

ESRs Participate in 6th Global Conference: Diaspora, Oxford University, 6-8 July 2013

The 3 ESRs from Mumbai, Ruby Rana, Melanie Wattenbarger, Iulia Rascanu presented papers as a special panel at the Mansfield College, Oxford University, '6th Global Conference: Diasporas'.



CoHaB Panel

Challenging Boundaries: Conversations on Problematizing the Limits of the Indian Diaspora

This panel explored how the Indian diaspora has been theorized in the past and how these conceptions continue today, perhaps as out-of-date theories. The work of Ms.

Wattenbarger examined the context in which first generation Indian diasporic individuals experience and articulate the diasporic experience through the pressures of literary expression and public policy. Ms. Rana further problematized boundaries of the Indian diaspora by taking a socio-cultural focus on the examination of biracial and multiracial identity and the discrimination against such individuals from within and outside the Indian diasporic community. Ms. Rascanu explored the 'new' South Asian diaspora living in Great Britain today while theorizing the future face of this diaspora by discussing current technological, cultural and economic movements in Indian cosmopolitan spaces. She examined these trends to theorize who tomorrow's Indian diasporic communities will be. As the second largest diasporic community in the world today, first being China's diaspora, the Indian diaspora holds influential sway over how we understand diaspora today and theorize the diaspora of tomorrow.

Abstract: Melanie Wattenbarger:

Competing Borders: Exploring Public Policy and Literature in the Construction of Indo-Canadian Diasporic Identity

This paper examines through the interdisciplinary application of literary and political analysis to theorize the liminal space of the hyphen where the diasporic Indo-Canadian individual is consigned to live. Specifically, Farzana Doctor's novel *Stealing Nasreen* is analyzed according to new historicism literary theory as informed by contemporary political movements in both India and Canada as they affect the Indian diasporic experience. Many theorists reach towards a space that is beyond the nation, but such reaching towards a post-national being is problematized by the continual assertion from Indian and Canadian policy to define national identity through the diasporic individual, thus tying the diasporic individual ever back to national consciousness with the implication of a differentiator, not a native/local citizen

but being pulled into the discourse of myth of national unity. Here literature serves as a public communication that works to further shape the inclusion/exclusion faculty of diasporic being as is influenced by multicultural and citizen outreach policies in Canada and India. Ultimately, the diasporic writer and her literature are influenced by political policies from both sides, thus her characters confined to living in the hyphen between Indo-Canadian.

Abstract of Iulia Rascanu's paper:

What is new about the new South Asian diaspora in Great Britain? Inter-generational and inter-cultural conflicts and negotiations

In 1994, Homi Bhabha was analysing the way in which 'newness enters the world' by looking at the migrant experience as an element of cultural transformations capable of changing the meaning of diasporic subjectivity. The South Asian diaspora is one of the oldest in the UK and helped at constructing what journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's defined as 'the New Britain'. The article will investigate how the diasporic phenomenon informs and is informed by transformed perceptions of the already diasporic subject of various generations living in Britain and by potential diasporic subjects who have been exposed through various media of communication to the Western experience at home. Mala Pandurang notices that the young urban middle-class generation in India is already familiar with the 'first world' through various communication media and may be tempted to emigrate in search of better-paid jobs. Such subjectivities inform the future of the new diaspora and the face of 'new Britain'. At the same time, inter-generational and inter-cultural conflicts do not disappear and cultural negotiations still need to be performed while de-constructing and re-constructing the boundaries that have been previously established by both cultures in accordance with the current local and global transformations. Socio-economic elements as well as gender and age come to re-define diaspora and reaffirm the 'indeterminacy of diasporic identity' (cf. H. Bhabha). The 'new' diaspora is no longer strictly related to boundary-crossing but to re-definition and re-configuration of boundaries. Subjectivities are not simply assimilated or ready to adapt. Having been informed by what to expect from a diasporic experience, the experience becomes more of a choice on the part of the subject.

Abstract of Ruby Rana's paper:

Changing Faces of the Indian Diaspora: Multiracial Identities and Diasporic Perspectives

Exclusion is not limited to intercultural or international dynamics, it also exists within interpersonal dynamics of the diaspora. As a diverse cultural in-group, as highlighted in Brij V. Lal's work, the Indian diaspora spans generations and varies in what John Berry calls the

processes of acculturation. Cultural values between generations become varied depending on contextualized experience; where some people identify themselves closely with a cross-cultural transnational existence, others may be concerned with cementing Indian cultural identities undisrupted by external cultural influences. It is from these diverse positions of acculturation and difference that this paper examines the complexities of biracial and multiracial identities as they exist in the context of the contemporary Indian diaspora.

Issues such as standardized concepts of diaspora, and fear of change and losing cultural grounding exist within the biracial and multiracial discussion. Constructed boundaries of diasporic identity have established themselves in diasporic discourse and have come to normalize conceptualizations of the Indian diaspora; where deviations from these norms can create concern. The act of holding tightly onto cultural roots offers a socio-cultural context in which to understand the thought processes of those who are strictly defined by existing diasporic norms. What remains to be discussed, and which will be acknowledged in this paper, is that in the current condition of globalization and increased intercultural and international exposure change is inevitable. Fixity is becoming a thing of the past according to social and theoretical trends, and complex identities and ways of belonging need to be acknowledged. Acts of avoiding and excluding will not prevent change from taking place.