

Conferences

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More often than not, discussions of multicultural Britain have focused on ethnic minorities and migrant or diasporic communities in their difference from and – tense or productive – relation to the dominant 'white' British culture. However, what exactly does that presumed core culture consist of? Does 'British culture' really exist as that self-enclosed, autonomous formation which its advocates try to propagate? Has it ever existed in history? Our conference starts from the assumption that Britishness has emerged through histories of cultural transactions with multiple others: colonial, Celtic, continental, trans-Atlantic, diasporic ... These others were, and are, constitutive in the process of consolidating the myth of a purist national culture that paradoxically has, at least from the Renaissance onwards, continuously been characterised by the incorporation of 'foreign' cultural inputs. Britishness, in short, is itself fundamentally hybrid. However, one of the most striking responses to this condition seems to consist in the intensification of efforts at re-essentialising cultural identities in terms of 'race', ethnicity, religion, region, nationality.

The texture of Britain, whether past or present, cannot be grasped in multiculturalist terms that assume the givenness of a core culture from which minorities and subcultures deviate. The multiculturalist view relies on the notion of distinct, if not homogeneous, singular 'cultures' that derive from specific geographical and historical points of origin, and may coexist more or less peacefully with each other. Accordingly, individuals and communities allegedly bring along their respective cultural identities that are grounded in specific 'traditions'. Intercultural communication would then consist of efforts of building bridges between these more or less solid cultural units. One major flaw of this perspective lies in the ethnicisation of cultural processes, i.e. the description of cultural dynamics in demographic terms. This perspective is blind to the multiple factors that drive the dynamics of culture – from economics to technology, politics to mediascapes. It furthermore fails to acknowledge that individual or collective identities are worked out through manifold cultural repertoires.

With the alternative notion of 'transculturality' as proposed by Wolfgang Welsch and others, cultural formations become legible as flexible, permeable and internally heterogeneous conjunctions of cultural flows. Individuals or groups – whether minority or 'mainstream' – negotiate identities and create meanings by drawing on a multitude of available and accessible cultural resources, which they transform in the process of appropriation. In this light, the transculturation of present-day Britain is neither owed nor restricted to the migrant communities alone; it is much rather a general aspect of the country's implication in globalisation and the concomitant erosion of insular Britishness. This is exemplified not only in the much cherished hybridisation of, say, the English diet but as well in the de-Englification of such 'national symbols' as Rolls Royce or Chelsea FC. In that sense, transculturality is a merely descriptive term. However, it will have to remain a normative term as long as it has not been established as a viable self-description – in other words, as long as it has not succeeded in superseding the purist, racist myth of insular Britishness.

The conference aims at a re-assessment of Britain past and present as transcultural. Contributions are welcome that focus on

- aspects of transculturality in various fields and media of cultural expression
- the transculturation of everyday life
- the reinvention of Britishness as a response to transculturality
- racism and religious fundamentalism
- Britain in the global marketplace
- Britain and Europe
- Britain's transcultural history
- marketing transculturality

TRANSCULTURAL BRITAIN, the 17th annual conference of the German Association for the Study of British Culture, will be held from Nov 23 to 25, 2006, at the University of Magdeburg. The conference language is English. The conference fee is Euros 40, reduced Euros 20.

We hope to include three keynote lectures (45 minutes each) by experts, practitioners and activists dedicated to the transculturation of Britain in various fields of cultural production.

All other papers will be arranged in thematic panels. In addition, there will be a postgraduate forum. Panel presentations as well as contributions to the postgraduate forum should not exceed 30 minutes so as to leave ample room for discussion.

Deadline for paper proposals (200 words) is June 30, 2006. By mid-July we will inform you whether your paper has been accepted. Paper presenters will be requested to submit an abstract (350 words) which will be posted on the conference website from early October onwards.

For further information and inquiries, please contact the organisers at

transcultural.britain@gse-w.uni-magdeburg.de

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