

Institution: University of South Wales		
Unit of Assessment: 33A Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Welsh and Khasi Cultural Dialogues: raising awareness, affecting working practices and allowing for greater understanding of the artistic process		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 08/2013 -12/2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Lisa Lewis Dr Helen Davies	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Theatre and Performance (Principal Investigator on Welsh and Khasi Cultural Dialogues) Research Assistant	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 04/2002 onwards 10/2015-12/2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The history of the cultural exchange between the Welsh and the Khasi people of North East India is little known. In times of social and cultural division worldwide, awareness of how our cultural identities have been formed through transcultural relationships and how our histories have been defined by differing colonial/postcolonial contexts is crucial. Research by Professor Lisa Lewis at the Centre for Media and Culture in Small Nations (CMCSN) led to the Welsh and Khasi Cultural Dialogues project. This was shared via 28 public performances and 5 exhibitions by Indian and Welsh practitioners (in India and Wales) between 2017 - 2020 and has (1) raised awareness of this history amongst communities in both countries, enabling participants from minority cultures to discuss their identities in relation to colonial/postcolonial history; (2) affected working practices of participant artists; (3) resulted in greater understanding of how artistic practice can reveal complex and hidden histories.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The cultural exchange between the Welsh and the Khasi peoples is an understudied area of research. The Khasi people, an indigenous ethnic group of North East India, are a designated Scheduled Tribe under the Constitution of India. The relationship is rooted in the history of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission to the Khasi-Jaintia Hills (now the state of Meghalaya) in North East India between 1841 and 1969. Following India's independence in 1947, all foreign missionaries were required to leave the country over a period of time. Until the Welsh mission closed in 1969 its representatives undertook extensive cultural production based on exchange with the Khasi people, leaving behind a complex body of literature and performance (letters, hymns and folksongs, writings, travel films and writing, photography, and poetry). The intercultural processes that are a consequence of this interaction are not widely recognised and there has been a timely need to examine people's experiences in relation to their memories of the mission and to analyse the implications of this history for contemporary postcolonial identities. This has been difficult, historically, because at the closing of the mission in the 1960s, both the Welsh and Khasi communities remained within themselves and there was no sustained diasporic relationship.</p> <p>Professor Lisa Lewis of the CMCSN, University of South Wales, conducted research on the performance of history and memory for her 2018 monograph <i>Performing Wales</i> (3.1), which proposes ideas for considering performance as a bind that ties people, memory and place. These ideas were investigated further in a transcultural context in 'Welsh and Khasi Cultural Dialogues' (2015-2019), an interdisciplinary project in performance, film and music, funded by The Leverhulme Trust (3.2). Lewis was principal investigator, with co-investigator Dr Aparna Sharma (World Arts and Cultures/Dance, UCLA). Other research team members included project consultant Prof. Desmond Kharmawphlang (Creative and Cultural Studies, North-Eastern Hill University Shillong, India); Senior Research Assistant Dr Helen Davies (USW); and Welsh musician Gareth Bonello who completed a PhD on the Khasi-Welsh exchange in music in 2020. Collaborating artists in the core team included Welsh actor Rhys ap Iffor, Khasi actor Lapdiani Syiem and Khasi musician Benedict Hynñiewta. Other collaborating</p>		

artists participated in performances in both countries. The project was conducted in two parts, involving a variety of methods used to investigate and respond to the history of the Welsh-Khasi exchange:

1. Archive-based research in India and Wales and ethnographic fieldwork in both countries that arrived at key research themes:
 - **The ways in which transcultural contact complicates the understanding of colonial history and impacts on post-colonial identities.**

Between October 2015 and October 2017, the team investigated the effects of Welsh and Khasi cultures on each other (stemming from the presence of the Welsh Presbyterian mission in the Khasi Hills, 1841-1969) and what this has meant for the way that national identity is culturally performed. Research with local people in India and Wales revealed complex paradoxes of feeling related to the history of the Welsh mission in the Khasi Hills, which complicate simplistic definitions of colonial relationships (3.3).

- **The ways in which the perceived 'peripheral' situation of both the Welsh and Khasi advanced their cultural exchange beyond that of a missionary agenda.**

The team explored the historic cultural exchange between peoples who belong to two historically-defined 'peripheral' regions in relation to broader categories such as the British Empire and the Indian nation. The history of the development of distinct cultural/intercultural activities in both Wales and the Khasi Hills challenges the idea of the metropole as centre of cultural production in relation to which peripheries merely act in response with a derivative culture. Research revealed that this is a hidden history despite the fact that the cultural exchange took place for over 130 years. The complex consequences of intercultural exchange over time has meant that there are traces of the cultural exchange in contemporary social and cultural performances but they are not always easily identified. Revealing this is of crucial importance in understanding how the Welsh came to represent India in relation to themselves and how they affected Khasi Society. Additionally, the research allows us to comprehend how Khasi culture and society influenced Welsh culture and how the Khasi people came to view themselves in relation to the Welsh (3.4).

2. The second half of the project (November 2017–November 2019), used Practice-Research (P-R) in performance, filmmaking, and music to respond to research themes:
 - **The ways in which arts practice can be used to further an interdisciplinary understanding of the history of cultural exchange.**

A series of P-R workshops with Khasi and Welsh performers, musicians and film-makers (21 day-long workshops in India and Wales, 2017-2019, with up to seven people) provided spaces in which to explore multifaceted understandings of history. Workshops explored a range of themes: ideas of homeplace in both cultures (explored through a study of embodied responses to words representing homeland by Khasi and Welsh performers); effects of colonial modernity on speech, e.g. the use of Welsh language orthography in the formation of the Khasi alphabet and literature and its influence on the oral tradition (which performers explored through workshops on oral narratives and ways of telling); embedded intercultural practices, e.g. difference/similarities in Khasi/Welsh choral singing (which performers investigated through sharing Khasi/Welsh hymns and folk songs and which the musicians explored through unravelling intercultural tunes and composing new ones in collaborative jamming sessions); colonial relationships (explored through workshops on embodying the colonial photographic archive of the North East and representing the power relationships in photographic portraits). These workshops provided the material for devising *Performing Journeys* (3.5), an intermedial performance that toured India and Wales (2019-2020) and through which the results of the P-R in performance, music and film were positioned next to each other, providing a multi-faceted response to the Welsh-Khasi exchange. It is a

performance that embodies the tensions, paradoxes and nuances in the Welsh-Khasi cultural exchange as imagined and understood by Khasi and Welsh artists. This became the output touring communities in Meghalaya and Wales and the focus of a series of post-show discussions with audiences. Other outputs included concerts and gigs in music and poetry, sharing new compositions, and screenings of documentary fieldwork by Aparna Sharma, listed on the project website (3.6), which also provides information on the banner-based exhibition on context, methodology and findings that accompanied the performance on tour in India and Wales in 2019-2020.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1. Lewis, L., *Performing Wales: People, Memory and Place* (2018), University of Wales Press, ISBN: 978-1-78683-242-9; listed in REF2. Quality: peer-reviewed, single-authored monograph.

3.2. Research Project Grant awarded to Lisa Lewis, University of South Wales: 'Welsh and Khasi Cultural Dialogues: An Interdisciplinary Arts and Performance Project', funded by The Leverhulme Trust (October 2015 – October 2019); value: £286,349.

3.3. Lewis, L. and Sharma A. (2016), 'Welsh and Khasi Cultural Dialogues: Transactions and Translations', *Performance Research*, 21.5, in Jones, A. (ed.), on 'Trans/Performance' (Taylor & Francis), pp.81–84. Quality: peer-reviewed article providing the objectives of the research project and its methodology, in leading international journal in the field.

3.4. Lewis, L., 'O'r ddrama gymdeithasol i'r pasiant: theatr yn y gyfnewidfa ddiwylliannol rhwng Cymru a gogledd-ddwyrain India/From social drama to the pageant: theatre in the cultural exchange between Wales and northeast India' (2019), *Gwerddon* (October), pp.28–58; listed in REF2. Quality: peer-reviewed article in the leading Welsh language research journal.

3.5. *Performing Journeys*, (director: Lisa Lewis), performance (Listed in REF 2), Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, Wales (co-production with Chapter); Khasi National Dorbar Hall, Shillong, India (co-production with independent artist Lapdiang Syiem), both April 2019; St Fagan's Museum of National History, National Museum Wales, Cardiff, November 2019; Indian tour, February 2020: Indian Museum, Kolkata; Kolkata International Book Fair; Thomas Jones College, Jowai, Jaiñtia Hills; Jiva Resort, Sohra, Khasi Hills; Synod College, Shillong, Khasi Hills; Ambedkar University, Delhi; Welsh tour, February 2020: Capel Penbryn, Holywell, Flintshire; Caersalem, Caernarfon; Y Morlan Centre, Aberystwyth; Capel Tabernacl, Carmarthen; Capel Tabernacl, Cardiff; Capel y Nant, Clydach.

Quality: performances in India facilitated by independent artist Lapdiang Syiem and team, British Council North and Northeast India and Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage; performances in Wales facilitated by Chapter Arts, Amgueddfa Cymru: National Museum Wales, Presbyterian Church of Wales, and Historical Society of the Presbyterian Church of Wales. Reviews, Patricia Mukhim, *The Shillong Times*, 24/04/2019; H. Mohrmen, *The Shillong Times*, 17/02/2020; Ananda Lal, *Times of India*, 27/02/2020; Huw Powell-Davies, Y Pedair Tudalen Cydenwadol (*Seren Cymru, Y Tyst, Goleuad*), 22/11/2019.

3.6. [Project website](#) for Leverhulme Trust funded research project; [performance page](#); [exhibition page](#) Quality: Leverhulme Trust funded research project website.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

We estimate that over 4,500 people saw the work in India and Wales, in concerts and gigs, theatre performances and exhibitions (based on combination of box office/front of house information from theatres and museums and headcounts and seats filled in community settings). Audiences included Khasi and Welsh communities, audiences at national museums, theatres, independent music venues, festivals, universities and colleges in both India and Wales. Between 2017-2020, eight concerts/gigs were held (four in India; four in Wales); twenty theatre performances (nine in India; eleven in Wales); and five versions of the exhibition which toured fifteen venues in total. Over 3 million people live in the Khasi-Jaiñtia Hill state of Meghalaya in North East India, roughly the same population as Wales. Performances in India were concentrated in Meghalaya (in the cities of Shillong and Jowai, and the Sohra locality, site of the first Welsh mission), with a further three performances outside the Khasi-Jaiñtia context, two in Kolkata (Indian Museum and Kolkata International Book Festival) and one in Delhi. Performances in Wales took place in Chapter Arts Centre Cardiff, the National Museum of History, and in Welsh chapels. Thousands of people heard/saw related broadcasts on BBC

Radio Wales/S4C in Wales and Doordarshan TV/All India Radio and independent radio/cable channels in India (5.5). 10 radio programmes were broadcast, 7 in India: on All India Radio - 06/09/2017 (no figures but coverage over all India, population 1.366 billion), Big FM - 7-8/12/2018, 15/02/2020 and Red FM - 25/07/2017, 26/04/2018, 26/04/2018, 22/04/2019 (no figures, but coverage to population of 144,000), and 3 in Wales on BBC Radio Cymru - 04/03/2018, 13/10/2019, 13/09/2020, (212,000 listeners, Rajar quarterly figures). Programmes included interviews or entire programmes with team members. 7 television items were broadcast, 2 in India on Doordarshan TV North East on 16/07/2017 and North East Indian Cable Channel PCN on 16/07/2017 (no figures but broadcast over the North East region (population over 45 million); and 5 in Wales on S4C - 30/10/2017, 07/08/2018, 25/11/2018, 14/01/2019 and 20/01/2020 (S4C audience figures 98,000). Post-show discussions in India and Wales, written feedback and reviews, reveal impact in three main areas:

a) Increased awareness by participants (artists and audiences) of the history of the Welsh-Khasi cultural exchange and an understanding of the importance of this history in the context of postcolonial identities today

Participants referred to becoming aware of an untold part of colonial history – a ‘hidden’ part of Welsh/British history relatively unknown as Indian history. A Khasi audience member stated that it was *‘a step towards giving a voice and narrative for our people’ at ‘a critical time when we as a hill tribe are trying to gain more authority over how our lived experiences, our confrontations and engagements are articulated and expressed to the world’ (5.1.a)*; for another Khasi audience member it was *‘fuel for introspection for...both communities to examine the history between the two’*, which is *‘of particular relevance in the current world where increasingly nationalistic perspectives are coming to dominate conversation about how people should relate to each other.’ (5.1.b)*.

Some audience members spoke of feelings of complicity. An audience member in Wales said: *‘I wasn’t aware of the history...I felt uncomfortable at times learning of this relationship and seeing how the Welsh have used religion for colonial purposes. But I also got that the relationship was a ‘dialogue’ (5.2.a)*; and another spoke of awareness *‘not only the history and its traces today...but also about myself and my prejudices’ (5.2.b)*. For one participant in Wales, *‘The work led me to reflect deeply on my understanding of Welsh identity, the complex relationship between Wales and the British Empire...leading to discussions on minority identity and the relationship between Khasi, Indian, Welsh and British identities’ (5.3.a)*. A participant in India spoke of the work being *‘essential in understanding the dismantling of hierarchies of how and who explains a history linked to a colonial past’ and of it leading to questions about responsibility for ‘artists and researchers in unearthing and re-presenting/representing that linked history’ and questions regarding how these stories can be told without bias: ‘Can one avoid the retelling without bias?’ (5.3.b)*.

The impact of this work is also recognised by cultural representatives in both Wales and India; the Chair of the Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage (Meghalaya) said that the work instigated *‘a renewed discussion and understanding of this history and an awareness of the importance of voicing histories which have not been adequately explored’ (5.7)*. The Deputy Head of Public History and Archaeology at the National Museum Wales confirmed that it raised *‘awareness...and enable[ed] an understanding for people in Wales of this complicated history from the point of view of minority cultures’ (5.8)*. A representative of the Presbyterian Church of Wales said that the performance and exhibition encouraged a *‘type of communal remembering that is important for defining the identity of the chapel and its members’* and that it encouraged *‘understanding by raising awareness of the history in all its complexity.’ (5.6)*.

b) Impact on working practices for participating artists and cultural facilitators

Eighteen artist-participants were involved in the project, specializing in performance, music, film, and performance design. Participants from Wales spoke of the impact of the collaborative research on their own practice: *‘Working in this way has had a profound effect on the way that*

I collaborate today, especially with artists whose culture differs from my own...building a working culture in which participating artists feel comfortable expressing themselves and have the power to shape the collaboration' (5.3.a); and of transcultural working practices enabling participants to 'think much deeper about representation in performance...[and] question who the intended audience are, who will benefit the most from experiencing the work, and how can we reach them. It has also made me question my identity as a white male performer, who do I represent?' (5.3.c). A reviewer from Jowai (capital of the Jaiñtia Hills, a region renowned for its community drama festival tradition) referred to the impact of the medium used on local theatre practices, 'The play was appreciated by the people of Jowai...known for their tradition of organising dramas...The multilayered story telling method has definitely inspired and given more ideas to the traditional dramatists of the town.' (5.4.e). A cultural facilitator from India commented, 'One of the best examples I have seen as a person who works to facilitate intercultural dialogue between India and other, mostly western, countries...I now use the example of this project in sessions that I conduct on 'good practice' in 'collaborative projects.' (5.1.c); Head of International Relations at Welsh Government said: 'This is important work, and a model of international artistic collaboration that reflects on past cultural exchange while focusing on contemporary and future relationships' (5.9).

c) Greater understanding of the effectiveness of artistic practice in revealing complex/hidden histories

Feedback revealed a realisation that artistic practice is a valuable form of interpreting history: *'My first thought when I watched the work, was to think about history and the ways in which it is told...the very many perspectives that the telling of history misses out on...The experience of this performance and the mediums it used - language, space, sound and visual, felt more whole, more honest, in the ways in which this history between two very different cultures...was examined and told...from multiple perspectives' (5.1.c, Delhi). During post-show discussions, numerous audience members spoke of performance as a medium that makes complex histories accessible. This was reiterated in written responses: 'The reinterpretation of history through performance...presents this linked history in a physical and visual representation of the politics of race, gender, memory and language. It is presented...in a more palpable form that connects emotionally as well as intellectually' (5.3.b, Khasi participant); and mentioned in a review in the Times of India by Ananda Lal (27/02/2020): 'Unconventional performance allows artists to explore subjects in ways that mainstream theatre often cannot. The British Council's support of intercultural collaboration exposes local performers and viewers to new approaches' (5.4.f). This view was shared by those working within historical institutions, such as National Museum Wales: 'These moments of transcultural practice are clearly instigating a discussion on new models for how we might approach history through performance' (5.8).*

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Reports, reviews, web links or other documented sources of information in the public domain.

5.1 Correspondence and post-show discussions – audiences, India (a, b, c)

5.2 Correspondence and post-show discussions – audiences, Wales (a, b)

5.3 Participant responses (a, b, c)

5.4 Reviews (e, f)

5.5 Television and Radio programmes – India and Wales

Individual users/beneficiaries who could be contacted by the REF team to corroborate claims.*

Indicative list:

5.6 Assistant Director of Ministries, Presbyterian Church of Wales

5.7 Chair of Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage (Meghalaya Chapter)

5.8 Deputy Head of Public History and Archaeology, Amgueddfa Cymru: National Museum Wales

5.9 Head of International Relations, Welsh Government

5.10 Director, British Council East and Northeast India