

Call for papers

Critical Approaches to Cultural Identities in the Public Sphere: From Ivory Tower to Social Arena

In recent years, social tensions linked to national, religious and ethnic identities have made the headlines in many countries, often linked to migration, as this “other globalization” (Wolton, 2003) brings the not-so-exotic “Other” ever closer in our cosmopolitan societies. For decades now, scholars have denounced the way in which the notion of culture has been exploited and misused in the public sphere, in support of various causes grounded in majority or minority identity discourse, by various groups defending or promoting national/nationalist, regional/regionalist, postcolonial, religious or other agendas, and resorting to “culture speak” (Hannerz, 1999). However, despite repeated warnings against rigid and “essentialised” uses of the concept of culture, these same social discourses and the identity phenomena motivating them seem to resist and even to grow stronger.

In the wake of the postmodern turn in anthropology (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) and in cultural studies (Hall, 1997), intercultural communication scholars have gradually shifted towards a more dynamic conception of culture as a communication process on the microsocial level (Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2016). There appears to be a consensus emerging among many researchers within the field, as to the necessity of “deconstructing” the notion of culture by adopting more “liquid” (Bauman, 2011) or “fluid” (Ogay & Edelmann, 2016) perspectives, and such approaches have progressively been applied to associated fields, such as management studies (Primecz, Romani & Sackmann, 2011), public relations (Carayol & Frame, 2012; Frame & Ihlen, 2018), education science (Ogay & Edelmann, 2016; Tremion & Dervin, 2018), media studies (Sommier, 2017), and migration studies (Frame, 2018). And yet, paradoxically, solid discourses about “cultural” identities appear to be becoming more resistant in the public sphere. Reductive, xenophobic populist discourse, on the one hand, but also accusations of cultural appropriation and minority identity movements on the other, seem to threaten social cohesion in political models based on British or North-American multiculturalism or indeed the French republican model of integration, as well as in many other areas of the world affected by perceived “migration crises.”

But could it be that these two opposing views – fluid and solid approaches to culture – actually work to strengthen one another? In a context where the legitimacy of “experts” is increasingly being challenged, a process catalysed by the trends of fact-checking, “fake news” and the fragmentation of the digital public sphere, academic discourse is frequently discredited, falling victim to the social constructionist relativism it extols. It seems to reflect less and less the social consciousness of those parts of the world population who feel they have been left behind in the rush towards globalization.

What is needed to reconcile these two extremes, to enable academics to re-engage with social debate and reduce the apparent gap between prevailing discourses within the ivory tower and those spread in society at large, amplified by the media and some politicians?

Even if we deconstruct and show certain uses of the notion of culture to be oversimplified and hegemonic from an academic point of view, we must also take into account the fact that such “culture speak” makes sense to many people thinking about identity in their everyday interactions (Holliday, 2015). To address this gap we might examine possible points of convergence between critical approaches to culture in intercultural communication (Dervin & Machart, 2015; Nakayama & Halualani, 2010; Romani et al., 2018) and in postcolonial or critical cultural studies, which have long been interested in the (de)construction and repression of identity discourse notably within minority groups (Gilroy, 1987; Hall & Du Gay, 1996).

How should we understand interculturality in the light of increasingly strongly-expressed identity claims on the one hand, and of assigned “prison identities” (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006) on the other? How should we take into account these “cultural identities” which are experienced, emotionally-charged, and which give meaning to everyday social interactions?

Even if all communication is intercultural because of our multiple social identities (Dacheux, 1999; Lahire, 2001), interculturalists must also engage with social discourse about culture and the social psychological mechanisms it implies, and not simply reject it as oversimplified. By dismissing it, we only continue to widen the gap between scholarly discourse and the social reality which it seeks to analyse. The aim of this 2-day conference is to focus on this gap and address social discourse on cultural identities, with the following objectives:

- To analyse social discourse on cultural identities (populist political speeches, media coverage of migration, cultural appropriation, reification of cultural forms through heritage, banal nationalism, institutional racism...) in order to better grasp underlying theoretical models and the conceptual and psychological mechanisms involved in this discourse.
- To propose methods (research activities, awareness-raising, training tools...) to better engage with social debate around those questions.
- To study the areas of convergence and possible synergies, in relation to these questions, between critical cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and intercultural communication.
- To open a space of dialogue between anglophone and francophone intellectual traditions in intercultural communication research, focusing particularly on critical approaches, applied to a variety of types and levels of cultural phenomena, without geographical limits.

This conference will take place in Dijon, on May 14th and 15th 2020. It is organized by the University of Burgundy (“Text-Image-Language” research group) and supported by the ECREA International and Intercultural Communication division and SAES. Conference languages will be English and French with mediation provided between the two languages.

Paper proposals of around 800 words, including a short bibliography, in English or French, should be submitted via the conference website (<http://blog.u-bourgogne.fr/aci2020/>) by 1st October 2019 for double-blind peer review. A selection of submitted texts will be published either in an edited volume or a journal special issue after the event.



Confirmed Keynote Speakers

Fred Dervin (University of Helsinki)
Vincent Latour (University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès)
Tania Ogay (University of Fribourg)
Laurence Romani (Stockholm School of Economics)
Gavan Titley (National University of Ireland, Maynooth)

Scientific Committee

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Michal Wanke, University of Opole
Carsten Wilhelm, University of Haute Alsace
Romy Woehlert, German Institute for Economic Research
Khaled Zouari, Clermont Auvergne University

Organising Committee

David Bousquet (Associate Professor, Cultural Studies, University of Burgundy)
Alex Frame (Associate Professor, Communication Science, University of Burgundy)
Mélodine Sommier (Assistant Professor, Intercultural Communication, Erasmus University Rotterdam)



Calendar

Deadline for abstract submission	1 st October 2019
Feedback from scientific committee	January 2020
Texts submitted for inclusion in digital conference proceedings	15 th April 2020
Conference	14 th -15 th May 2020
Selected final papers submitted for publication	September 2020

Conference fees

Full rate: 200€

Student rate: 90€

The registration fees include all the conference materials, coffee breaks and lunch, and social programme with the exception of the conference dinner.

<http://blog.u-bourgogne.fr/aci2020/>

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