ICRRA Online Conference, 13 – 22 October 2021

Cooperation in a fragmented world:
International cultural relations at the crossroads of climate, health and political crisis

The pandemic that has been going on for over a year now is exacerbating existing political, social and economic crises. While the urgency of the climate emergency might be recognised by four major international negotiations this year, this and other global crises are also causing further polarisation in societies and being exploited by some for cultural manipulation.

These struggles may be understood as cumulative or related. Reactions might deepen sectorial governance, or, on the other hand, they might open opportunities to re-imagine and reconceive the spatiality, economy and social formation of international relations. Long-term transformations in geopolitical power distribution, in struggles for social equality and thus even in the very project of modernity might be in sight.

What are ‘good’ cultural relations practices under these circumstances? How do different cultural actors and academic disciplines conceptualise such processes of (re-)ordering? Are new spaces, new alliances, new network formations, new concepts of belonging evolving?

Researchers, practitioners, policy makers and others interested in the above topics and questions are warmly invited to join ICRRA members to discuss international cultural relations under the overarching theme ‘Cooperation in a Fragmented World’.

Timetable summary (all times CET):

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Keynote Speakers


Oby Ezekwesili is the Founder and Chairperson of SPPG (School of Politics, Policy and Governance established by the #FixPoliticsInitiative which she also co-chairs. She is the President of Human Capital África and currently runs the Africa Economic Development Policy Initiative (AEDPI). Dr. Ezekwesili is a former Vice President of the World Bank, Africa Region. She was a Minister of Education and also of Mineral Resources of Nigeria. She is Co-Convener of #BringBackOurGirls Campaign, a group of diverse citizens advocating for the speedy and effective search and rescue of school girls abducted from the secondary school in Chibok on the 14, April 2014, Nigeria. She was one of the co-founders of Transparency International and was one of the pioneer directors of its Global Board in Berlin from 1994-1999. Ezekwesili was a Presidential Candidate in the 2019 election in Nigeria.

Walter D. Mignolo is William H. Wannamaker Professor and Director of the Center for Global Studies and the Humanities at Duke University. He was associated researcher at Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, 2002-2018) and an Honorary Research Associate for CISA (Center for Indian Studies in South Africa), Wits University at Johannesburg (2015-2019). He is a Senior Advisor of DOC (Dialogue of Civilizations) Research Institute, based in Berlin. He received a Doctor Honoris Causa Degree (2016) from the University National of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Honorary Degree (2018) from the University of London-Goldsmith. Among his books related to the topic are: The Darker Side of the Renaissance. Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization (1995); Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of Decoloniality (2007); Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking (2000); The Idea of Latin America (2006); On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analysis, Praxis, co-authored with Catherine Walsh (2018) and The Politics of Decolonial Investigations (scheduled for June of 2021).
Day 1 – Wednesday, 13 October 2021, 15:00 – 16:30 CET - Open to public

15:00 -16:30 CET: Keynote 1: Walter Mignolo
15:00  Welcome and Introduction: Lynda Jessup (North American Cultural Diplomacy Initiative, Canada)
15:10  Keynote Presentation: Colonial and Imperial Differences: A Hindrance to Inter-National Cultural Cooperations

There are several issues that need clarification when addressing the topic of International Cooperations. The keynote will focus on two of them. One is the sphere of the State (inter-State rather than inter-National relations) and the other is the public sphere (e.g. the enclosure of the civil society facing immigration and flight) in conflict with the State. The other are the colonial and imperial differences that are hidden under the word "cultural differences." Racial, sexual, religious, national, etc. discriminations are preventing today's inter-State and inter-National (the public sphere) relations and cooperations. Colonial and imperial differences are always entangled in power differentials, while cultural differences disguise the imperial differences that today are shaping inter-State conflicts (cf. US/EU – China) and the colonial differences that today divide the domestic relations of the public sphere.

15:55  ICRRA Response: Lynda Jessup (North American Cultural Diplomacy Initiative, Canada)
16:05  Chaired Discussion
   Chair: Lynda Jessup (North American Cultural Diplomacy Initiative, Canada)
16:25  Wrap up
16:30  END

Day 2 – Thursday, 14 October 2021, 15:00 – 16:30 CET - Open to public

15:00 -16:30 CET: Keynote 2: Oby Ezekwesili
15:00  Welcome and Introduction: Christine Wilson (British Council, UK)
15:10  Keynote Presentation: Recovering Together- A Pathway to a New and Inclusive Multilateral System

The Covid-19 pandemic struck at a time our world was already grappling with multiple of crises on which the ineffectual solutions of our existing multilateral order are manifest. The uncoordinated global response was a major reason for the severity of the loss of life and livelihood caused by the health crisis.
Evidently, such unanticipated global crises like the health pandemic – that caught even the most advanced societies unprepared – will be more common and of such nature that only cooperation and collaboration among countries can speedily and effectively solve.

Can the world pursue a “recovering together” agenda? Are there prospects for the design of improvements to national and global systems in ways that can respond to common risks which afflict both rich and poor countries? What should the global agenda setting and convening of such a design initiative look like and how can citizens take the center stage in charting that bold path to a more inclusive world that addresses currently intractable inequalities?

15:55 ICRRA Response: Christine Wilson (British Council, UK)
16:05 Chaired Discussion
   Chair: Christine Wilson (British Council, UK)
16:25 Wrap up: Christine Wilson (British Council, UK)
16:30 END

Day 3 – Friday, 15 October 2021, 10:00 – 11:30 CET - Open to public

10:00 -11:30 CET: Keynote 2: Nikita Dhawan
10:00 Welcome and Introduction: Odila Triebel (ifa, Germany)
10:10 Keynote Presentation: Global Ethics and the Imperative to Save the Planet
   In the face of growing global interdependence, there is rising expectation that powerful actors, organizations, and nation states have an ethical responsibility towards the more vulnerable sections of the world population. The demand that transnational elites act beyond narrow territorial-based understanding of self-interest in order to ‘protect’ victims of injustice, seems convincing, at first glance. However, given the long and violent history of colonial intervention in the non-Western world, current attempts to act in the ‘interests’ of the distant others often invoke suspicion and distrust. Euro-American supremacism and paternalism are reinstated once again with them acting as dispensers of rights and justice. In my talk I will focus on the role of the State, the International Civil Society and the Market in the context of discussions about growing global inequality and the need for transnational solidarity.
10:55 ICRRA Response: Odila Triebel (ifa, Germany)
11:05 Chaired Discussion
   Chair: Odila Triebel (ifa, Germany)
11:25 Wrap up
11:30 END
FORUM 1

10:00-11:30 CET: Trust and Values in International Dialogue

The current crises we are witnessing around the pandemic and climate change are arguably interlinked with a new contestation of democratic practices by authoritarian governments and a populist questioning of multilateral approaches to global politics. International dialogue and cooperation has a foundation in the UNESCO convention on diversity. The Sustainable Development Goals also show the impact of culture and cultural cooperation. However, for some parts in the world aspects of these international approaches may still feel loaded by continuing global power imbalances, the privileging of the values of the global north, and legacies of western colonial domination and empire. How can international cultural relations, and cultural expression, invention and production, be realised under these circumstances? What are the baselines? What response is needed from institutions and organisations committed to international dialogue: more understanding or more assertiveness?

10:00 Welcome and resume of keynotes from ICRRA members: Naren Chitty (Macquarie University, Australia)

10:10 Applications of keynote themes in research and practice:

Stuart MacDonald (International Cultural Relations, UK) & Mona Lotten (British Council, UK)
Cultural relations, dialogue and co-operation in an age of competition

Covadonga Hernández (Instituto InclusArtiz, Brasil)
National and internacional residency programmes as a platform of dialogue between countries and communities to promote multilateral cooperation

Twediana Budi Hapsari (Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia)
Online Islamic learning, radicalism and cultural expression in South East Asia

11:00 Chaired Discussion
Chair: Naren Chitty (Macquarie University, Australia)

11:20 Wrap up: Naren Chitty (Macquarie University, Australia)

11:30 END
FORUM 2
13:00-14:30 CET: Decolonising knowledge and knowledge production in international cultural relations

The social and political terms around which we conceive international cultural relations are still dominated by European traditions. Decolonisation means acknowledging the historical, geographical and social situatedness of knowledge and continuing global imbalances in how knowledge is produced and consumed. A simple acknowledgement of this fact, however, is not enough: Transforming this acknowledgement into praxis means accepting plurality. However, what does it really take to foster a plurality in knowledge production, distribution and consumption? What does a plurality of epistemologies mean for international cooperation? Is there a new form of „universality“ at the horizon?

13:00 Welcome and resume of keynotes from ICRRA members: Avril Joffe (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa)

13:10 Applications of keynote themes in research and practice:

- Doreen Nchang (University of Cape Town, South Africa) & Ojoma Ochai (British Council, Nigeria)
  Decolonising Digital: Open Access and research communication in West Africa

- Lynda Jessup (North American Cultural Diplomacy Initiative, Canada) & César Villanueva (Universidad Iberoamericana Ciudad de México, Mexico)
  The North American Cultural Diplomacy Initiative: Cultural Diplomacy as Critical Practice

- Venka Purushothaman (LASALLE College of the Arts Singapore)
  Decoloniality and cultural networks in Southeast Asia

14:00 Chaired Discussion

Chair: Avril Joffe (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa)

14:20 Wrap up: Avril Joffe (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa)

14:30 END
As the Covid 19 crisis and the effects of climate change have both shown, on the one hand global crises provide humanity with a shared experience of sameness in our physical being. On the other hand, it has also been very clearly and bluntly shown that common crises do not effect everyone the same way and not to the same extent. These crises intensify existing social and economic inequalities. And there will very likely be ongoing global differences in the budgets, technology and political infrastructure available to respond to these crises. How is fair international collaboration made possible under these circumstances? How should cultural relations organisations respond? What rules and conditions need to be respected at a minimum? What kind of redistribution or even dispossession needs to be envisioned?

15:00 Welcome and resume of keynotes
Mafalda Dâmaso (King’s College London, UK)

15:10 Applications of keynote themes in research and practice:
Avril Joffe (Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg, South Africa), Matina Magkou (University of Côte d’Azur, France), Anna Steinkamp (Independent Consultant in International Cultural Cooperation, Germany), Cristina Farinha (Independent expert cultural and creative sector, Portugal), Katelijn Verstraete (Independent Cultural Consultant, Belgium/Singapore), Sudebi Thakurata (D.epicentre and Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology, India)

The EUNIC Toolkit on Fair Collaboration in Cultural Relations
Carla Figueira (Goldsmiths, University of London, UK) & Aimee Fullman (George Mason University, USA)

Cultural Relations in the Critical Zone: Cultural Relations and Climate Change
Anmol Vellani (Theatre practitioner, India)
Fairness before collaboration: preparing for meaningful intercultural practice in a polarising world

16:00 Chaired Discussion
Chair: Mafalda Dâmaso (King’s College London, UK)

16:20 Wrap up: Mafalda Dâmaso (King’s College London, UK)
16:30 END
18:00-19:30 CET: Cultural relations responses to global challenges

Cultural relations operate in a non-political social sphere. They seek cooperation in the fields of arts, culture, education and science and thus for a cooperation more of societies than of governments. They make room for aesthetic projections of new and better futures and they can draft horizons for aspiration. However, cultural relations both confront and are themselves confronted by realpolitics in this process. Hard power interests as well as geopolitical dynamics do have an impact on their operational possibilities. However, it is more and more acknowledged that global challenges like climate change and pandemics (as well as internet governance, migration and terrorism) need cooperative responses. What is the role of cultural relations in this task? What kind of skills and practices can they provide and foster? What kind of alliances do they seek?

18:00  Welcome and resume of keynotes from ICRRA members: Carla Figueira (Goldsmiths, University of London, UK)

18:10  Applications of keynote themes in research and practice:

   Ian Thomas (British Council, UK)
   The Cultural Heritage Protection Fund

   Inge Ceustermans (The Festival Academy, Belgium)
   International Festivals Declare Emergency

   Pedro Affonso Ivo Franco (Furtwangen University, Germany) & Kimani Njugua
   (Twaweza Communications)
   Cultural and Creative Industries fostering Cultural Relations

19:00  Chaired Discussion

   Chair: Carla Figueira (Goldsmiths, University of London, UK)

19:20  Wrap up: Carla Figueira (Goldsmiths, University of London, UK)

19:30  END

Day 6 – Friday 22 October 2021, 13:30 – 14:30 CET - INVITATION ONLY

Policy roundtable

13:30  Welcome and Introduction

13:40  ICRRA reflections on conference

14:05  Policy responses and discussion

14:25  Wrap up

14:30  End