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Identity as the performative product of, rather than as the input into, intercultural encounters

Paper proposal,
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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to question a common assumption in the current discourse on interculturality: the idea that distinct cultural identities enjoy a fully-fledged existence on the ground, and that they constitute the givens which, with often unpredictable results (including conflict, violence, anomie and disruption) can be seen to be in interaction in 'intercultural encounters'.

By contrast, the paper's contention is that cultural identities (from whatever diffuse and inchoate historical substrate inspiration, which will be conceded to be undeniable, yet ephemeral and relatively insignificant in their individual socio-historical effects) only shape up, are only produced in the first place, in the context of so-called 'intercultural encounters'.

Therefore, such encounters *are not between cultures but between individuals and groups in the process of elaborating and affirming their identity as cultural – within a political context where such affirmation is formally empowered*; 'intercultural encounters' are laboratories of cultural identity – seed-beds, not arenas, for cultural interaction and confrontation.

The author will be revisiting (self-critically, yet by and large affirmatively) his thesis to the effect that 'Cultures do not exist' (as e.g. elaborated in his *Intercultural Encounters*, LIT, Berlin / Münster, 2003). In the process he will touch on such topics as the performative nature of cultural identity, the politics of recognition and respect, and the price of cultural relativism in the face of militant fundamentalism.