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# The Diasporic Family in Cinema

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 21 May 2011

## A report by Deniz Günes Yardimci, Royal Holloway, University of London

Why does Hollywood cinema typecast the Italian-American father as a macho? What are we to make of the Arab-Muslim father in French cinema, a figure who, at least until recently, has been typically represented as an overbearing patriarch? These are some of the questions raised during the "Diasporic Family in Cinema" conference, where migrants, ethnic minority fathers, diasporic weddings and multi-ethnic romances were prominent themes. Despite the fact that families with a migratory background have been widely represented in film and make media headlines almost on a daily basis, they are often neglected in screen studies, an oversight the conference sought to redress.

The conference was organised by Dr Daniela Berghahn (Royal Holloway, University of London) and co-hosted by the Centre for Film and Media Studies and the Centre for Migration and Diaspora Studies (SOAS), in association with the Screen Studies Group (University of London), and the Ciné Lumière. This one-day event was organised as part of an AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) Fellowship on "The Diasporic Family in Cinema," currently held by Berghahn. The conference provided a valuable platform for the exchange of academic ideas and research findings, as well as for the film industry's perspectives and insights. This kind of knowledge transfer among scholars, film directors and producers all engaging with issues surrounding diasporic family narratives is still relatively rare in academia and was an opportunity taken up enthusiastically by all conference delegates.

The conference consisted of a series of panels, two film screenings followed by Q&A sessions with the filmmakers, and a roundtable discussion. The day began with a brief welcome by Berghahn and was followed by Stella Bruzzi's (University of Warwick) opening keynote address "Macho Italiano: Hollywood's Italian-American Fathers – Why are They So Awful?" Considering *House of Strangers* (1949), *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *Bloodbrothers* (1978) *and Moonstruck* (1987) among others, Bruzzi explored two of the stereotypes of Italian immigrant fathers in film: the caring family patriarch and the excessively violent father. As Bruzzi noted, both figures share a strong emotional attachment to Italian culture, which finds expression in a heavy accent, a love of Italian food,

Catholicism and Italian music. Even a criminal patriarch such as Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* (1972) is extremely protective of his own family. The dialectical tension between excessive violence and family values holds a particular fascination and explains the pervasiveness of this ethnic stereotype in Hollywood cinema.

The day's first panel began with Rachel Dwyer's (SOAS, University of London) paper "Innocents Abroad: The Diaspora in the Shaping of the Imagined Indian Family." Considering films such as the famous romance *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), the melodramas *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003) and *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna* (2006), as well as *My Name is Khan* (2010) and *Singh in Kinng (2008) i*n her comprehensive analysis of the representation of the imagined Indian family abroad, Dwyer concluded that these films' remarkable success was in part linked to the casting of Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan. She also suggested that the super-affluent lifestyles of non-resident Indians depicted in these films appealed to Indian audiences, both at home and abroad, and was only credible in a diasporic setting, far removed from the harsh social divides and poverty of India. The following presentation, Carrie Tarr's (Kingston University) "Diasporic Families and the Rehabilitation of the Father Figure in Recent French Cinema," returned to the subject of the immigrant father. Tarr traced the shift from a negative portrayal of the Arab-Muslim father in the 1980s to a cinema that imagines Maghrebi French families as increasingly hybridized. In contrast to *beur* and *banlieue* cinema of the 1980s and 1990s, characterized by absent fathers or fathers who present obstacles to their children's successful integration into French society, recent films, such as the comedies *Mauvaise foi (2006) and L'Italien* (2010), tend to present second-generation immigrants forming their own intercultural families.

The morning panel concluded with the first film screening of the day at SOAS's Khalili Lecture Theatre. Sandhya Suri's multi-award-winning documentary *I for India* (2005) gives an intensely moving account of migration from India to Britain, an account that is simultaneously intensely personal and universal. An archive of Super 8 home-movie footage chronicling the Suri's family life in the UK since their arrival in 1965 and the life of their relatives back in India, it offers pertinent insights into the trials and tribulations of contemporary transnational lives from the vantage point of an Indian diasporic family. Themes of identity and belonging, cultural alienation and assimilation, the emotional repercussions of separation and the impossibility of "going home again" are at the center of Suri's autobiographical documentary. After the screening, the conference participants took advantage of the opportunity to discuss the documentary with the filmmaker. During the Q&A session, scriptwriter and director Suri discussed the difficulties in choosing footage from the vast amount of material given to her by her father.

Claudia Sternberg (University of Leeds) started the second panel with an insightful exploration of the film *West is West* (2010), the sequel to the internationally successful comedy *East is East* (1999). After discussing the functions and attributes of remakes and sequels, her paper centered the "sequelizing" shifts in time, location (Pakistan rather than Salford), and character constellations, as well as on the on-screen integration of Pakistan and George Khan's pre-migratory cultural and social ties. Focusing in particular on the reconciliation between Khan's first and second wives, who communicate their shared empathy without speaking the same language, Sternberg suggested that the film proposed new forms of transnational and transcultural kinship. Finally, Berghahn's paper, "My Big Fat Diasporic Wedding: Negotiation between Tradition and Modernity," analyzed the proliferation of weddings in diasporic cinema. Comparing the quintessential diasporic wedding film, *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), with a recent Turkish-German romantic comedy about weddings, *Evet, I Do!* (2008), Berghahn identified a shift from negative presentations of arranged marriages, regarded as irreconcilable with Western notions of romantic love, to weddings that successfully negotiate between Western and non-Western concepts of love and marriage. She also proposed that wedding films address different audience segments in specific ways. For Western audiences, diasporic marriage customs and wedding ceremonies crystallize otherness, whereas for diasporic audiences, wedding films satisfy nostalgic fantasies about preservation of cultural traditions.

The lively roundtable discussion that followed, co-chaired by Berghahn and Sarita Malik (Brunel University), brought together film directors and producers whose films make family life in diaspora or encounters in the diaspora space their main concern: Sandhya Suri; Feo Aladağ, scriptwriter, director and producer of *When We Leave* (2010); Gareth Jones, scriptwriter and director of *Desire* (2006) and founder of BABYLON (an audio-visual development programme assisting filmmakers of migrant origin to break through into the international mainstream); and Leslee Udwin, producer of *East is East* and *West is West.* After showing and commenting upon scenes from their films, they discussed how they negotiate among their artistic ambitions, the demands of funding bodies, and marketing their construction of the diasporic family in film. There was a general consensus regarding the universal appeal of stories about families: audiences can empathize with families, even if they are of a different ethnic or cultural background. Narratives about the family invariably emphasize this common ground, and therefore have considerable crossover appeal. They potentially fulfill an important role in promoting a greater sense of acceptance and tolerance. Comparing European film funding mechanisms, all panellists agreed that Germany offers the best funding opportunities. Leslee Udwin gave a lively account of the difficulties she faced when trying to secure money for *West is West* in the UK, in spite of the fact that *East is East* had been a box-office hit.

The conference ended with the screening of Feo Aladağ's multi-award-winning film *When We Leave*, which was also Germany's Oscar nominee for 2010. The well-attended public screening at the Ciné Lumière was followed by an animated discussion with the filmmaker. Much of the Q&A with Aladağ centered on the film's controversial theme, an honor killing in a Turkish-German family. While some attendees felt that *When We Leave* reiterates the problematic stereotype of the victimized Turkish woman, Aladağ made a convincing case for the different approach she had taken in her film. In contrast to earlier depictions of patriarchal family dynamics, which invariable mobilize the binary opposition between male perpetrators and female victims, her film portrays all family members with great empathy and tries to show that every family member suffers whenever an honour killing occurs.

The conference testified to the genuine desire for dialogue between academia and the industry. By focusing on a prominent theme, which will hopefully result in further cross-cultural comparisons, the conference also expanded the scope of transnational film studies, which is still largely concerned with the critical specificities of "the transnational." To ensure that the dialogue continues and that the exploration of this new and fascinating theme will be taken up in teaching and research at all levels, conference delegates were invited to contribute actively to (and spread the word about) the project website: www.farflungfamilies.net, which provides a wealth of material and invites interactive input, and which includes podcasts of the conference presentations and roundtable discussion.

# NECS Conference 2011

King's College and Birkbeck, University of London, 23-26 June

**A report by Celia Nicholls, University of Warwick & Richard Wallace, University of Warwick**

This year's fifth annual European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) conference, entitled "Sonic Futures: Soundscapes and the Languages of Screen Media" explored the social, cultural, aesthetic, theoretical, technological, historical and political dimensions of sound—and in many cases, language—in film, television and other new, experimental and broadcast media forms. While thus far, media studies practitioners have chosen to devote much detailed attention to the many implications of the visual aesthetic, the NECS mandate for 2011 was to remind scholars that contemporary media culture is as much a sonic and acoustic culture as it is a visual culture. The event was, to some degree, preoccupied with establishing new disciplinary and interdisciplinary methodologies to take account of the sonic, and with finding more holistic critical approaches to the interplay of the sonic and the visual than have previously been employed in European approaches to media studies. The importance of sound and language was also highlighted by the international and cross-disciplinary nature of the conference. Indeed, the degree of self-reflexivity in the conception of the event was obvious from the start, with Kevin Donnelly (Southampton) commenting that the coming together of scholars from different academic fields often involved them speaking to each other "in different languages."

The concept of sound in media, understood in the widest sense, invited and accommodated critical discussions across a number of disciplines, including film and television studies, political and philosophical theory, musicology, sociology and history, and a number of identifiable themes emerged over the course of the four days. The papers delivered addressed questions arising from the experience of sound as cognitive affect, from the relationship of the aural to questions of objectivity and subjectivity, and from the roles of acoustic space and spoken language in the formation of identity, whether urban, national, transnational, political or personal. The scope of discussion therefore allowed for fruitful exploration of everything from the unique soundscapes of genre and historical representation, to such pressing contemporary issues as the effects of globalization on culture, the environment, and the circulation of and access to ideas in a world in which freedom of movement is to be increasingly restricted by our reliance on dwindling natural resources.

In this vein, the provocative keynote speech given by John Urry (Lancaster University) argued that as consumers locked in a "high

energy" global society, we are heading towards one of a number of possible "catastrophic futures." Of particular significance to a conference with such an international scope, Urry's paper suggested that, bar a "magic-bullet" solution, all of these futures would involve a breakdown of communication and decreased mobility, whether for political or financial reasons, making the exchange of ideas more difficult. The idea that these "catastrophic futures" would preclude international intellectual exchange and silence ideas was concerning. Indeed, the importance of movement to the ability to hear and be heard was a particular feature of a conference that took place in various locations around the city of London, necessitating movement between spaces both physical (rooms, buildings, colleges), and intellectual (panels, workshops, plenaries, open meetings). In light of this emphasis on mobility, and on a seemingly general consensus on the need to foster pan-European dialogue both within, but also on the subject of media culture, it is perhaps all the more poignant to note that delegates from Turkey, the host nation to last year's NECS gathering, who were to have been in attendance, had at the last minute been denied their visas for travel to this year's meeting.

Perhaps appropriately then, for a conference at which, from the outset, European political boundaries had such a tangible impact on the freedom of intellectual exchange, the keynote given by Raphaëlle Moine (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris 3) addressed the question of barriers to cultural understanding and their impact on global media consumption. Given that language is perhaps the most evident signifier of nationality, Moine suggested that it is surprising that language has been a virtually absent element in the study of national cinemas. She chose to redress the balance by exploring the idea of language as barrier, both within and between national cinemas, and in transnational contexts. Using a number of engaging examples from mainstream Hollywood films, Moine argued that typical cinematic conceptualizations of linguistic difference are open to a number of different interpretations. Since the introduction of sound cinema, spoken language has imposed limitations on the global circulation of films. Yet language, whether facilitating or hindering dialogue, has also been a recurring cinematic theme, whether in the context of screen narratives, or through the foregrounding of techniques such as dubbing, subtitling, multilingual productions, multi-language versions, and accented speech, that serve either to highlight or efface difference.

The construction of "other" or "foreign" languages, whether within or outside filmic texts, can therefore be viewed either positively, as the hallmark of international exchange and interdependency, or negatively, as the product of monolingual isolationism and an instrument of cultural subjugation and effacement. The language barrier serves, then, as "an ambiguous defence against standardization in the context of globalization." On the one hand, the experience of hearing one's own language spoken can be a source of pleasure that generates or

contributes to the formation of a unique national identity. On the other, linguistic specificity can give rise to the "unexportable." Here the works of the *boulevardier* playwright Sacha Guitry provide an instructive example. As Moine argued, Guitry has been much neglected in English-language scholarship perhaps not only because his films have long been unavailable in subtitled form, but also because such translation ultimately fails to capture or convey adequately Guitry's "Frenchness," which is key to an understanding of his comedy.

The need to assert or erase national or cultural identities through language was a common theme throughout the conference. Several papers addressed the way in which dubbed versions of European films introduced narrative changes to bring them in line with differing social attitudes towards race and gender. Other papers focused upon the ways that voice(s) heard or silenced in historical contexts, and in the context of writing history in contemporary cinematic texts, are frequently subject to highly politicized forms of control. Fictional worlds such as the Baltimore of the HBO series *The Wire* (2002-2008) and the island of ABC's *Lost* (2004-2010), television programmes that provided the impetus for some particularly fruitful cross-panel dialogue, were used to illustrate the ways language can be used within a system of power, particularly in situations where one group attempts to force the use of their patois or language on another, with power dynamics established through acceptance of or resistance to dominant modes of communication.

The closing keynote address from Richard Dyer (King's College London) explored the significance of the absence of vocal or musical sound, and raised several interesting questions in relation to what Dyer termed "the politics of silence," or, more particularly, the attempts by some (often men) to force others (often women) to speak on terms that are not their own. In this instance, he suggested, it is silence, rather than sound or language, that defines the limits of power, with those who refuse to speak gaining power over the people who are unable to make them speak. Silence can, therefore, be viewed as a particularly effective form of resistance, although the choice to remain silent is perhaps not as powerful as possessing a capacity to render others silent.

Dyer's keynote summed up another key theme of the conference: the issue of voice and authority. Popular and "arthouse" films employ various textual approaches to engage different audiences and validate their authority to do so. As a number of papers pointed out, an opposition between high and low culture can be integral to discourses of national identity. Stylistic choices about how language is heard—for example through post-dubbing or recordings of "wild sound"—complicate this identity and introduce new discursive and aesthetic strategies. Such strategies, and their conceptualization in an industrial context, raise the question of which audiences these discourses aim to engage and are

themselves worthy of attention. As one panel on sound technology highlighted, the marketing of Surround Sound and other sound exhibition systems often draws upon both high and low cultural discourses to emphasize either realism or the aural spectacular in an attempt to address two different audiences.

While there are evidently a host of differing perspectives on sound aesthetics, techniques and technologies, the notion of an internal sonic "point-of-view" arose in a number of different contexts. Film sound, particularly the use of voice, can approximate the subjective experiences of characters within a narrative, but can also create a personal, affective experience for the viewer. Unlike images, sound can also link separate spaces in extra-diegetic ways, blending the sonic landscapes of several locations simultaneously with differing effects. As several papers suggested, the creation of the sonic world of a film is, it must be recognized, often the result of the editing together of sounds taken from many different locations, positioning both the audience and the characters within a diegetic space, much of which exists off-screen. Moreover, when recording any sound we cannot help but record the ambience of the space in which that sound is being made, making it a crucial factor in authenticity of experience. Even something as seemingly abstract as the mix of a film's soundtrack demands critical attention. As many contributors pointed out, it could be that we are only now beginning to develop an adequate critical framework through which to discuss these aspects. One particularly fruitful line of analysis emerged from discussions of the ideas of new media theorists such as Lev Manovich, Henry Jenkins and others. The application of the new media concepts of convergence, remediation and spatial montage to old forms of media offered compelling new insights on a wide range of material.

The integral importance of film music to cinematic affect was another theme, perhaps best illustrated by the large number of close readings from a broad, international filmography of texts that included music videos, traditional film "musicals" and other types of musical film like the concert film or the "star vehicle." Amongst the insights to be gained from the reassessment of the use of music in these texts was the realization that while the transition to a musical number is usually unproblematic at an experiential level, the mechanics of the form become much harder to comprehend under closer examination and with a more objective view. Several papers also suggested that repeated musical phrases and motifs function on an affective level to transform the real and everyday into fantasy, and that music and sound can also create a realistic transcultural or heterotopic experience on a perceptual level beyond symbolic representation.

Referencing examples like the avant-garde composer John Cage's work *4'33"*, a piece composed of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of

"silence," and the recent *Le Quattre Volte* (Michelangelo Frammartino, 2010), a film that contains only one spoken word, Dyer ultimately suggested that despite the conference's intense discussion of sound, there was also much to commend the idea of listening to the world "as it is" and on its own terms. The question remains, however, as to whether this alternative approach to film sound could ever become a feature of popular and national cinemas that, as he put it, "invest so much capital in not being silent." We must overcome the unsettling nature of silence in film in order to develop our capacity to hear more clearly. In intellectual terms, the discovery of new ways of speaking, and new subjects for conversation, should continue to animate the debate for a long time to come, and ensure that European media scholars finally break their silence about sound.

# Screen Studies Conference 2011: Repositioning Screen History

University of Glasgow, 1–3 July 2011

**A report by Linda Hutcheson, University of Stirling & Natália Pinazza, University of Bath**

The 21st Screen Studies Conference was structured around the theme of "Repositioning Screen History." Over the course of the weekend, over 100 papers were given on a variety of topics, identified by the organisers as: rethinking the canon, new sources for new histories, issues of preservation and restoration, archival theories and practices, the impact of digital technologies, decentering European cinema and television in the context of global media and screen history, pedagogy, and disciplinary identity.

The conference was opened by two plenary speakers: Barbara Klinger (University of Indiana) and Christine Geraghty (retiring Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of Glasgow). Klinger's paper, entitled "Mutations or Mutilations? Reissues of Classic Hollywood Films," centered on the afterlife of a film, constructed through its reissues. Focusing on films from the classic studio era, such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Casablanca* (1942), and *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), Klinger demonstrated the ways films from past eras can enhance our present understanding of textual circulation and reiteration. In the second plenary paper, "Bazin's Doorknob: Text and Context in Film and Television Studies," Geraghty reflected upon her career by presenting her thoughts on the possibilities and difficulties of combining the often dichotomous textual analysis and historical analysis. Geraghty noted a tendency within pedagogical frameworks to separate analytical and historical analysis, "text" and "context." Examples given included the structure of introductory media courses and the division of textbooks. Pointing to her writing as an example, she spoke of "a conscious grinding of gears, a change in register, a difference in writing styles" often present when one moves from textual to historical analysis. However, as an audience member suggested, text and context are contestable terms, for which a universally accepted definition is difficult to articulate; are there not times when a film text is itself the context?

The thought-provoking ideas presented during the panel "Realism/Hyper-Realism and New Technologies" by scholars from Brazil led to an interesting debate on the changing conditions of spectatorship. Luiz Coelho (Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janiero) argued that the omnipresence of the screen has led to its "naturalization" within contemporary society (to the point where it is no longer even noticed),

which has impacted on how reality is perceived. Fernando da Costa (Universidade Federal Fluminense) focused on sound's role in the work of contemporary Argentine filmmakers, in particular Pablo Trapero, Lucrécia Martel, and José Capanella, and provided insights into the relationship between sound and spectatorship. Drawing on his own experiences as a viewer of Blu-Ray editions of films, João Luiz Viera (Universidade Federal Fluminense) was more concerned with raising pertinent questions regarding interactivity and its impact on spectatorship, addressing the overlap between cinema and videogames, as spectators can now interrupt the film and, in some cases, completely forget about it, in order to play the game, an option offered in some DVD and Blu-Ray editions.

Jan-Christopher Horak (UCLA) delivered Saturday's plenary, "Moving Into the Digital Future: Archives, Film Studies and the Internet." Film archives' particular use of and relationship to digital technology was a prominent theme throughout the conference. This is evidenced in the number of panel sessions devoted to the topic, for example: "Archives and Histories in the Age of Mobile Media," "Cinema as Archive," "Changing Distribution Contexts and Histories," and "Creative Archiving: the Case of Channel 4 and the Press Pack." Drawing on his many years of experience as Director of the UCLA Film and Television Archive, Horak spoke passionately about the contemporary challenges facing both archivists and archive users. He asserted that there will come a point in the not-too-distant future when all surviving audio-visual material will be digitized, when preservation will also be linked to access. While this may sound like an ideal scenario, Horak quickly dispelled this belief, noting the inevitable losses that accompany media transitions, as well as the cost and manpower involved in digitizing analog film and television. Speaking of digitization's possible implications for film academia, Horak provided anecdotal evidence that suggests that scholars need to be aware of the process of digitization. In order to convey to the audience how digitization could "wipe out history," Horak recounted an instance in which a student had given a presentation on the film aesthetics of *Robin Hood* (1973), without realising that the DVD version used for the analysis had been digitally restored. This point linked back to Klinger's plenary, since she had discussed the processes of colorization and digital restoration as means through which films can be reissued, citing Disney films as a prime example. Horak argued that there is a very real possibility that digitization may render this process of restoration, or alteration, invisible to the scholar. Noting that while audio-visual material stored in analog form bears the physical marks of its alteration, which is visible to the eye of the researcher, this trace is removed when converted to a series of ones and zeros.

Another key aspect of Horak's plenary, and of the question-and-answer session that followed, was the discussion of the role of financiers in the process of deciding what material should receive priority for restoration and acquisition. Informing the audience that a significant part of his job

as director of UCLA's Film and Television Archive centers on fundraising, he highlighted the difficulty archives face in funding their activities, particularly in today's uncertain financial climate. He noted that the lack of finance essentially means that not all material can be conserved, consequently creating an inevitable selection process. Unfortunately, another factor that has historically proven influential in the process of prioritizing audiovisual material to be conserved is "cultural racism." Giving the major losses of works by African-American filmmakers, Horak insisted that no amount of digital restoration can recreate what is no longer there.

Horak's paper appeared to resonate with participants of the panel session "Changing Distribution Contexts and Histories," each of which made reference to his plenary. Three papers were presented: Dagmar Brunow's (Halmstad University and Hamburg University) "The Cultural Heritage of Collective Filmmaking in Germany: The Archival Practice of Independent Film and Video Workshops," Julia Knight's (University of Sunderland) "Distribution Practices in the Digital Age," and Iain Smith's (Roehampton University) "Bootleg Archives: Alternative Channels of Film Distribution in the Digital Age." While all three were highly insightful and engaging, it was Smith's paper that was the focus of discussion in the question-and-answer session. In this, he discussed file-sharing as a means of distributing and archiving films unavailable through legitimate channels (such films as *Bedmen Yarasa Adam* [1973], a Turkish appropriation of *Batman*). Due to the films' lack of official distribution, Smith argued that their presence on peer-to-peer file-sharing websites such as Cinemageddon shaped a "bootleg archive." Here, the process of distribution and archiving are intertwined, as fans both distribute the film illegally and participate in the conservation of works that would otherwise cease to be available. This paper was especially interesting in light of Horak's, as it provided consideration of an alternative, and peripheral, form of archiving, bound by a different set of rules that in turn have their own possibilities and constraints.

In addition to the archiving of audio-visual material, the archiving of documents pertaining to film and television was also considered in the "Creative Archiving: The Case of Channel 4 and the Press Pack" panel. All three participants, Justin Smith (University of Portsmouth), Linda Kaye (British Universities Film and Video Council), and Rachael Keene (University of Portsmouth), are currently involved in an AHRC-funded four-year project based at the University of Portsmouth, which aims to assess the impact of Channel 4 television on British film culture since 1982. Kaye has been given the task of digitizing around 1,100 press packs released by Channel 4 between 1982 and 2002 (after which they went online) and publishing them as a searchable database. In the course of her presentation, Kaye passionately called for researchers to engage actively with the theory of digitizing archives to understand better how

searchable databases operate. Kaye argued that, although such databases give the illusion of objectivity, the process of breaking down items such as press books into categorical sections and tagging them accordingly is highly subjective. Drawing on Geraghty's plenary paper, Kaye implored the audience to consider the knowledge and logic behind search-term databases and asserted that in order to understand fully and make efficient use of the texts (in this case the digitized press books), users should first understand the context in which search results are presented to them. Finally, Keene's paper demonstrated how archival sources such as the press book can be a key source in determining and assessing Channel 4's film scheduling policy, an important aspect of their overall project. This point complemented the previous paper, as it illuminated some of Kaye's more theoretical claims by providing the audience with a tangible example.

The panel "Latin-American Cinema and Interculturalism" featured papers on Brazilian cop shows, Third Cinema and the oeuvre of Alberto Cavalcanti. In "Law, Urban Violence and Order: Cop Shows as a Brazilian TV Genre," Luiza Lusvarghi (Uninove São Paulo) argued that while Brazilian cop shows are essentially formulaic, they make use of local elements, such as Brazilian actors and music. Lusvarghi provided an account of how these hybrid cultural products have become increasingly popular, as while they participate in a global genre, they are sufficiently different from mainstream examples for Brazilian audiences to identify with them. Susan Martin-Márquez (Rutgers University) presented a paper entitled "Radical Filmmaking at the Transatlantic Crossroads: *Vent d'Est*, Latin American Cinema and European Anxiety of Influence." Marquez argued that European avant-garde filmmakers had to negotiate with the distinctive cinema that was emerging from Latin America in the 1960s. Given its sophisticated aesthetics and post-colonial thrust, the radical filmmaking in Latin America could not be reduced to mere copies of European cinema, making some European filmmakers experience what she refers to as "anxiety of influence." Marquez's argument challenges James Roy MacBean's readings of the "crossroads" sequence in the 1970 Godard/Dziga Vertov Group film *Vent d'Est*, which features the Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha discussing Third Cinema. According to her, MacBean provides a Eurocentric account of the sequence that overlooks both the different film practices taking place in Latin America and the Latin American filmmakers' preoccupation with the de-elitization of cinema. Fernanda Martins (Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahia) focused on the work of Alberto Cavalcanti, best known in Britain for his work for and Ealing Studios and the GPO Film Unit. Martin's paper, "A Comparative Approach: A Study of Alberto Cavalcanti's French Avant-Garde Films of the 1920s and Brazilian National Cinema of the 1950s," provided an interesting insight into the largely unexplored impact of Cavalcanti's work on Brazilian cinema. According to Martins, establishing dialogue between Cavalcanti's French film *En Rade* (1927) and Brazilian

film *O Canto do Mar* (1953) provides a better understanding of his oeuvre as a whole.

A diverse range of papers were presented at the Screen Studies conference, these united under the broad theme of "repositioning screen history." Engagement with this theme took many forms and encompassed a variety of areas currently being researched in screen studies. The number of papers focusing on cinemas both within and outside Europe was indicative of screen studies' expanded geographical focus. While this reflects the decentering of the discipline, it also signals a rising interest within Europe in non-European cinema. Such changes testify to the repositioning of screen history, as the cinema of non-European countries, which were once marginalized, are now treated as integral to development of cinema history. Another prominent aspect of this overarching theme was the exploration of film archives, both in theory and in practice. While film archives are by no means new, to date they have not received sufficient attention from screen researchers. As was demonstrated in the course of the conference, the ways archival material is collected and stored not only impact our understanding of screen history but also have the potential to shape future archival practice and research. Ultimately the varied interests and backgrounds of attendees made for many lively discussions, and it is with great interest that we look forward next year's conference.

# Images of Whiteness

InterDisciplinary.Net, Oxford University, 12–14 July 2011

## A report by Clare Reed, University of Reading

InterDisciplinary.Net's inaugural "whiteness" conference took place at Mansfield College, Oxford University, and saw a range of delegates in attendance from across the world, with particularly strong representation from Canada, South Africa and Australia, as well as from all over Britain and Europe. In accordance with ID.Net's ethos of equal representation and the thorough interrogation of whiteness in all its forms, the conference provided an open forum for discussion. To foster productive discussions, this international conference had only two strands of panels throughout the three days, often split between the arts-based papers and those of a sociopolitical nature.

The first panel, "Disputed Territories and Maps of Whiteness," included papers from Veronica Watson (Indiana University of Pennsylvania), Lisa Spanierman (McGill University), and Adela Fofiu (Babeš-Bolyai University/University of Manchester). The papers initiated what were later to emerge as major themes of the conference. These included discussions of how whiteness relates to blackness, and how whiteness defines itself on its own terms, in particular as powerful (sometimes covertly so) and in a privileged position over different, less socially acceptable forms of whiteness. These themes carried across subsequent panels and were discussed in the contexts of South Africa and the United States, in panels generating interesting discussions of historical and political whiteness. Several studies of film and television from across the world interrogated specific types of white portrayals: soap opera from South Africa, the politics of working in Māori television in New Zealand, the whiteness present in Korean cinema, and the ubiquitous whiteness of mainstream Hollywood cinema.

The panel "Identities of/and Whiteness" emphasized different kinds of whiteness in relation to gender and nationality in Hannah Hamad's (Massey University) "The Gendered Hyper-Visibility of Whiteness in *Whiteout* (Dominic Sena, 2009) and *30 Days of Night* (David Slade, 2007)" and Colette Balmain's (Kingston University) "Black Skin/White Skin: Whiteness, Women and Westernisation in Contemporary South Korean Horror Cinema." Hamad's analysis of excessive whiteness in American horror films centered on a dichotomy between good and bad whiteness, and emphasized the idealization of the white female protagonist in relation to the threatening white male antagonist. Hamad's discussion related this cinematic tendency to the excessive whiteness of the Antarctic and Alaskan landscapes in which these films are set. Balmain's discussion continued the discussion of gender, this time in a

South Korean context. Although based in film study, Balmain's paper consisted largely of contextual analysis: she identified the roots of Korean cinema's whiteness, and linked its "horrific" status to the distrust and ostracization of the Other. Balmain also highlighted the difference between Western and Japanese forms of whiteness, claiming that the two are not only different, but that Japanese whiteness enjoys a privilege in South Korean society not given to Western whiteness, owing to the fact that whiteness is an indicator of social class in Southeast Asia, but that looking "Western" still carries connotations of local female prostitution with American soldiers in return for social status dating back to Western invasions of the region.

The subsequent panel, "Screening Whiteness," produced three carefully considered arguments concerning the ways whiteness is both understated and portrayed as normative or dominant in various contexts. Andrea Schofield's (Ryerson University and York University) paper, "A Whiter Shade of Pale: Whiteness in Hollywood Combat Films," gave a survey account of war films produced in U.S. and Hollywood cinema, beginning with D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Schofield's premise was that these films' endemic whiteness—although rarely explicitly discussed—is formulated by the stark contrast between normative protagonists and those who "go native" in Vietnam (in 1979's *Apocalypse Now*) "ethnic" white characters (in 1998's *Saving Private Ryan*) and the insidious racism of "us/them" divides in *Jarhead* (2005) and *The Hurt Locker* (2008). Nicky Falkof's (London Consortium) paper, "Entering the Ninja: The New Cultural Strategies of the White South African Male" explored a normalized whiteness in contrast to a theoretically present yet invisible blackness. Falkof astutely argued that the invisibility of whiteness seen in other countries does not apply in South Africa, and that it is normalized rather than invisible. Falkof cited films such as *Tsotsi* (2005) and *District 9* (2009), which depict troubling black characters, and claimed that portrayals that most often emphasize deprivation, xenophobia and violence are markedly different from those of the films' white characters. This panel concluded with Ewan Kirkland's (Brighton University) case study of white normalization in film, "*Pleasantville* and the Meaning of Colour." Kirkland argued that although *Pleasantville* (1998) does not actively engage with racial or ethnic commentary, the film nonetheless serves as a metaphor for these issues. Kirkland reads monochrome characters' encounters with color as ways of experiencing ethnic color without losing white privilege, a theory he sustained with references to American racial history, such as shop signs saying "No Coloreds."

The following panel, "Whiteness on/and the Small Screen," addressed issues of whiteness on television in South Africa, the United States, and New Zealand. Hannelie Marx's (University of South Africa) paper, "A 'Hot Potato': Whiteness and Narratives of Whiteness in Selected South African

Soap Operas," in many ways represented a continuation of the discussion initiated by Falkof, since it analyzed the ethnic dynamics of black and white characters in South African soap operas, specifically *7de Laan* (SABC 2, 2000-) and *Binnelanders* (TVSA, 2005-), and emphasized that these soap operas do not represent South African society as a whole, questioning the notion of the "Rainbow Nation." Also in this panel, Sue Abel's (University of Auckland) "Pakeha Identity and Whiteness: The Case of Pakeha Workers at Māori Television" identified white New Zealanders' unwillingness to describe themselves using Māori language (that is, as Pakeha), and the attitudes of those whites working in Māori television. Abel's paper demonstrated that the divide between white and Māori New Zealanders evident in her empirical research is not necessarily bridged by working together in television (that is, by reducing the ignorance of another culture through engaging with it directly), and she recounted some highly patronizing attitudes from white employees towards Māori culture.

Other papers made valuable and unusual contributions to the conference, although not through the medium of film or television. For example, Orna Sasson-Levy and AviShoshana's (Bar-Ilan University) complementary papers on Israeli whitenesses—"Global Whiteness, Local Privileges: Ashkenazim in Israel" and "Password for (Non) Ethnicity: The Israeli Version of Acting White," respectively—reflected on a particular concept of ethnic whiteness. Charlotte Baker (Lancaster University) gave a most unusual perspective on whiteness in her paper, "Representing 'The Tribe of Ghosts': Stereotypes of Albinism Emerging from Reports of Recent Attacks in Tanzania and Burundi." The final panel, "Theorizing Whiteness," included contributions from Delores V. Mullings (Memorial University of Newfoundland), David Owen (University of Louisville) and Vanessa Eileen Thompson (Goethe-University in Frankfurt/Main). Their papers addressed theoretical issues that had been raised, both implicitly and explicitly, throughout the conference. These were most usefully summarized by Owen, whose reflection on his own position as a white middle-class man and the effect of this on his "authority" encouraged delegates to assess their own positions in relation to this topic; indeed, the discussions following this last panel were among some of the most productive of the entire conference. The contribution of this conference (and hopefully future ID.Net conferences in this area) is significant, given that it combines established researchers' expertise with the abundant enthusiasm of early-career academics.