Come to Ireland

SIETAR Europa Congress
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As SIETAR Europa will be holding its next congress in Dublin this coming May, we thought it would be appropriate to devote this issue to the Irish and their culture.

So, it’s natural to have an interview with Joe Kearns, an active SIETARian and a passionate Irishman. His background is atypical—after his studies, he spent two years working in a remote, semi-desertic region of Ethiopia as a humanitarian volunteer. As he explains, working in extreme poverty was a dramatic, life-changing experience. His remarks about the current migration crisis in Europe provides a realistic assessment of what the entire world is facing.

His intercultural experiences aren’t just limited to Africa, his later career in the computer industry put him into intense contact with Germans and Americans. All in all, he is the quintessence of a real interculturalist and the SIETAR organization is proud to have him as a member. The interview starts on page 3.

Keeping in theme, there are other articles on Ireland. Our interviewee, Joe Kearns, was nice enough to write a piece on ‘Ireland and the Irish’ (page 11), giving his points of view on the many facets of Irish culture.

Of course, the shocking turn of events in the U.S. Presidential election is having an effect on all of us around the world. Columnist Dan MacLeod compares the media of the past with today’s post-media era, providing some explanation as to how an amoral, self-aggrandizing businessman, scorned by the political establishment, was elected to the most powerful position in the world. (Page 14)

Milton Bennett follows with a look at the irony of American exceptionalism in light of the Trump victory (page 17) and, to round things off, George Simons provides food for thought with a cutting overview of shifting paradigms in intercultural thought and practice. (Page 18)

As the year 2016 comes slowly to an end, the SIETAR Board and I wish you all the warmest season’s greetings and a good, cheerful start in 2017.

Patrick Schmidt, Editor-in-chief
Human migration is usually defined as the movement by people from one place to another with the intention of permanently settling there. Essentially, it’s individuals who are searching for food and security outside their usual habitation. The reasons for moving are varied but, generally, are the combined result of economic hardship, famine, human rights violations and/or violent conflict.

With regional wars in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Somalia and abject poverty in many areas of Africa, it’s no surprise that the affluent European continent is besieged by a massive number of migrants. And the rapid influx of people with different cultural values, languages and traditions is perceived by many Europeans as a threat to safety, prosperity and national identity. Extreme political parties have sprung up, generating a pervasive atmosphere of suspicion and fear of “the other”.

Our interviewee, Joe Kearns, is well versed in the migration problematic—after finishing his studies in Dublin, he spent two years working for an aid agency in Ethiopia. Having seen how famine and the horrors of civil war force people to migrate, he offers us a unique opportunity to understand the desperation involved. He also gives us an inside view of what it means to grow up in Ireland, the tradition of Irish migration and the saving grace of Irish storytelling.

A Board member of SIETAR Europa, he is actively involved in preparations for the upcoming SIETAR congress, to be held in Dublin this coming May.

How did your life begin?

I was born in Dublin, but since both my parents came from the countryside, every summer we’d go the west of Ireland to visit the family. That was the first time I had a sense of being different — we really didn’t fit in because we were from the city. Our cousins used to refer to us as “Dublin-Jackeens”, a slightly negative term for Dublin people. On the other hand, back in Dublin we were considered “culchies”, a slightly derogatory term for people from the country, because our accents weren’t like those of Dubliners.

This is my earliest awareness of difference. It’s possible my interest in culture can be traced right back to that. As Interculturalists we need to be aware that cultural differences can be found between many groups, between city and country, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, male and female and many more.

My siblings and I went to a working-class, Catholic Christian Brothers school in Dublin. It was a culture that appreciated physical toughness and this showed up in the sports and the fact that corporal punishment featured almost daily. The teachers had a leather belt — about 13 inches long and a quarter of an inch thick — and they’d hit our open hands with it. The culture of our school was that you didn’t show pain and your status among your classmates was higher the less you showed your pain.
While the school had a good academic record, I was more interested in the non-academic activities. But I did love his—
tory, geography, biology and above all mathematics, which led me to study engineering at university. After graduating in 1981, I got a job helping research students and designing instruments to test farm machinery. Around this time, I saw a documentary about poverty in Africa and it had such a strong impact on me that I contacted an Irish aid agency, called Concern, to explore the possibility of volunteering. At the same time, I received a scholarship to study French in Lyon. I stayed there six months and was about to start work at the Renault truck factory when I received a telegram from the aid agency saying that a position in Ethiopia was open. I remember clearly thinking that if I didn’t go then, I’d never go. So, I flew back to Ireland, did a pre-training course and was sent to Ethiopia, all in the space of about 8 weeks.

What were your initial reactions to the country?
The first three months were difficult, work-wise and culturally. I was sent out to an isolated, semi-desert region north of the eastern town of Dire Dawa to set up an irrigation project for Issa (Somali) nomads near a village of about 120 people. I should stress that my experience as a volunteer was very different from most others, as it was very unusual to be sent to a remote area on your own. Most volunteers were sent to ongoing projects and got language training. At that time, there was little intercultural training.

Occasionally I would go to the town of Dire Dawa for supplies or just for a break. There were very few foreigners in the country but in Dire Dawa I became friendly with two Red Cross workers based there. One was a French Canadian, Marcel Fortier and the other a Finn, Karl Kakonnen. We became very good friends and it was my first introduction to Finnish culture and humour and to the strange place of French speakers in Canada. Communication with the outside world was difficult. In the two years I was in Ethiopia I made only two phone calls home—both at Christmas. All other communication was by letter and receiving a letter was a highlight! Today, people have instantaneous connections with mobile phones, even in remote areas.

Language was a challenge because, even though I learned some Amharic, the main language of Ethiopia, I was working mostly with Somalis who of course spoke Somali. In a curious twist of fate, the area was very close to the Djibouti border, which used to be a French territory. Many of the nomads I worked with spent time in Djibouti who thought all white people spoke French. They spoke to me in the limited French they had and I answered in French, confirming their perception that all white people speak French.

A bonus for me living in Ethiopia was the insect and arachnid life. Ever since I was a child, I’ve loved insects and spiders and it became my area of amateur expertise. When I went to Africa, I discovered so many types I’d never seen before,
like the solifugae, an arachnid the size of your hand with jaws so big it can eat a lizard. On the right is a scorpion.

And there were scorpions in my room too—you could see them running around the boxes at night. You gradually became casual about them. One day, one got into my shoe and stung me—not fun. It was as if someone took a hot needle and stuck it in my toe, right into the bone. There was no hospital nearby and it took two days for the pain to subside. However, I knew that if you were a healthy adult and the sting wasn’t in the neck or head, you weren’t in any great danger.

After 19 months of work on the water irrigation project, I was asked to abandon it because of the famine which had hit northern Ethiopia. It was heart-breaking to leave the project; I’d put the best part of two years of my life into the project and felt we were abandoning the people. I had come to love the Issa people I worked with and had a deep affection for the culture.

During the famine of late 1984 I was assigned the role of project engineer for the Concern feeding centres in Northern Ethiopia. My role included building shelters and arranging logistics. For three months, I and the other volunteers, worked literally from dawn to dark, 15-hour days. But it had a positive side—I met a nurse from Northern Ireland who later became my wife.

When you’re working in famine areas, you see the horrors that result from extreme poverty. There were many bad days in the camps and the death toll peaked at 105 deaths in one day. You don’t ever recover from that experience, you are never the same. Most of the problems we have are nothing compared to what those people were going through. And it goes on.

**What made you return to Ireland?**

During my time in Ethiopia, I’d met a lot of experienced people working for aid agencies who had been away so long they had no real home anymore. They were nomads, moving from country to country. They had a very exciting existence but most of them seemed lost with no community to belong to. I didn’t want to end up like that. And there was a part of me that wanted to prove to myself that I could make a career in Ireland.

When I arrived back in Dublin in 1985 I had only 200 Irish pounds and was wearing clothes I’d borrowed from other people. I was 28 years old, had no job, and was living back in the family home. The unemployment rate in Ireland was 17% and, with my two years’ experience in irrigation and famine experience, I wasn’t exactly in demand. So, I took a chance and started a computer-programmer course sponsored by a German company, called Nixdorf, but with no guarantee of a job. I worked very hard and was the only programmer hired into the company.

I spent a lot of time in Paderborn, Germany doing software...
testing where I discovered that, in my opinion, a German-Irish team is strong because they are wonderfully complementary cultures. In broad terms, the Germans are fantastic at detail planning but they aren't so good with ambiguity or things going wrong. The Irish are good at that.

After I left Nixdorf I joined Ashton-Tate, a US-Californian company, and the management contrast was like night and day. For example, at Nixdorf, it was the norm to work long hours; sometimes I'd working 48 hours non-stop, including nights, but nobody noticed or cared because it was expected in the culture. Ashton-Tate was a complete contrast. There, I once worked the whole day and on until 4 o'clock in the morning. The next day, the financial controller personally thanked me and everybody at the factory knew about it. I said to myself, “Hey, people here notice my contribution!” It was a great place to work.

While I was at Ashton-Tate we were taken over by another US company, Borland. Led by a charismatic, tough Frenchman, Philippe Khan, they referred to themselves as Barbarians and the management style reflected that. I watched with great interest how the merging of two very different management cultures led to stress and adaptation by all. That was the beginning of my real interest in cultural difference, especially in how corporate cultures mix.

Borland ceased operation in Ireland in 1985 and I was lucky to be hired into Hewlett Packard I was with Hewlett Packard for nearly ten years, working up to senior management level. I was extremely happy at Hewlett Packard and the values of the company were a great match to my own — trust and respect for people. But after nearly twenty years in technology I had had enough. I wanted to go back to experiencing the “real world” and being enthusiastic like when I was in Ethiopia. I was financially secure but I couldn’t sit around doing nothing. I wanted to back into the “real world” and being enthusiastic like when I was in Ethiopia. I was financially secure but I couldn’t sit around doing nothing. I had small classes, five to 12 students, who came from all over the world.

How did you get to know about SIETAR?
At a workshop on Business English training I met SIETAR veteran, the late Maura Gallagher. Maura told me about the organization. Suddenly I learned people were researching interculturalism and you could study it! I did the intercultural course in Bath with Adrian Pilbeam and it was a revelation. I fundamentally believe that the single most important topic in all of human activity is learning how to get along within different cultural perspectives. All conflicts and problems in the world contain a culture element. Maura Gallagher continued to be a mentor to me as I developed my skills in the field.

I went to my first SIETAR conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 2007 and met so many wonderful people, the most interesting and diverse group I’ve come across in my life. People of different backgrounds, many with a strong academic back-
ground, but also with a huge practical experience. That mix of academia and real-world experience is one of SIETAR’s great strengths. I feel strongly that SIETAR must retain that mixture. To me, intercultural relations is core to human existence and SIETAR must always be open to those with a genuine passion for cultural understanding no matter what background they come from.

**What interests you most in the intercultural field?**

Migration. Working in Africa, I got to know first-hand the pressures of extreme poverty and why people want to come to Europe. Western societies can’t imagine the horrors of extreme poverty. Take Eritria, from where many of the refugees we are seeing in Europe. If you read what life is like there, it is easy to understand how desperate people are to get out.

Migration is also a key part of the history of Ireland. Millions of Irish, because of oppression, poverty and hunger, were forced to go overseas. Their experiences were often terrible, humiliating. Signs like “No blacks or Irish” were seen in the US and UK. They were even still to be seen in the UK into the 1970’s. My grandfather and other family worked in England and had a tough time with rejection, abuse and discrimination. The experience was made harder because of the sadness at missing his family and being cut-off from his own culture. And there is the damage migration does to the home country. Ireland always struggled to develop economically because we were losing good people. The same thing is happening today in Africa.

*Your observations of abject poverty in Africa bring up the question of critical mass. How many migrants can a receiving country absorb without overwhelming its social and identity balance?*

You’ve touched on the very important issue of the impact on “receiving communities”. If you take the town I live in, where we have a population of are 5,000 people. We have quite many Polish and Lithuanian families living here and they are extremely well received - for many reasons. But we also need to be sensitive to potential negative impacts of large scale migration on receiving communities. If we lose sight of the impact on receiving communities and do not do the ground-work to increase cross-cultural understanding, we can alienate people and feed the negative rhetoric that led to things like the Brexit vote and the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment.

But on a wider scale we face an enormous challenge dealing with so many people trying to come to Europe; Syria is only part of the problem. Poverty in much of sub-Saharan Africa is also driving migration. In Nigeria alone there are nearly 190 million people and many are trying to get to Europe. It’s very similar to people in Central America and Mexico trying to enter the U.S. but the numbers and economic scale are completely different. The population of the migrant countries within reach...
of Europe — including India, Pakistan and Africa — is 2.4 billion people. On the border of the southwestern U.S., you probably have less than 200 million. And the GDP per person of Central America and Mexico is about $10,000, whereas that of India, Pakistan and Africa averages about $1,000. As you can see, the pressure on Europe is far bigger. The real challenge, of course, is to improve the social and economic environment in those countries from which people are fleeing. And to be honest I am not optimistic of that happening any time soon.

Turning to a less controversial issue. A few years ago, I was in Dublin in a taxi. The driver couldn’t stop talking about Ireland's traditions, its history, its buildings and monuments. He was absolutely captivating. Why are the Irish such good storytellers and have four Nobel prize winners in literature?

Our taxi drivers are unique, I believe, in that they tend to be well read, interested in many things and love talking to people. During the financial crisis here in 2011, one member of the IMF troika told journalists that he loved coming to Ireland because he learned more about economics from taxi-drivers than from academics.

I think storytelling is the way our experiences, history and knowledge are passed down. A lot of cultural differences have to do with industrialization and the need to become time-conscious. Even today, Ireland is one of the least industrialized countries in the Europe, still very much a rural society. We have time to tell our stories. It is interesting to note that the ancient pre-Christian Druids believed that stories needed to be memorised and passed on from person to person and from generation to generation. I think that belief persists!

Secondly, it’s entertainment. People with humour, wit and storytelling talent are valued and have status in Ireland. The Anglo-Irish playwright Oscar Wilde would always use words cleverly to make a story funny. For instance, his proposition, “Always borrow money from a pessimist, he won’t expect it back.”

Finally, storytelling distracts us. My mother, who’s almost 90, often repeats a story we have heard many times before. You want to hear them again. It’s like when you’re a child — you want to be taken somewhere else. We have one particular friend, and she is not unique, will tell a story, and within seconds she has drawn you into her world and you forget what’s around you. That’s great storytelling talent.

How do you see the future of SIETAR?

The biggest challenge for SIETAR is to determine what sort of structure it will need to make it effective in an increasingly complex and “virtual” world. We need to adopt a multi-level perspective on a diverse world, where rapid and, often disturbing, changes are happening. The real task is how we can ensure that interculturalists are known and valued by society and are involved in creating an atmosphere of understanding and compassion for all.
Ireland is a large island, east of Great Britain. Politically, it is divided between the sovereign state Republic of Ireland, covering five-sixths of the land, and the other sixth is Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. The total population is about 6.4 million, with just under 4.6 million living in the Republic of Ireland and over 1.8 million inhabitants in Northern Ireland.

Ireland was largely independent until the English gradually conquered it in the 16th – 17th century, known as the Tudor conquest. It was not a period of prosperity for the local inhabitants and by the late 1840s, the infamous Potato Famine caused half the population to either emigrate or starve to death. Small wonder a war of independence followed. In 1921, the island was partitioned, creating the Irish Free State, later to be the Republic of Ireland (Eire). Northern Ireland remained within the United Kingdom.

The Republic of Ireland is a parliamentary democracy, with Dublin as its capital. The terms used to describe the government stem from the Irish language. The legislature is called the Oireachtas, which consists of a lower house, known as the Dáil Éireann, an upper house, Seanad Éireann. It elects the President, called the Uachtarán. The prime minister is referred to as the Taoiseach.

Ireland is part of the European Union and uses the Euro as its currency. The country attained unbelievable prosperity between the years of 1995 and 2007, which is known as the Celtic Tiger period. When the global financial crash of 2008 came, its growth was put into check. Due to its English-speaking workforce and historical Irish connections in the U.S., it houses the European headquarters of the major technological companies, such as Google, Apple, Microsoft.

Although small in population, Ireland has surprisingly produced four winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature: George Bernard Shaw, William Butler Yeats, Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney. And one shouldn’t forget two other major writers of the 19th and 20th century: Oscar Wilde and James Joyce.

In terms of communication, Ireland can be quite a macho culture, and touching between men is rare. However, a relaxed tone of voice is the norm and first names are used almost immediately. Humor is important for breaking the ice and building trust. As with the British, the Irish person may use humor as a defence mechanism, in a self-deprecating or ironic way. Good friends may trade insults and teasing each other, known as ‘slagging’. These backhanded compliments are meant to reflect the strength of the relationship.

In general, when dealing with the Irish topics that should be avoided are drinking, religion and the British. Wit, sarcasm and eloquence are appreciated, provided it’s not done in a condescending manner.
Spectacular Ireland

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Ireland and the Irish

A miscellany of facts, thoughts and ideas

by Joe Kearns

Death
This may seem like a strange topic to start with but we do death well in Ireland.

It seems that the death of a friend or relative is a cause for genuine celebration of the loved one’s place in our lives — and funerals are large events. What is known as a “wake”, a gathering in the days before the actual funeral, where traditionally the deceased person is laid out in their own home in an open coffin, something that can be quite a shock for some other cultures. It is a time for talking and story-telling about the deceased — and often for laughter. The presence of laughter at the wake is something outsiders are surprised at or even disturbed by, but it is natural to Irish people. Death is part of life.

In traditional funeral processes, the community and family gather and there are copious supplies of food, tea and coffee. The myth of heavy drinking at an Irish funeral is just that — largely myth. Sure, some might go to the pub after, but that isn’t the defining characteristic.

Gaelic Games
Sport is different in Ireland, in that the most popular sports are unique to Ireland — with some relatives in Scotland. Anyone wishing to understand Ireland must understand the role of traditional Gaelic games and the association that runs them, the GAA.

Gaelic football might be best described as a cross between basketball and rugby — but faster and tougher. You have to see it to understand. Do a search for “Gaelic Football - The Original Beautiful Game” on YouTube and you will get the picture. Both men and women play the game.

The other main sport Hurling, played by women under the name Camogie, is at least 3,000 years old and described as the fastest game on grass. Not a game for the faint hearted or if you have a fear of getting hit with sticks. You can also get a flavour for this amazing game, the ancestor of hockey, by searching on YouTube for “Hurling - The Fastest Game on Grass” — enjoy.

We are very proud of our traditional sports, now being played in many countries outside Ireland — there is even an Asian Games! Ireland has many stadiums for the sports and the jewel in the crown is the main stadium in Dublin, Croke Park, which holds 82,000 people and is the 4th biggest stadium in Europe. And — these are an entirely amateur sports.

Red Hair
Big sigh. Contrary to the common myth, there are not that many people with red hair in Ireland — maybe 10%. Sure, you are going to see more than in most countries, but to read some articles, you’d think most of us were red-headed! Read more on Wikipedia
Guinness
Even bigger sigh! First off, Guinness is not even Irish any more. Secondly it is not the drink of choice of most people in Ireland — that’s tea. If anything is to be celebrated about Guinness, it is their extraordinary marketing coup — it is to be seen on almost every piece of tourist tat you will see. Well done Guinness, but don’t ever imagine it represents anything other than a commercial success.

Alcohol
First off, yes, we do have a problem with alcohol — some drink too much. But there are countries who drink more. Secondly up to the dramatic increase in affluence that started in the early 1990’s we were way down the international tables. You will have a good time in an Irish pub — even if you don’t drink alcohol — it’s about the company and chat.

The Irish Language
Another “must-know” if you come to Ireland. The Irish language was, up to the late 19th century, the main language of the country — certainly outside Dublin. It has been in decline since then, with some recent revival, and is now spoken daily as a first language only in areas of the country, mostly in the West, known as An Gaeltacht. And while most people are not proficient, most Irish people can understand the basics.

Irish is an Indo-European language and is almost identical to Scots Gaelic and Manx. It is closely related to Welsh, Cornish and Breton — the other so-called Celtic language group. It comes from the same family as Gaulish, which was spoken in Gaul before the Romans. And no, it is not related to English.

Weather
We cannot talk about Ireland without mentioning the main topic of introductory conversation — the weather. And while we are dispelling myths, it is true that it does rain in Ireland quite a lot, but on the west coast it rains two days out of every three. But the green and pleasant countryside is beautiful even in the rain.

And talking of weather, all our weather presenters are professional meteorologists unlike some countries. We regard them as family members who bring us the good and bad news. Look up two favourites online, the hugely popular Jean Byrne, who famously makes all her own clothes, and Gerald Fleming. There are not many countries where weather reporters are national celebrities!

Gaeltacht is an Irish-language word used to denote any primarily Irish-speaking region.
Tell us what motivated you to become the coordinator for SIETAR Europa’s Dublin congress.

While doing an MBA at Norwegian Business School, one of my favourite classes was *Intercultural Management and Negotiations*. The field appealed to me as a way to put into practice my experiences, after having lived in seven different countries and studying many languages.

After that class, I began to search for organisations with a focus on intercultural management and learned about SIETAR Europa. I joined and attended the SIETAR Europa Congress in Valencia in 2015, which I enjoyed a lot. I wanted to become more involved in SIETAR Europa and have a chance to work directly with people in the field.

So when I saw the opening for a congress coordinator, I jumped at the opportunity. I feel that being a part of SIETAR Europa is a great way to establish relationships and to learn more about careers in intercultural management.

Tell us about your role on a virtual team as one of SIETAR Europa Congress Coordinators.

There are many volunteers working for the congress and to coordinate them, we have steering committee meetings every two weeks on average. We usually use Zoom for our video meetings, Dropbox for document sharing, email for more detailed messages and WhatsApp for short messages. The other congress co-coordinator, Gradiola Kapaj, is working on the academic track and coordinates with the communications team. She is also doing her master’s thesis on volunteer teams and we aim to present in Dublin if our proposal is accepted.

As for myself, I’m working more on the budget and more closely with Abbey Events in Ireland, which is our conference management company on the ground in Dublin. I’m also the head of the sponsorship committee and was also the sponsorship coordinator at the Polyglot Berlin Gathering for May 2016. [http://polyglotberlin.com/2016](http://polyglotberlin.com/2016/)

What other projects are you working on right now?

Earlier this year, I launched a website, yozzi.com, where I write in my eight strongest languages and encourage others to write in their target languages as well. The platform aims to become an online community for advanced language learners.

There are two additional websites, which I plan to launch as well. One is about MBA experiences, providing qualitative information to help people decide whether to do an MBA. The other website will be about professions in intercultural management. So I encourage any people who would like to be interviewed for either site to reach out to me [https://no.linkedin.com/in/dpolychronopoulos](https://no.linkedin.com/in/dpolychronopoulos). Also, I welcome guest posts in your target language on yozzi. All three websites offer the opportunity to link to your site, raising your profile in your field.
The election of Donald Trump may well be one of the saddest days in U.S. history. The man is obviously unfit for any public office, let alone that of president. Like the Brexit, it signals that the social and economic systems are broken, the politicians unresponsive and the “media” clueless.

The End of Media

When I was a ten-year-old kid in Boston, I sold newspapers at the train station five mornings a week. A Big Ben alarm-clock jolted me awake and I had a half-mile walk to get to the News Agent’s, a stationery-store, dark at 6 a.m. I’d go down an alley and around back, then down half a dozen steps into a windowless cavern of stone and cement where chest-high benches were piled with wire-bound bundles of papers.

Two-dozen paperboys filled their bags; they were older than me and their routes covered half the town. I’d lug my wagon up the stairs, then lug up my “Globes”, “Herald-Travelers” and “Record-Americans” and pull my wagon back up the alley and half a block to the station.

The Muffin Man was closed but the door was unlocked, the baker was in the back making bread. I’d bring him his paper and get a jelly donut in return. When Lou’s Coffee Cup opened, I’d head over there for an english muffin and a Pepsi. The rest of the time I sat on my papers. And read them, every morning for four years.

Everyone read the paper back then, all the people waiting to take the train into the city. And they swore by them, even when they were gone--an older man in a suit used to ask me for a “Post” every day as a joke. I’d never even heard of it.

The “Record-American” was a tabloid and I saw it as a comic-book version of a paper. The “Herald” was for businessmen, Republicans read it. Both were amalgamations, four papers had become two. And, much like the Republican party since Nixon in 1968, these “business” and “populist” papers eventually became one, the “Herald-American”. Ironically, its name denotes exactly what it does--herald and trumpet “American Exceptionalism” and right-wing values.

The 144-year-old “Globe”, on the other hand, has always been the “paper of record” and continues its less fun, more rigorous (and expensive) task of objective reporting, information-over-entertainment and science-over-religion, with social inclusion in readership, coverage and staffing.

There were ten daily papers in Boston in 1900, only two in 1972, now both are struggling. There were three tv chan-
A popular ... — continued

Print-only media reached its peak in 2000 and has been decimated by the internet since.

nels in Boston back then, now there are hundreds, plus ubiquitous “talk radio”, plus the Internet.

Donald Trump is the product of a post-factual media; what we’ve always agreed on as public knowledge no longer exists.

When I was ten years old, Walter Cronkite, who “anchored” the CBS Evening News, was known as the most trusted man in America. Today, mainstream media is mocked as being the lamestream media in half the country. Journalists have joined politicians and lawyers as objects of public scorn, and not only in the U.S.

For the past 25 years, whenever there’s a riot in Montreal, people attack the tv vans with bottles and rocks.

Endlessly crashing waves...

In the ‘90s, I was an associate editor for the Boston-based “WorldPaper”, a pre-Internet experiment in global journalism (launched in 1978). It was a monthly magazine published simultaneously in English, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Chinese as an insert in major papers in over two dozen countries. The heart of the endeavor was the staffing, a network of editors and writers who were natives of those countries—a true “world view” for a “world audience”.

In August 1999, I wrote about “culture-jamming”, the idea that citizens can bypass media to communicate politically and as a society. In this case, it concerned a bitter strike by Montreal’s nurses, who were being attacked by both politicians and editorialists. As a result, people driving by picket lines began spontaneously honking in support of the nurses, a slight tap on the horn because they were, after all, in front of hospitals.

The horn-taps had already become a citywide phenomenon before the media got involved but they immediately co-opted the story, leading the news with the “celebration of citizenship”, then reminding people to limit themselves to one or two taps because they were in hospital zones and interviewing the police chief about possible noise-infrctions.

Meanwhile, the Parti Québécois decided the answer to people expressing themselves was for party-members to call into radio shows and write to newspapers (a form-letter was circulated) as “regular citizens” who thought the nurses were “greedy”.

The media and political responses showed how far both institutions were from understanding the citizenry.
A popular... — continued

The final culture-jam: a world of simultaneous noise and silence, the sound of endlessly crashing waves on an empty beach.

The Internet was still at the stage where a lot of people didn’t use e-mail yet but I knew there were chat rooms, a kind of private “talk radio”. I interviewed a young McGill student, Paul Georgescu, and learned chat rooms were just one facet of what he called the on-line community. He, himself, was the co-founder of a website offering translation services in six languages (he spoke four).

I described him as wearing “army surplus” (khaki pants, boots) and quoted him saying, “The message is we know the world’s a tough place and we’re ready for it! The Internet sends a cultural message, it’s democratic, it costs virtually nothing. The mentality is that we’re fighting for important things and saying ‘Okay, nobody’s got any money so let’s share.’”

Now you could do things like read an interview, then click and hear the uncut tape, “all the reporter’s questions, all the answers and even the chit-chat.” I mused that previously-unpublished novels were available, and music by people without record-deals.

Whereas Montreal’s free alternative weeklies were being bought out by the people who owned the daily papers. And “the urban poetry of rap became a multi-billion-dollar industry managed by white guys.”

“At the same time,” I added, “that’s why younger white Americans began listening.” Even when co-opted, dissonance moves society along (the co-opting is the proof).

Culture-jamming is Canadian suffragettes in 1914, holding a mock Parliamentary debate on the wisdom of giving men the vote. It is, in fact, striking and picketing, as well as honking in support. It is also as simple as a black person sitting down at an Alabama lunch-counter in 1963.

Media does have an important role to play. But what about when it no longer exists?

Everyone seems to wonder now whether the Internet will be co-opted by Microsoft or the IRS. But I worry that it won’t be gathered together by anyone, so that every day millions of people will send out messages in bottles which no one has the time to read. And that all manner of like-minded people will spend all their time agreeing with each other and listening to no one else. And that this final culture-jam will be a world of simultaneous noise and silence, the sound of endlessly crashing waves on an empty beach.

(from “The WorldPaper”, August 1999)
President Trump and the Irony of American Exceptionalism

by Milton J. Bennett

As a US American who spends a lot of time in Europe, I have apparently picked up a tendency to appreciate irony. So along with other Europeans (and even a lot of Americans) I was struck during the US presidential campaign by the irony of a proudly rich and pathetically wannabe elitist guy claiming to speak for downtrodden workers, of a shady global businessman arguing for trade restriction, and of an aggressive bully crying his tweets out.

A really serious irony of the Trump triumph, though, concerns the myth of American exceptionalism. Trump’s campaign was based on the idea of unique American superiority, but it showed that the USA is actually no different than any number of other countries — democratic or totalitarian — that can be manipulated by a clever demagogue.

Trump’s successful slogan, “Make America Great Again,” is clearly an appeal to exceptionalism. It is no accident that Trump speaks of “America” and not “USA.” The term “USA” or “US American” denotes nationality and thus membership in the global family of nations. On the other hand, “America” is an appeal to the substantial portion of the population who don’t just think that the United States is unique (as famously noted by Alexis de Tocqueville), but who hold that American ideals are the acme of political development and the God-given perfection of society. This utopian belief in exceptionalism makes people vulnerable to a narrative in which the perfection must be protected from nefarious outside forces. Thus, ironically, exceptionalism breeds conventional compliance to authority.

President Obama once had a more nuanced view of exceptionalism, expressed in a 2009 Financial Times interview: “I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism.” This slight nod to cultural relativity generated a firestorm of protest from American nativists, and among a string of corrections was his 2014 statement to the US Military Academy, “I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being.” I suspect that Obama knows better, but at least in his presidential role he also knows better than to go against this strongest of American myths.

The Nobel Laureate physicist Max Born, himself a victim of Nazi persecution, said “the belief that there is only one truth, and that one’s self is in possession of it, is the root of all evil in the world.” No matter how good an idea seems to be – freedom, or human rights, or divine obedience – an unquestioned belief in it carries the seeds of intolerance and worse. In this case, the true believers in American exceptionalism have spawned President Donald Trump.
Stop Flogging a Dead Horse

Harnessing new tools in intercultural thought and practice

by George Simons at diversophy.com

A few years ago at the SIETAR Congress in Tallinn, Estonia, Milton Bennett made a short presentation calling into question the metaphors being used to explore culture, the iceberg being the most popular of these. Given the reaction of a number of people in the audience about his attempt to critique the limitations of metaphorical approaches, dear to many, I could perhaps have even titled this article, “Whose Ox is Being Gored?”, as various people object to his critique, feeling their business was being threatened.

The fact is that studies of culture are always in flux, as is culture itself. This means that metaphors and models are not the be-all and end-all, but the temptation to, perhaps unconsciously, become a “one size fits all” approach to our work. In the words of Doris Bachmann-Medick, “Rather than claiming culture to be an ‘original’ and particular context of traditions, it should be considered as an ‘impure’ mix of differing or contradictory experiences, meanings, multiple affiliations and respective power struggles.”

On the other hand, limiting oneself to a single paradigm, metaphor, or model of culture can turn out to be “flogging a dead horse”, not only a waste of time, but a danger of becoming a dangerous kind of blindness. In the words of Nobel Laureate physicist Max Born, himself a victim of Nazi persecution, “The belief that there is only one truth, and that one’s self is in possession of it, is the root of all evil in the world.”

While we are likely to be aware of the “great names” and current thought leaders in the intercultural field, we often lack a bigger picture of how their approaches are related to each other and how they have both developed and deviated from each other in attempting to identify and work with the dynamics of culture.

Courses in intercultural studies rarely if ever teach us about these broader dimensions of our work. We lack a good history, a philosophy and epistemology of intercultural studies, as well as an exploration of the culture of interculturalists from these varied perspectives. (Hint to those seeking areas for research or dissertation topics – these would be two very worthwhile projects.)

My purpose here is to highlight how there are underlying paradigms that have informed cultural research and practical models, learning about which may give us a better handle on when and how as well as when not to choose specific tools for our research and our practice. In this short space I can only call attention to a few important paradigms that have been driving both research and practice in the intercultural field over the years. We have come...
Stop Flogging...  
— continued

Social constructivism means knowledge is constructed through human activity.

a long way from the earliest interpretive approaches (the significance of cultural elements for the bearer of a culture) now arriving at the more current iconic trend (exploring the intrinsic purpose and logic of the visual), and the neuroscientific turn (biological interpretations of how culture functions in us). I would highly recommend Joseph Shaules’ recent book *The Intercultural Mind* for insight to the latter.

Most of us have perhaps recognized the linguistic turn (reality is man-made via systems of meaning). This led to the focus on linguistic analysis and the trend to social constructivism and the translational, cultural reflection, especially on the cultural and personal identity narrative, the latter most evident in the surge of popularity of storytelling as a medium for cultural understanding. This turn helped me personally and professionally to deepen my understanding of cultural behavior and its variations according to the contexts in which it occurs.

Sharing stories can also be enhanced by establishing themes for identity narrative explorations in small groups or in coaching sessions, e.g., such as those Kate Be rardo-Cox and I suggest in the Cultural Detective: Self-Discovery instrument, or something as simple as investigating the stories surrounding one’s names, an activity which I have been able to turn into a very satisfying full day workshop. More depth can be achieved by entering into personal dialogues with parts of oneself, a technique I first learned in my Gestalt Psychology training years ago and have begun to apply now, with the caution, of course, that one must protect personal boundaries as most of us are not doing therapy.

For example, in the pro bono project of creating diversophy® games for migrants and local communities, our team discovered that the dynamic of sharing stories and anecdotes in playing the game was by far the most important outcome, whereas the specific cultural information contained in the game was most useful not as content, but as triggers for the quality of contact and the dialogue they created for the players. We experienced a shift from one turn to another, both contributing to the final outcome.

The availability of multiple paradigms also challenges the positivistic constraints on humanistic disciplines as well as calls into question the tendency to abstraction found in dimensional approaches to culture. We are, reluctantly perhaps, beginning to accept the fact that scientific or statistical proof is not the only form of knowledge.

Likewise, dimensional labels are deceptive, not just because they are easily transformed into stereotypes, but...
because the stories behind them and the behaviors they generate can be quite different, even contradictory. Becoming aware of existing paradigms and those coming to the fore, we can examine and identify trends in our cultural understanding and in our intercultural work. Such trends include the **performative** (focus on the public presentation of the cultural self in our actions), the **postcolonial** (understanding the legacy of colonialism on culture and structure of cultural studies and policies), the **reflexive** (the rise of auto-ethnography as a cultural resource), the **translational** (the non-dichotomous reciprocity of cultural formation), and the **spatial** (how cultures are situated in, shaped by and themselves shape space).

Basically, we need to explore how we may be consciously or unconsciously using them, and how greater awareness of them can improve both our own day-to-day personal cultural competence as well as enrich the creativity and effectiveness of our training, coaching, and consulting interventions. Confusing? Yes, but what I would like to highlight is that our competence resides not in exhaustive knowledge of each of these turns, but in knowing and recognizing them well enough to provide us with flexibility in turning toward them to contribute multiple perspectives to our work and our understanding of others. Each of these turns has the potential to inform and empower our work as well as the hazard of limiting our understanding and effectiveness by becoming our single story (flogging the dead horse).

Culture wars are being waged in business, politics, economics and on battlefields as a result of such single stories. We need to examine and discuss the kinds of models and tools we are using for their relationship to the various paradigms. Thus both beginners and seasoned professionals have a broader framework in which they can contribute their perspectives and learn from each other. Certainly, the increasing polarization around identities in many parts of the world and the Othering of those not like us serve as wake-up calls for us to both listen and enter into discussion from multiple perspectives chosen and adapted to the best of our ability to the values and context of our interlocutors.
Welcome to Silicon Valley – wherever you happen to be. As an expatriate from the area in question, I am often plagued by unexplained neologisms arriving in my emails and text messages, to say nothing of the confusion that occurs when they are concatenated in audio messages without explanation. This book – I read it in the Kindle edition – arrived much like a caravan of medicine and foodstuffs to a long besieged town.

The authors have done their best to organize the fast-moving discourse of Valley Speak into categories that describe the functional areas of people management, technology and finance as well as work culture and lifestyle. These broader areas are broken down into over 100 mini-chapters focusing on specific expressions, their sources, and their connections to related words. Each expression is enriched by giving examples of use in everyday speech and writing as well as in quotations from persons involved in the culture and phenomena of Silicon Valley. Kopp and Ganz have done a splendid job in consistently hitting the inner rings of a moving target by their research and taking it further by crowdsourcing, not just the funding for the publication project, but for updating via ongoing crowdsourcing of content online.

Since culture and language are mutually creative and reinforcing, Kopp and Ganz have given us much more than a lexicon of the buzzwords found in the ever-expanding Silicon Valley culture. The richness of what this book contains probably cannot find its way into translate.google.com, though our search for new words in various cultures and languages will increasingly take us online these days. It is the overall impact and interconnection of the vocabulary discussed in the book that reveals a shape-shifting glocal culture in the process self-creation, reinvention and dissemination. It also suggests that the number of our ideas about the functioning of technology, the markets, capitalist economics and its politics may be fraying at the edges if not fully exhausted. It broadens our linguistic approaches to defining and studying cultures and culture itself.

Words label and disseminate not just abstract ideas, but the practices that we see, hear and feel around us when working together and attempting to communicate with each other. At the same time, they are “products” often created on the spot, designed for specific uses, tested by the users, subject to often uncontrolled proliferation and thus to inflation and exaggeration as well as exhaustion and dissolution.

Besides being personally and professionally concerned with the unending task of becoming culturally competent and attempting to pass on the strategies for this to my students and trainees, I remain a logophile who loves rooting for the etymology of words and their history. This is not the kind of book that you want to sit down and read in one sitting. There is simply too much to digest – learning a language one cannot be force fed but rather slowly tasted.

Reviewed by George Simons
The principal point made and supported by this textbook is that decolonization, besides being a political and legal challenge, has another dimension, equally challenging, on both personal and psychological levels. While interculturalists seek to raise consciousness in groups and organizations to increase respect for diversity and promote inclusion, they are not alone in this task. Assimilation into a new social environment, maybe more less traumatic depending on the nature of the person and their previous experience. However, the personal imprint of having been colonized is not simply bleached out by learning about cultures. More context is needed.

Beyond the need for building a fresh egalitarian environment in society, the mental and emotional baggage and damage of the experience of colonization is likely to fall to the responsibility of the counselor and the psychologist. People do not seek help on a personal level because they have been colonized; rather it is the impact of colonization that shows up beneath challenges to self-esteem, relationship problems, and the host of other things that send people in search of advice and help from mental health professionals.

While multicultural counseling has been a growing part of the curriculum for professional education and formation for some years now, it has still to realize the unfettered potential needed to fully do justice to situations involving social justice in which its diverse clientele is often trapped. This book tells how to identify those dynamics as well as providing insights into the directions that such work needs to take in a social justice framework. If this dimension and responsibility for it is not recognized, and adjustments are not made, interventions are more than likely to reinforce rather than alleviate the effects of colonialism.

Activism and advocacy, as we are coming to see it in other fields as well, is not separate from practice, but present at least in a higher level of consciousness and more focused quality of interventions that explore and address people’s deeper histories in the effort to improve adjustments or “fixes” to everyday life. The deeper identity narrative and context of its formation need to be recognized rather than ignored in the therapeutic process. It's not enough to bemoan the marginalization of a culture. Therapy must draw on the residual strengths that exist in the human narrative for health and well-being, whatever the identified problem for which a person seeks help. Helpers must be fully aware of the impact of social, economic, racial and ethnic biases integrated into that history.

It's necessary to deconstruct the models of education and intervention to discover where they fail in this regard, to see where a superficial multiculturalism impedes rather than aids healthy adjustment to one's own personality in the contexts that challenge it. Incisive essays look at inadequate models and norms of personality development applied in practice to certain groups such as Blacks, gays, Native Americans and
Decolonizing...
— continued

women, and how these approaches may unwittingly reinforce rather than alleviate marginalization. In therapeutic as well as intercultural interventions, tendencies to superficial essentialism must be recognized. Diagnosing malfunction by mainstream values is one of the negative outcomes of failing to recognize essentialist interpretation. Traditional as well as Increasing diversity and hybridity in the population are rap
idly contradicting earlier typecasting and assumptions, to the point where the distinction between general and multicultural counseling has become a false dichotomy.

Assumptions we make that contain norms reinforcing colonialism. For example, many helping professionals insist in affirming those who are different, but this is generally a practice done by those whose culture is dominant and therefore is likely to carry a message of condescension. While root practices of the counseling professions are sunk deep into the need to acculturate people to successful survival in their environment, it is the environment itself that functions on colonial premises. The counselor may not be aware of this if she or he or the professional curriculum has been designed and generated from their standards of the dominant environment. Lack of social justice is frequently the context of traumatic events and social conditions, such as poverty are operative sources of oppression in the patient’s life.

One must look into, for example, historical events that have led a community to address a particular issue. These events and how they are dealt with then become a part of the culture and the identity narratives of subsequent generations. Much of the same can be asked about the knowledge of the ongoing political social and economic conditions that directly affect members of a specific community.

Worth noting, the focus of this volume is largely on the USA with a couple of Australian outtakes. As both Anglo nations are heir to historically the world’s largest colonial empire, it would be interesting to hear from a more varied group. This is not criticism of the quality of the contributions, but a concern for variety.

Despite their subtlety, and occasionally blatancy, dominance discourses can be awarded social capital in contemporary US society and become self fulfilling prophecies in the lives of people. Such discourses tell the story of a people even before actions and events take place. The central ideal of cultural pluralism, while admirable and desirable, will never be possible until colonizing dominant discourses are identified and interrupted. Tacit collusion stemming from unconscious bias undermines therapy as well as intercultural work. This insight is encapsulated in the words of Howard Zinn, “One cannot be neutral on a moving train.”

Anthony J. Marsella blesses this project with a splendid and motivating afterword summary. Reviewed by George Simons
SIETAR Europa Congress 2017

Themes and Tracks

Dublin, Ireland
22-27 May 2017

CONFEREECE THEME:
21ST CENTURY WAVES OF CHANGE.
CULTURAL DEXTERITY FOR TURBULENT TIMES

Track 1: Business & Organizational Challenges:
What does it mean to work together?

Track 2: Sociopolitical concerns:
How can cultural sensitivity become part of
the creation and application of law,
media, health and educational systems?

Track 3: Shaping Intercultural Professions:
What are the current updates & fresh developments
in theory, methodology and practice?

Track 4: Practicing and shifting Perspective Change:
What are the opportunities and challenges of hybrid identities?

Track 5: Academic track

Interested?
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### Events, workshops, congresses

**Bath, United Kingdom**  
9-13 January 2017 & 27-31 March 2017  
Developing intercultural training skills  
This 5-day course is for trainers who wish to develop their knowledge and skills in the intercultural training field.

13-17 March 2017 & 26-30 June 2017  
Designing and delivering intercultural training  
This 5-day course is a follow-up to the above course, also suitable for trainers who already have experience in the intercultural field. More information at www.lts-training.com/ICTCourse.htm or contact adrian.pilbeam@lts-training.com

**Winchester, U.K.**  
14 -17 February, 2017  
*Lewis Model - Train the Trainer*  
This course is particularly suited for training purposes as it is simple, practical and communication-based. It will be held at Riversdown House near Winchester. The main trainer is Michael Gates. SIETAR members receive a 20% discount. More information at michael.gates@rlcglobal.com

**Milan, Italy**  
5 - 6 May, 2017  
IX SIETAR Italia Annual Conference  
— Multicultural Identities: Understanding the Sense of Belonging  
The notion of identity — be it personal, religious, ethnic or national — is important to interculturalists. SIETAR ITALIA has chosen the subject for its 9th conference and will explore the ambivalences, fluctuations and modalities which underpin multicultural identities. Those who have worked on the subject of “identity” are welcome to propose papers or presentations. Deadline is the 10th of January, 2017. For more information on proposing a paper, please go to http://www.sietar-italia.org/en/

**Dublin, Ireland**  
22 - 27 May 2017  
SIETAR Europa Congress 2017  
This five-day event will have as its theme: 21st Century Waves of Change: Cultural Dexterity for Turbulent Times. This congress welcomes all those whose life and work puts them at the interface of cultures, from the perspectives of economy, society, and education with the aim of reshaping intercultural discourse, questioning our current cultural paradigms and exploring new thinking to help us navigate complexity in our emerging global world. Thus our congress title mirrors this need. For more information, write to: dublin2017@sietareu.org or click: http://www.sietareu.org/activities/dublin-congress-2017

**Winterthur, Switzerland**  
15 - 16 June, 2017  
Tools for Intercultural Training  
This two-day workshop will explore topics related to intercultural training and teamwork as well as debriefing ready-to-use simulations and games. The focus is on activities that enable the participants to interact with the content and help them process, recall, adapt, and apply them to improve their professional and organizational productivity. The facilitators are Dr. Sivasailam “Thiagi” Thiagarajan and Samuel van den Bergh. More information at http://diversityandinclusion.net/en/

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**Online Everyday**  
The SIETAR Europa group, discussing  
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on LinkedIn, has now over 8000 members. Plus it offers videos, articles, books, tools for the intercultural profession.

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