

**Only Connect ...**

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It seems that the inability of individuals from different interest groups to connect with one another remains as problematic as ever. Only recently I encountered a biography of the African American singer Paul Robeson, which depicts the struggles he experienced during the early Fifties, when he was denounced as a communist and a subversive for daring to preach the cause of civil rights, while expressing admiration for the way in which social issues were handled in the Soviet Union. However much Robeson preached the importance of “the oneness of mankind [...] the likenesses – the common human spirit that we see in the various people’s songs” (Goodman 47), he was considered a “political meddler” – someone who had no right to intervene in affairs that did not concern him (77). The State Department “did not like his peacemongering or his support for the international struggle against colonialism” (82). Dismissed as “a black nationalist,” he was considered a potentially subversive person, dedicated to forging a new world order in which “black men will overwhelm the whites whom he [Robeson] sees as the blind purveyors of shame and misery” (117). Thus it was hardly surprising that he had his passport withdrawn for most of the Fifties; to let him sing abroad was considered politically damaging. No attempt was made either to understand him, or the true nature of his desire for social equality.

The same inability of people to understand one another permeates other cultures as well. Recently the British magazine *The New Statesman* became the focus for an intense debate concerning education – despite numerous reforms over the last half-century, it seemed that society was as divided as ever. Power remains in the hands of the educated, privately educated elite, who act “as a roadblock both to upward and (less often noted) downward social mobility” (Kynaston and Kynaston 25). They operate what might be described as “a systematic process [...] of giving better educational – and subsequently professional – opportunities to those

already from the best-off backgrounds [...] It is not just education that the parental chequebook buys but the assumption of a substantial socio-economic platform. There are, after all, only as many available rungs on the ladder” (25). For all the government’s talk of a “big society” encompassing all classes and all races, the reality is that those in power try their best to maintain it by excluding those who would question it. This strategy is not dissimilar to that used in the Fifties to marginalize Robeson.

With these two examples in mind, the theme of this issue of the *Journal of American Studies in Turkey* might be summed up in a phrase coined by E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India* (1924) – “only connect” (“E. M. Forster”). This phrase suggests the need for all groups of society, whether intellectual, commercial or cultural, to meet and understand one another. Social groups not only need to connect; individuals should be given the chance to connect “the prose and the passion” to link their rational and emotional sides. The essays in this issue offer ways in which this process of connection might be achieved in different disciplinary and/or historical areas. In an interview with Susan Bassnett, we return to the issue of how different disciplines might try to talk to one another – specifically Translation Studies, Adaptation Studies and Comparative Literature. She describes the ways in which academics from all these disciplines have often been wary of sharing their views for a variety of reasons, both personal as well as academic. In a context where technology brings people ever closer together, however, it seems that the time has come for further negotiation. Giselle Bastin shows this process at work in the Australian context by demonstrating how the National Curriculum at the secondary level requires inter- and transdisciplinary work. Such initiatives should be continued at the tertiary level: Bastin offers an example of how this might work in practice through a case-study of teaching the Merchant-Ivory film *The Remains of the Day* (1993). Christophe Collard’s piece looks at the work of American theater artist John Jesurun, whose work is based on an “epistemology of plurality,” breaking down barriers between the conscious and unconscious minds while simultaneously functioning as an engine of reflection across media, genres and cultures.

The next three pieces demonstrate the obstacles often placed in the way of promoting such understandings. Mohammed Abdullah Hussein Muharram shows how Occidentalism, as expressed by many Arab writers, often proved as limiting as Orientalism in encouraging

stereotypical perceptions of East and West. Emrah Şahin's historical piece of relationships between the Ottomans and the Americans likewise depict suspicions between the two sides, despite numerous initiatives to promote awareness of Islam within the United States. Cultural strategies generally produced few tangible results; despite the goodwill of diplomats from both countries. Elizabeth M. Nix brings us right up to date with a consideration of the consequences of Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech, in the fiftieth year since it was delivered. Through a case-study of her local area in Baltimore, Maryland, she shows how people from different cultures still need to talk to one another and – perhaps more significantly – listen to one another.

Yet there are strategies being pursued to bring people together. Işıl Tipioğlu describes a trip to Japan in 2013, organized by Peter Kuznick, during which time American, Turkish and Japanese students were brought together to reflect on the consequences of the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima, and to meet some of the few survivors still alive. This proved a humbling experience: many students realized – perhaps for the first time – the human consequences of political actions, and how they affected ordinary people. Tipioğlu's piece offers an interesting counterpoint to the interview with Kuznick that we published in Issue 37. Perin Gürel likewise emphasizes the theme of connection through a study of Walt Whitman's changing reputation since the mid-nineteenth century. Through her analysis of Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* (2006), which consciously draws on Whitman, she demonstrates the need for progressive change that resides in ourselves, not in governments. This issue rounds off with an extended analysis of the film *Pacific Rim* (2013), which consciously challenges our expectations of human behavior with specific reference to gender stereotypes. Individuals should be treated as people, not simply representatives of different groups.

### Works Cited

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