

**Dr Sean McLoughlin**  
**From Diaspora to Multi-Locality: Writing British Asian Cities**  
**End of Year Report for 2007**

The highlights so far have been five steering committee meetings, four city events, developing the website, organising the symposium and planning the final edited collection. Issues that have come to the fore of our discussions are as follows:

- The significance of imperial legacies and contemporary city images in the national imagination e.g. the north / south of England, different extents of adaptation to post-industrial and post-colonial contexts. The importance of not writing non-South Asians out of accounts e.g. class / ethnicity and other diasporas in the history of specific localities such as the East End of London.
- Framing diaspora, migration & identity in the multi-local processes of :  
i) community, locality and ethnic institutionalisation – social, economic, political, cultural and religious re-production / organising; ii) generation and socio-cultural change: hybrid youth cultures (e.g. music, sport and ‘secular’ resistance to racism); iii) public recognition, political leadership and changing patterns of mobilisation on local / national levels (race, multiculturalism, cohesion); iv) globalisation, trans-locality and the turn to religious identities
- The tension between British academic history with its emphasis on official documents and oral history with its concern for peoples’ voices. A lack of interest in South Asians in Britain amongst the former but a lack of meta- analysis or contextualisation in the latter.
- The question of the politics of writing and the unequal power of voices and texts; who is writing and for whom; reproducing and contesting authenticities; the structure of the mainstream publishing business; what gets left out of accounts; the importance of writing the cities in South Asian vernaculars; which ‘break’ with the past is key - diaspora or globalised colonial modernity; to what extent does the transmission of South Asian popular culture (the main residual space of the ‘Asian’?) depend upon processes of commodification?
- Can Arts and Humanities research escape the dominant discourse of researching ‘problems’ which seems so prevalent in policy / the social sciences? Are tropes such as ‘the problem of integration’ shared across all disciplines? Or, does Arts and Humanities’ work complicate / resist hegemonic discourses e.g. through positive accounts of agency, imagination, expression and identity? Or, are such accounts inevitably relying on the displacing of ‘problems’. Is hegemony ever complete? Can one only study discourses of power? What are the limits of Foucauldian analysis?

The network website is at [www.leeds.ac.uk/writingbritishasiancities/](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/writingbritishasiancities/). So far, resources lodged on the website include short introductions to the cities, city event programmes, a list of participants, reports of the discussions on each day, some papers and miscellaneous links to other web resources. We are beginning to add more sound and vision – see the additions to the Bradford page by Irna Qureshi for an example of what could be achieved. A resource enhancement grant application is a future possibility in this regard @ £500-1000 / city. A number of scholars have also registered their details on a database.

In January 2007 McLoughlin, Zavos and Eade submitted a large grant proposal to the AHRC / ESRC Religion and Society programme. Unfortunately, however, this bid was unsuccessful. In March 2007 McLoughlin, Gould, Tomalin and Eade were joined by two other paper-givers (one an AHRC DMI grant holder) at a panel organised for the British Association for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge. Another panel, at the European Conference of Modern South Asian Studies, is being organised for July 2008 in Manchester.

Research engagement with non-academic stakeholders has been one of the highlights of the project. This is facilitated in two ways: i) through our steering committee and ii) through our city based events. Our steering committee has brought us into close conversation with key stakeholders – Aki Nawaz, a London-based musician, and Irna Qureshi, a Bradford-based oral historian and freelance researcher – both of whom have contributed fruitfully to discussions.

In 2007 two city events organised in Manchester and Leicester were held not in academic institutions but in a British-Asian business and a community centre respectively. The Manchester event featured representatives from the Manchester Education Authority and Manchester Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education, Tameside Local Studies Unit, the editor of a Manchester-based literary magazine and two Manchester-based British-Asian poets (one performance being filmed by a satellite TV company). The Leicester event featured the acting Chief Executive of the Race Equality Centre, the Chair of the Federation of Muslim Organisations of Leicestershire, representatives of the East Midlands Economic Network and local people involved in sports, dance and business.

Organisation for the final symposium at the University of Leeds, 17-18 March 2008, is well under way. A full proposal for an edited book based on the symposium working papers has been prepared. It includes abstracts for 10 chapters authored by the steering committee. A publisher is still being sought with publication late 2009.