts (namely that of Wales and New Zealand). A question from the floor raised the issue of whether education should be provided in the minority language for an indigenous population which only constitutes 2% of the population. This generated lively discussions both during and after the presentation.

The final presentation within this session was given by Nanda Klapwijk who presented findings from a research project investigating English as Language of business in a Multilingual and Multicultural Environment, namely that of South Africa. She discussed the difficulties that 11 official languages posed for employees in the politically sensitive context. She framed her discussion within an educational context, highlighting that whilst English is the lingua franca of South Africa it is in reality spoken rarely as a first language, instead forms the basis of immersion education. Discussions led to the problematic nature of researching in South Africa as researcher who traditionally or historically ‘belongs’ to the colonial ‘majority’.