

CfP - Cultural Identities in a Global World: Reframing Hybridity

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Cultural Identities in a Global World: Reframing Cultural Hybridity

Online Interdisciplinary Laboratory-Conference, June 24-25, 2021

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC)

Germany

The 21st Century is a time of cultural and social acceleration (Rosa, 2013), which continuously shapes physical limits by updating socio-cultural dynamics in the hybrid form of overlapping, blending and mixing of cultural identities. The novel COVID-19 pandemic highlights this global dimension by provoking an even faster digitalization of all spheres of life and forming new cultural hierarchies through disparities in technological development and economic resources. Is this crisis one of the examples that show how cultural hybridity can be reconceptualised in theoretical discourses and social practice? In this laboratory-conference, we look for a more concrete, differentiated and nuanced understanding of cultural hybridity, stressing the need for a critique of the concept and its harmonious connotations. We aim to explore new ways to overcome the essentialization and commodification of cultural hybridity that has been taking place in the last decades in the global world. In this way, we encourage new meanings, action-oriented concepts in a broader discussion about localization, translation and digitalization of cultural identities in our interconnected global world.

Our approach stresses how the genealogy of hybridity proves its fecundity in understanding the construction of cultural identities. In this sense, we see hybridity as a cultural artefact and a (still) useful analytical tool in the study of culture. The history of the concept of hybridity originates in the nineteenth-century biological context indicating miscegenation, which found an immediate affiliation to the colonial vocabulary of racial discrimination (cf. Young, as cited in Bachmann-Medick, 2014, p. 123). This term travelled to the opposite connotative side, in the postcolonial studies of the second half of the 20th Century, after a positive revaluation of impurity was taking place "due to the theory of evolution and the discovery of Mendel's laws" (Bachmann-Medick, 2014, p. 123). By all means, hybridity has acquired a significant role in Humanities because "it represents [a] new understanding

of cultural dynamics” (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 142), and rejects the idea of cultural purity in the context of the postcolonial turn by stressing “marginal borders and overlapping zones, as well as interstitial spaces, as culturally productive” (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 142). The power of this concept to adapt and edit identities in different contexts has been proven in the last decades by the medical practices of transplantation and body modification, which opened a new understanding of hybridity through the body-identity relationship. In this perspective, hybridity acquires a vital function for the survival of the body, but with repercussions on the individual’s identity due to the identitarian crisis before and after a body transplant because of the donor-recipient relationship (Ette & Wirth, 2019).

The corresponding change of the concept of hybridity in the natural sciences and the humanistic disciplines marks a working interconnection between the two fields, which is fostered nowadays by technological advancement. In this sense, the novel coronavirus pandemic and its threatening nature are the pulling strings of a reformulation of the social contact, taking advantage of 21st-century developed technology and social media platforms, which easily substitute physical presence. For this reason, the shift to the online world becomes in our perspective the means of a reevaluation of hybridity, carried to a more complex social, cultural and historical level that need to be explored. At the same time, this virus shows the fragility of the cultural hybridity that was established as a mass value in the social and cultural context of 21st-century globalizing phenomena as of melting-pot, transnationalism and internationalism. By being promoted as a “valorization of difference” (Nghi Ha, 2006, pp. 3-4), hybridity became an economical concept, a recurring marketing strategy, and a commodification. Instead of being a subverter of oppositions (modernist theory) and negotiation of cultural differences (postmodernism), hybridity in itself is being essentialized: It creates the paradox of being “celebrated as powerfully interruptive and yet theorized as commonplace and pervasive” (Werbner, 2015, p. 1). This appropriation of hybridity by the dominant cultures leads to the loss of its creativity and power to criticize cultural uniformity. Far from keeping its critical vitality, its creative in-between characteristic is being menaced by essentialisms and the necessity of reconstructing an ‘authentic’ cultural identity proximal to nationalist tendencies. At the same time, the COVID-19 caused a “medicalization of politics” (Esposito, 2020, p. 5) in terms of “health, age, gender or even ethnic group” (ibid, p. 5-6), which in our perspective can mean a new, hybrid reassessment of politics.

Especially in the current times, that highlighted the economical, social and cultural differences in experiencing the pandemic globally, we stress the need of new approaches focused on localization (Hahn, 2012) and translation of cultures by local actors in historical sites (Bachmann-Medick, 2014), reconstructing the process of hybridization, like grafting (Wirth, 2020), and highlighting alternative approaches to cultural encounters, as between missionaries and locals (Shaws, 2018). Hybridity relates to identities travelling across the individual, political, religious, cultural and virtual spaces in contexts of nation-states, transnational movements and globalization. We invite theoretical and empirical contributions about the following focuses concerning cultural hybridity (but not limited to them):

- 21st-century individual and collective identities

- the coronavirus pandemic and the digitalisation of daily life
- nation-state building/preservation
- the 'otherness' in the interconnected global world
- multiple historical stages
- in situ formulations in worldwide geographic areas

The organizers invite doctoral and postdoctoral candidates, scholars from different stages (and not limited to them) within all disciplines and inter-disciplines of the Humanities (including Religion Studies and History) and Social Sciences to **send their abstracts for contributions (max. 300 words with a short biographical statement) no later than the 1st of March 2021 to [Clara.Verri](#) and [Laura.Popa](#)**. Selected papers will be published in an issue of a peer-reviewed journal.

The planned event is a laboratory-conference, a format including workshop elements, cultural exchanges among the participants and the discussion of the selected contributions. We welcome and encourage you to break the limits of paper-based conferences with creative and interactive contributions as presentations, quizzes, readings, audio-visual performances, story-telling, etc. The conference is planned as an online event on the 24th and 25th June 2021 at the GCSC, Giessen. If you need any kind of assistance for the duration or part of the conference kindly let us know in advance. The organizers of the laboratory-conference are Laura Popa and Clara Verri, PhD students and members of the Research Area 06 "Cultural Identity" at the GCSC and IPP (International PhD Program).

Selective bibliography:

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Contact Info:

CfP: "Cultural Identities in a Global World: Reframing Cultural Hybridity" by Laura Popa and Clara Verri

This interdisciplinary laboratory-conference will take place online on June 24-25, 2021 at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture, Germany. The deadline for sending abstracts is March 1, 2021.

"From the local to the global, cultural hybridity nowadays travels across the individual, political, religious, biological, cultural and virtual spaces in the historical contexts of nation-state, transnationalism and globalization. Hence, hybridity can entangle new meanings and action-oriented concepts. This conference aims to reframe the discourse on hybridity by exploring this cultural artefact in theory and social practice and as a still useful analytical tool in the study of culture."

You can find more here:

<https://www.uni-giessen.de/faculties/gcsc/newsboard/cfp-cultural-identit...>

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