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**'“Intercultural” ’ Performance in Wales and India: Welsh and Khasi Cultural Dialogues'**

In this paper I am seeking to investigate the idea of the intercultural in relation to an interdisciplinary project, called 'Welsh and Khasi Cultural Dialogues', conducted between Welsh and Indian scholars in both Wales and India. The project investigates the shared cultural history of the Welsh people and the Khasi people of northeast India, and the influence of this history on cultural identities. Colonial history, as historian Andrew Porter points out, has been 'shaped by the encounters of different peoples within the framework of Empire' (Porter, 1999, p.19). Both Welsh and Khasi people have responded to different forms of colonialism; have become complicit with Empire, and have sought to define themselves anew as distinct cultures against prevailing colonial pressures. And at a particular point in history the Khasi and the Welsh have done this in relation to each other. In the most basic sense the project could be said to be investigating the history of a certain set of 'intercultural' relationships, but what does this mean exactly, and what bearing does it have on the ways in which the project works, bearing in mind that the concept of interculturalism in the theatre has been problematised many times.

This project engages with a past history of shared cultural exchange and also seeks to analyse and reflect upon this relationship through the medium of performance and of film, creating a new iteration and perpetuation of this relationship from Welsh and Indian/Khasi perspectives. In making this statement I'm very aware that I speak as a white, Welsh, European, Western woman; yet I'm making work with my colleagues Dr Aparna Sharma, Indian ethnographer and documentary film-maker, and Prof Desmond Kharmawphlang, Khasi poet and folklorist. Crucial to this statement of my own positionality is the acknowledgement in the work of our respective points of views, cultures, belief systems, artistic sensibilities and ways of working. We are not seeking any kind of totalising worldview that captures our similarities in the work itself; it is precisely our cultural differences that we seek to uncover, especially those that have been compromised, eroded, or more or less eradicated by colonial relationships. This project is not about a Western interpretation of the uses of Indian theatre or culture in Western form. I come to the project with my culture alone (or at least, what appears to be my culture). Interculturalism in our project involves a consideration of the fluid, accidental and sometimes unrecognised exchanges between peoples (and those who historically have not shared equal relationships). It is not contained by a moment in time or the time of the performance event, rather the intercultural here has happened over a long period of time – and is almost forgotten. In Wales and the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya we see a crossing of cultures wrought through an uneven power relationship, where dominant culture is often pressed into and onto indigenous cultural patterns, yet the indigenous culture is also absorbed in unconscious ways by the hegemonic. In a way, our work seeks to explore the indirect, unexpected or unintended consequences of cultural interactions that stem from

specific political, social and religious aims. This is further complicated by the fact that the Welsh and Khasi communities have remained within themselves; there is no history of migration per se and the communities have remained in contact through a process of reflection from a distance, fuelled by a degree of cultural exchange.

We're still in the project's first two years where we're researching the general landscape for the project and trying to explore specific questions; in the later half, the last two years of the project, we're involved in creative practice, in making performances and short documentary films, as well as exhibitions, that attempt to provide an experiential encounter and understanding of this history of cultural exchange. We haven't yet started to make work, but I'll mention many of the issues that arise in thinking about the practice that is to come and in relation to intercultural practice. It would be useful also for me to provide an outline of what I mean by intercultural, especially considering its problematics within theatre and performance studies.

While remaining alert to the complex and contentious divergences of views regarding the intercultural, I want to acknowledge the 'inter-cultural' not as an empty in-between space but as reflective of the historical 'entanglement' of Welsh and Khasi cultures, an inter | cultural meshing that is in some cases almost impossible to detect. As Bharucha states: in a historical context 'when importations and borrowings become indigenized' at some point in time, the intercultural ceases'.<sup>1</sup> And this has certainly happened, to an extent, with Welsh and Khasi cultures and their influences

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<sup>1</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice*, p. 32.

on one another. In most cases unfolding the history of the influences of two (or more) cultures on each other entails recognising fully the impact of the power relationships implicit in such interactions, and on numerous cultures. Julie F. Codell and Dianne Sachko MacLeod have described the discourses of colonialism as ‘an unstable chorus of conflicts and struggles voice by multiple participants (not just two dichotomously opposed sides)’<sup>2</sup> and lament the fact that there has been little examination of the complex cultural interactions of colonized and colonizers. This area of cultural interaction is called by Lisa Lowe a ‘heterotopia’, ‘a space of otherness and crisis, filled with overlapping, shifting articulations.’<sup>3</sup> The problems of articulating the crisis in the Welsh-Khasi relationship part of the problem with the history of the Welsh and Khasi relationship and the way it has been recorded and discussed, and the reason why the Welsh missionary presence in India has ‘never fully entered the mainstream of what constitutes British postcolonial history in Wales.’<sup>4</sup> The Welsh have been reticent to analyse and deal with this part of their history. We can add to this the fact that the histories of mission written by its insiders, and the critiques of the mission as imperial agents (‘colonialism’s Trojan horse’<sup>5</sup>), have together tended to undervalue an

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<sup>2</sup> Julie F. Codell and Dianne Sachko Macleod, ‘Orientalism transposed: the ‘Easternization’ of Britain and interventions to colonial discourse’, in Codell and Macleod, *Orientalism Transposed: The Impact of the Colonies on British Culture* (Ashgate, 1998), pp. 1-10 (3).

<sup>3</sup> See Coddell and Macleod p. 2, but also Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Aled Jones, ‘Welsh Missionary Journalism in India, 1880-1947’ in Julie F. Coddell (ed.), *Imperial Co-Histories: National Identities and the British Colonial Press* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), pp. 242-272 (242).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew May, ‘Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Exchange’, 2010, p.81.

appreciation of intercultural exchanges, and their implications for the formation of different identities.

In actuality, the relationships founded by missionary impact are exceedingly complex. According to historian Andrew Porter ‘No stark dichotomy between ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’ conveys either the range of local responses to Britain’s missionary presence or the extent of missionary adaptation to local cultures. All parties are engaged consciously and unconsciously, in a constant process of mutual engagement and two-way translation, even when unqualified dislike, conservatism, and incomprehension could easily be found on all sides.’<sup>6</sup> Anthropologist Peter Van der Veer argues that national cultures in both India and Britain developed in relation to a shared colonial experience. Rejecting the idea that the metropole is the centre of cultural production while the periphery only develops derivative, imitative culture he states that ‘Both colonizer and colonized were intimately connected and transformed through a shared process of colonization’<sup>7</sup>. In order to ‘lay out fields of historical interaction and encounter’, he, adopts a perspective he calls ‘interactional history’, which he describes as an attempt to go ‘beyond the national story and get at some of the fragments without losing coherence in the telling of the tale.’<sup>8</sup> He also warns of the pitfalls that are implicit in imagining a time-lag in which ‘blueprints of a finished nation-state are exported to less-evolved societies via colonialism’ because this may

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Porter, ‘Religion and Empire’, in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, The Nineteenth Century* (OUP, 1999), pp. 222-246 (239).

<sup>7</sup> Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters, Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, p. 8.

lead to misunderstanding ‘the processual and differential nature of nation-state formation’, as well as overlooking the fact that the people of both Britain and India are implicitly involved in imagining different kinds of ‘nation’ communities.<sup>9</sup> Whilst the expansion of British power and the creation of a national culture in Britain are commonly perceived to be unconnected there is evidence that culture in both Britain and India developed in relation to a shared experience: (and these are van der Veer’s words) ‘in the same period that Britain was colonizing India, England was colonizing Great Britain, trying to unify what was not yet (and will only partially be) the united kingdom’.<sup>10</sup>

During the nineteenth century both Welsh and Khasi peoples were involved in a re-invention of their sense of identity in relation to events taking place in the world. Attempts to establish the supremacy of English as a colonial language had already been established in Thomas Babington Macaulay’s minute on Indian Education (1835) under which the British policy for educating the Indian population in English was set out and accepted as the basis official policy in India. This was the colonial framework for education that came to be adopted in relation to minority languages in Britain. <sup>11</sup> Historian Aled Jones has shown that the missionary enterprise in Victorian Wales was bound up in identity issues and (these are his words) ‘undertaken in order to transform the Welsh into a literate and educated society that met current aspirations to social and moral notions of liberal ‘respectability’; which was a response to the

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<sup>9</sup> Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, pp. 31-2.

<sup>10</sup> Peter van der Veer, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> See Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books, Wales and Colonial Prejudice* (Cardiff: UWP, 1998), p.58.

deeply affecting indictment of Welsh morality in the Blue Books of 1847 (or to give them their correct title, the Report of the Royal Commission on Education in Wales), which had a profound impact on the way in which the Welsh viewed themselves in relation to the world.<sup>12</sup> The report sought to denigrate the Welsh (particularly women), their language and culture, as backward, immoral, and animalistic. The report is seen as one of the most significant events in the history of 19<sup>th</sup> C Wales because of its lasting significance on shaping attitudes regarding what it means to be Welsh and therefore on the development of Welsh identity. In many ways it led to an obsession in Welsh literary culture with propaganda on the virtues of the Welsh people – respectability, religious morality, and loyalty to the British crown. This challenged the verdict of the Reports but endorsed the social, cultural and political values underpinning them, and ended up affirming the supremacy of the English language in the spheres of education, economics and political life. In the 1850s and 1860s the language of this report is prevalent in cultural critiques by Welsh missionaries of the communities in India that they sought to convert. This is a history then of deep inter cultural entanglements.

The specific Welsh-Khasi cultural relationship is rooted in the missionary contact established in the mid-nineteenth century by the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist mission in the Khasi hills, and the cultural processes that are a consequence of this interaction. This mission begins in 1840 following the formation of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists missionary society in Liverpool, with the first missionary Thomas Jones (1810-1849), and Ann Jones (1812-1845), his wife, undertaking the long voyage to

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<sup>12</sup> Aled Jones, 'Culture, Race, and the Missionary Public in Mid-Victorian Wales', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, November 2005, 10:2, 158-9.

India and arriving in Cherrapunji (or Sohra) in 1841. Thomas Jones was a Welshman, and as such is described by historian Andrew May as ‘in a sense a colonized colonizer of an area of India that is now 70% Christian (in a country where Christians comprise less than 3% of the population).’<sup>13</sup> Referred to as the founding father of the Khasi alphabet and literature, Jones is renowned for codifying the Khasi language into a written script based on Welsh language orthography, and for starting to translate the Bible into Khasi, a task completed by others by 1891. For safeguarding their language by establishing its written form, and thereby strengthening a profound sense of national identity, Jones acquired the status of religious and secular hero among the Khasi people. This act of translation is of momentous significance to the Khasis; not only is it the moment when oral culture becomes enscribed, facilitating a different form of social and cultural interaction, but the act has mythical implications. In one of their originary myths, the Khasis tell of the great flood in which many died. Of those who survived a Khasi and a stranger both gathered the books of their peoples and attempted to carry them across the waters. The stranger placed his books on his head, and was able to swim to safety with the books intact. The Khasi however, was too short, and his books were lost. In one version, he places the books in his mouth, and swallows them, and from thence onwards must carry his knowledge inside himself. Thomas Jones was not only a stranger, but in terms of Khasi legend, brought back the book.

Between the time of Thomas Jones and the establishment of the mission church and

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew May, ‘The Promise of a Book: Missionaries and Native Evangelists in North-east India’, in P. Grimshaw & A. May (eds), *Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Exchange* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), p.82

school in Nongsawlia, Cherrapunji, the mission movement established further communities (of churches, schools, colleges, hospitals and medical services etc) in the Khasi Hills, further afield in Sylhet and the plains of Assam (in what is now Bangladesh), and following this, in Lushai, Cachar, and eventually Mizoram, forming the three waves of the Welsh missionary movement in the north east, between 1841 and 1969. This movement had a profound affect on the tribal cultures in this area (an area that, prior to the establishment of British India, was not considered to be part of India at all). It remained for the British a so-called 'backward tract' and was never fully integrated into its administration. Today, the state of Meghalaya is governed by a legislative assembly as an autonomous state, and 50 of its 65 assembly seats are reserved for members of scheduled tribes. While this is a tribal area and 30% of the population practice Ka Niam Khasi, the indigenous faith, over 70% of the Khasi population are said to be Christian, and the majority of these Presbyterian.

Following India's independence in 1947 foreign missionaries were required to leave the country and the last Welsh missionaries returned home in 1969. Between 1841 and 1969, they had undertaken extensive cultural production based on exchange with the Khasi people, leaving behind a scattered and complex body of literature and performance in both the Khasi Hills and Wales, including letters, hymns and folksongs, pamphlets, writings in denominational magazines, diaries, travel films and writing, a vast body of photographic material, as well as creative writing, poetry, plays and pageants.

The impact of religious belief on cultural exchange is central to our project, but is far from straightforward. Whilst there is clear evidence of early missionaries participating

in the imperial approach to 'civilising' local communities, of colonial governments supporting missionary enterprise, and of substantial resistance to the mission itself; the relation between religion and empire was ambiguous. Opposition to Nonconformist missionaries was strong, initially, from the East India Company, and then from the early British administration. In many instances, 'Christians and their churches provided powerful stimuli for local resistance and opposition to colonial rule.'<sup>14</sup> According to Andrew Porter: 'Recipients of mission education by 1914 were everywhere among the most effective and articulate critics of Britain's presence and the mainstays of embryonic nationalist movements.'<sup>15</sup>

While much of Khasi society has assimilated Christianity alongside its own indigenous belief system, the missionary impetus has also been resisted, provoking an indigenous nationalist movement for self-assertion and a native revivalism. This is complicated further by the fact that religion, within the mission movement, was bound to issues of national character (language, literature, race, notions of civilization etc.), and this is particularly evident in relation to the Welsh mission where linguistic nationalism and Nonconformity were inextricably linked. The relationship between the legacy of mission, the Presbyterian Church of India and the Khasi cultural movement is still a highly complex area to negotiate.

I want to outline two examples of the historical and cultural entanglements that specifically show a Welsh reading of the mission and its role in relation to Welsh

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Porter, p. 223

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Porter, p. 240

identity. As the Mission movement sought to raise funds, congregations in Wales were eager to celebrate their role in a worldly enterprise. It is worth emphasising the scale of the colonial performances staged in Wales, and the way in which theatre and other methods of display that were part of the broader exhibitionary complex of the time, were used as instruments of power. Representations of the exotic other, the imitation of primitive rituals and oriental forms of culture have all been part of the broader British missionary movement,<sup>16</sup> and were the focus of the explicitly imperial exhibitions staged around Britain and the Empire (in Bombay and Calcutta for instance) between the 1880s and the 1920s, culminating in the great Empire Exhibition in Wembley in 1924-5.<sup>17</sup> Whilst the Imperial connection and the focus on Empire was the drive for these larger exhibitions, the localised Welsh missionary exhibitions, had a different function; in Wales the exhibition was not about accumulated wealth and power, but rather the social, moral and religious needs of the people the mission sought to convert (and due to the desire on behalf of the Welsh to cast themselves in a very specific light). The elaborate missionary pageants staged, for instance, in Caernarfon Castle in 1929 and in Liverpool in 1931, had casts of hundreds of performers (350+) , all actors from drama societies associated with the chapel. Called *Pasiant y Newyddion Da* (The Pageant of Glad Tidings) and written by Cynan (Albert Evans-Jones – arch-druid at Nat Eisteddfod, and Lord Chamberlain’s representative in Wales), it depicted the coming of the Holy Grail to Wales and the spread of

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<sup>16</sup> Julie Stone Peters in *Imperialism and Theatre* (ed. J. Ellen Gainor) (Routledge, 1995), p.201.

<sup>17</sup> See John MacKenzie, ‘Empire and Metropolitan Cultures’ in Andrew Porter, (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, The Nineteenth Century* (OUP, 1999), pp. 270-293 (283).

Christianity worldwide; portraying the contemporary mission endeavour as a continuation of this narrative. The scale of the practice was made possible by the widespread presence of the dramatic movement in Wales since 1880, that enabled a repertoire of staging practices and of performers, coming together here for spectacular romantic pageants, as well as shorter ‘entertainments’ put on as part of the programme of events for the touring ‘colonial exhibitions’ (that included dramatic presentations of ‘Indian’ traditions, films, and plays such as *A Brahminian Marriage* or *Priodas Fohametaidd*, the representation of Indian villages and bazaars and reenactments of Khasi customs and rituals such as divination through the breaking of eggshells). All performances were designed to excite the sympathies of the audience. This widespread sociocultural movement– the Welsh dramatic movement – that operated via the chapel, provided the perfect structure within which to perform and sustain the narrative of the mission and is rich material for exploring the way in which the colonial implications of this relationship was reflected in Welsh society of the time. The colonial exhibitions travelled extensively throughout Wales and had the added attraction of presentations by missionaries who had returned from the field on ‘furlough’. These were lavish fundraising events; some included, for instance, in Aberystwyth University Hall in 1927, a ‘tea garden’ experience, where tables and chairs were placed in tiers before the frame of the main stage, under the shadow of a backdrop of the Taj Mahal. Visitors could literally perform their support of the missionary (and the colonial) endeavour, by drinking tea on stage. Photographs from these exhibitions display the extent to which participants were eager to perform and

immerse themselves in a representation of the exotic other, either as performers taking part in daily drama performances or as part of the exhibitionary complex at play.<sup>18</sup>

Cultural production did not come to an end with the closure of the mission. It took form in travel writing and poetry, for instance in the work of Welsh poet Nigel Jenkins (1995), and Khasi poet Desmond Kharmawphlang, amongst others. Welsh concepts emerge in Khasi literature and writing, for instance, in one of the major works on the Khasi national poet Soso Tham (1873-1940), written by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, called *Hiraeth and the Poetry of Soso Tham* (2012).

Other forms of inter cultural practice took hold in the Khasi Hills, recalling Christopher Balme's definition of a kind of 'theatrical syncretism', where indigenous performative responses to imperialism, colonisation and decolonisation, involve the syncretising of indigenous performance practices with western theatrical traditions.<sup>19</sup> Today, in the Khasi village of Mawlyngbna, during the spring *Shad Suk Mynsiem* (happy heart dance) festival, two days of theatre take place in the community hall, which is located next to the Presbyterian Church. The three day festival begins with the indigenous dance that was revived during the early 20thC. The remainder of the festival involves the staging of plays performed on an undoubtedly European stage, with numerous side wings, an ornate backdrop depicting a traditional Khasi village, numerous falling backdrops along the depth of the stage, and a trap door opening onto

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<sup>18</sup> See further John M. Mackenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures' in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (OUP, 1999), pp. 270-293 (284 ff.).

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Balme, *Decolonising the Stage*, p.8

a pit filled with water into which comedic characters fall. It brings to mind Bharucha's writing on the concept of the 'invention of tradition' in Indian theatre, and the way that it has been mediated by 'the colonial machinery of the nineteenth-century theatre, the conventions of stage tricks derived from the pantomimes and historical extravaganzas of the English Victorian stage', though 'thoroughly Indianized through music, song, colour, pathos, melodrama and the histrionic delivery of lines that are intrinsically a part of the popular theatrical tradition of India.'<sup>20</sup> The three day event is organised by *Ka Seng Khasi*, 'the Khasi society, established in 1899 in order to defend indigenous Khasi culture against colonial influences. It has been responsible for driving the cultural renaissance in Khasi language, literature and society throughout the 20thC, and introduced theatre as part of a conscious nationalist movement. Vehemently opposed to the Presbyterian mission's portrayal of *Ka Niam Khasi*, the indigenous religion, which was portrayed by early British ethnographers as well as early missionaries as an animistic and primitive belief system, members of *Ka Seng Khasi*, the majority of them educated by the West, revived or invented such festivals as events in which to celebrate indigenous culture.

I want to return to interculturalism in practice now. Bharucha defines interculturalism as 'interacting with other cultures through the specific disciplines and languages of theatre'.<sup>21</sup> For us, the intercultural extends to the content of culture itself, both Khasi and Welsh cultures, and the quest to find processes through which this may be interpreted or presented in performance, but, we're unsure about what inter-

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<sup>20</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *Theatre and the World*, p.193

<sup>21</sup> Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice*, p.3.

culturalism in practice might mean. What we seek to make in practice has to account for different ways of seeing in relation to our social, cultural and political histories, otherwise how are we to meet each other in the work.<sup>22</sup> All subjects involved -- Welsh, Khasi, and those identified in more pan-Indian terms, are negotiating quite particular and sometimes divergent experiences of colonial modernities. Post-independence India, following the path of modern nation building, seeks a more homogenous national fabric in which sub-nationalist sentiments such as those of communities in northeast India are seen as conflicting with the national enterprise. A similar statement could be made in relation to Welsh identity within a British context. And so we're aware that our practice will involve a writing/performing against the grain of majority sensibilities. It is about the particular, the specific; the cultural situation wrought by the social, historical, economic and political realities. And while we're in no way attempting to situate our practice outside the sphere of global systems of power, it nevertheless, in different ways, voices a need to be recognised as subject of certain global power relations, and in this context, seeks to structure a system of artistic operation that rejects these relations. In doing so, it may be that the work will exist for very specific audiences, and unable to operate in the global context of Western majority cultures. What does it mean in terms of audience to perform in Khasi and Welsh? The work exists for those people intimately bound up with the history of Welsh-Khasi relationships, though it is certainly not designed to be closed off, or separate.

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<sup>22</sup> See Bharucha, *Theatre and the World*, p.242.

The discourse on intercultural theatre and performance often implies a space in between cultures, and whilst there may be possibilities in this, as Ric Knowles points out when he says that ‘interculturalism evokes the possibility of interaction across a multiplicity of cultural positionings avoiding binary codings’<sup>23</sup>, we are looking for something that doesn’t assume this space between as a blank canvas, against which diverse cultural materials can be pieced together - a process that colludes in the political subjugation of cultures and ways of life. Space, in fact, may not be the appropriate metaphor, despite the seemingly infinite possibilities of theatrical space. There is no such thing as empty space after all, and if space is socially constructed between people, then we must acknowledge fully the place where we are making work, who we are, and who comes to it to participate. This is not the meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions, seeking new ways of working. We’re investigating and unravelling aspects of shared cultures that have influenced each other over time. What exploring these on a practical level means, we are yet to find out.

Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta’s evocation of interculturalism as ‘a state of mind, as much as a way of working’, and ‘as a form of intertextualism’, that can be understood to be dialogic, chimes very much with our understandings of how we may appropriately interact in an artistic context.<sup>24</sup> In describing the project we often make reference to Dwight Conquergood’s concept of ‘dialogic performance’, a performative

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<sup>23</sup> Ric Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta, *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from PAJ* (PAJ Books, 1991), p.11.

stance that 'struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another.'<sup>25</sup> Dialogic performance involves recognising that both the researcher and the researched are implicated in the meaning-making process, and this self-reflexive aspect is the reason why we foreground ourselves as practitioners in the research itself. Part of our daily ways of working involves discussions over skype, or waiting for the next days email – we can only collaborate in time and space while we are together in India or Wales. This has made us aware of movements across countries, time differences, cultures.

In a forthcoming article, co-written by co-investigator Aparna Sharma and myself, we've highlighted the possibilities of the prefix 'trans' to suggest the way the project is both constituted in and reflects certain movements and processes – between landscapes (Wales and Meghalaya), media (archival materials, literature, music, poetry, film) and ourselves as researchers in dialogue with one another. Here, 'trans' is a shared condition provoked by movement through which cultural identities and experiences are questioned, constituted and reconstituted in relation to wider currents of history. 'Trans' recalls the experience of crossing, of moving beyond, geographically and culturally, both in the past and the present and it harbours the suggestion of moving through and of change, where cultural practices shift, diffuse or merge. Practice will be a site in which we examine this point - where one cultural iteration may become 'the other side of' its self - while being acutely aware of the power relations implicit in this movement.

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<sup>25</sup> Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (The University of Michigan Press, 2013), p. 75.

At the heart of our work is the question of how creative practice might facilitate an understanding of the history and implications of colonial exchange. We are working towards an experiential encounter relating to the Welsh-Khasi relationship over time, and are using an approach that uses art making as a research method offering complex and competing cultural epistemologies.

So, how are we to engage with creative practice in such a way that we are able together, as Indian and Welsh practitioners, encounter each other and in relation to our shared cultural history? How are we to find a shared methodology for practice? We've realised that perhaps our work will acknowledge and confront difference conceptually and in terms of form. Already, we understand that we are seeing and understanding the same landscapes and places with different eyes and this has enabled rich discussion. And perhaps our divergent backgrounds in film and performance enable us to work through different modes which accentuate or heighten difference. By coincidence, Aparna's doctoral research was influenced by Eisenstein's montage theory and my own looked at the contribution of Meyerhold's theories of performance to 20thC European theatre through practice. In short, this means we've both worked through a highly structured juxtaposing of elements within an artwork in order to affect an idea or have an impact beyond the individual images or elements of composition. The coming together of film and performance techniques relating to montage may itself involve a dialectical process, a relationship of conflict resulting in a new form.

In thinking our way through the practice as we talk of its construction we find ourselves working in different and discrete areas. We are aware, however, that our practices are being structured in a way that discloses a desire to be placed next to the other. So as well as stand alone short films and performances, we are working towards an installation comprised of performance, film and photography elements. In this way our work may be presented together or apart. We are also engaged in critical writing, and our thinking in this sphere impacts on the practice and vice versa. All the elements are being positioned to interact with one another.

Articulating shared histories through creative practice will not only share the nature of historical intercultural practices and their influences, but will start to unfold the historical inventions at the basis of postcolonial identities. When we look at the historical basis of the cultural exchange we're unable to remove ourselves from the intercultural, though we wish to move beyond it, and it is our hope that the work itself will do this.

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