

# Editorial Preface

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*Whenever someone who knows you disappears, you lose one version of yourself. Yourself as you were seen, as you were judged to be. Lover or enemy, mother or friend, those who know us construct us, and their several knowings slant the different facets of our characters like a diamond-cutter's tools. Each such loss is a step leading to the grave, where all versions blend and end. (Salman Rushdie)*

This is the most difficult and painful introduction that we have written.

On Sept. 18<sup>th</sup> the third editor-in-chief of this journal, Professor Regis Machart, passed away in Malaysia after a short battle with illness. Regis was our friend, our colleague and “companion in arms”. As Rushdie has it in the quote above, we have lost ‘one version of ourselves’.

Fred met Regis in Finland in 2008. Through their friendship, Julie started cooperating with Regis. Although Julie never had the pleasure of meeting Regis in person, they developed a friendship that went beyond scholarship. Many initiatives and projects saw the light of day between the three of us. This journal is testimony to our close, trustworthy and enriching friendship.

Regis was born in France in 1968. He migrated to Germany in his early 20s, then to Egypt and finally to Malaysia where he worked at University Putra Malaysia, where he was much liked by his students. Recently he was appointed Docent Professor at the University of Helsinki in recognition of his work in intercultural communication education. Regis had visited Finland many times and was much loved by the students and colleagues he had met. He soon became aware of the ‘lies’ about the ‘wonders’ of the Nordic country. This further fed his reflections on critical interculturality and the damages of educational rankings on our imaginaries. His hard work, professionalism, strong sense of criticality, his joy and sense of humor will be greatly missed. But we will make sure that his legacy is not lost. We would like to thank IGI for offering their condolences to his family and friends and for recognizing his excellent work by making him Editor-in-Chief Emeritus for IJIBIDE. Regis was passionate about the journal and he worked hard to make sure it was successful.

Regis’s life experiences inspired his research very much. As an ‘other’ for most of his adult life, having moved between different countries, he was always in search of fresh and critical ideas that would help make this world a better and safer place. Like us, Regis was critical of culturalist approaches to the ‘migrant’ and fought hard to ‘put people in their place’ when they behaved or talked in such ways. He was also self-critical of his own beliefs. Fred remembers him lamenting about an encounter with a Malaysian scholar who had told him, in an accusatory tone, that he had a very strong French accent in his English, which made it difficult for her to understand him. Regis had replied that, of course he had an accent, and that his interlocutor also had a strong Malaysian accent in her English, which made it difficult for him to understand her too. But he tried and did not complain about ‘her’ accent.

If Regis had had a motto it would have been this aphorism from the Austrian writer Karl Kraus (1874-1936): “You’d be surprised how hard it can often be to translate an action into an idea”. Over and over Regis would fight to problematize, contextualize and analyze what the ‘other’ represents in our so-called global world. The context Regis worked in, Malaysia, was very inspiring for reflecting on the keywords of this journal: identity, diversity, and biases. Regis has written intensively about the fascinating identity politics at the macro- and micro- levels of Malaysia (ethnicity, language, religion, etc.) (Machart & Lim, 2013). As a White male scholar, a figure often described as a privileged ‘other’, he experienced certain forms of discrimination and essentialism in this context that would often irritate him. Although he was respected for his work (which brought many ‘points’ to his faculty), he never received the full recognition that we feel he deserved at his university. In a chapter published in 2016 in the volume co-edited by Komisarof and Zhu Hua entitled *Crossing Boundaries and Weaving Intercultural Work, Life and Scholarship in Globalizing Universities* (Routledge, 2016), Regis gave a fascinating glimpse into what he called the ‘struggles with representations of cultural identity’ he experienced in (Malaysian) academia. Regis was also very much concerned by the racist distinction between Malaysians of different backgrounds in Malaysian society and especially of Malaysians of Chinese and Indian descents. Interestingly, most of his Master’s and PhD students were from these communities.

Reading through the international news this month, it is clear that discussions on identity, diversity and biases, that Regis liked engaging in, are needed, especially in relation to education. Taking *The Guardian* as an example, a British national daily newspaper from the ‘center left’, the following relevant topics were highly discussed:

- The dangers of cultural appropriation, with a full transcript of a provocative keynote speech, *Fiction and Identity Politics*, given by Lionel Shriver at the Brisbane Writers Festival in September 2016 in which she “hopes that the idea of cultural appropriation is just a fad” (13<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2016);
- Indigenous Australians were reported to be the oldest living culture according to a study of the DNA of Australian Indigenous people published in *Nature*, which confirms, as Larissa Behrendt argues, an argument Indigenous people have always been aware of. One reader notes however that the article in *Nature* never referred to the word culture (22<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2016);
- The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are urged to confront the past colonial wrongs of the representatives of the Monarchy in Canada, during a visit that will have them see an artwork representing the cultural genocide of indigenous residential school children (23<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2016).

The mis-/use of the concepts and notions of cultural appropriation, the oldest living culture and cultural genocide by those who are made to speak in these articles would have undoubtedly led to interesting discussions with Regis, who was a strong advocate of different forms of critical discourse analysis. Regis agreed with us that the very word culture is often used as an alibi/an excuse and that the overreliance on this contested word can, sometimes, do more harm than good in our confused world (Dervin & Machart, 2015).

This issue of *IJIBIDE* could not be better suited to pay respect to Regis. The four articles that compose this issue all deal with topics that were dear to him – and to us: inclusion-exclusion, marginalization, and intercultural/global awareness.

The first article, written by Rosaire Ifedi (Ashland University, USA), complements our discussions above on the marginalization of the ‘other’ in our global universities. The context is that of the United States. Concentrating on African-born female academics, the author shows how these women face unique questions of identity and discrimination, on top of the usual negative experiences of other Black and foreign women.

The article by Sadan Kulturel-Konak\*, Abdullah Konak\* and Mary Lou D’Allegro# (\*Penn State Berks # Siena College, USA) concentrates on the concept of global awareness. Often used interchangeably with intercultural/multicultural/... awareness, this concept needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed. This is what the authors attempt to do by examining college students’ interest in and understanding of the concept.

In the third article, Emmanuel Fokides (University of the Aegean, Greece) looks into bullying and the use of digital technologies to fight against it in Greek schools. By creating their own digital stories, students were guided to reflect on the complex aspects of bullying. This could serve as a good example for other contexts.

Finally, in *Different Experiences and Perceptions of Campus Climate Among Minority Students at a Predominantly White Institution*, Lucila Telles Rudge (University of Montana, USA) examines another topic that was dear to Regis. Based on six focus group sessions with minority students, the article reports their experiences of racism and discrimination on campus. This important study deserves to be replicated in other contexts. In Malaysia or in Finland, often admired for its ‘miraculous’ approach of equity/equality and social justice in education, which Regis often visited, these issues are rarely discussed in education. At a conference on education in Kuala Lumpur where Fred was giving a plenary speech, a local professor told him that the idea of racism is ‘un-Malaysian’ and that only Europe experiences racism. In Finland, at a recent event, a ‘famous’ professor was preaching for tolerance and respect of the ‘other’ and when asked why it is that most student teachers are white in the Nordic country, she replied “we only choose the best students” – without noticing the irony of her utterance.

We hope that our readers will enjoy this issue regardless of its somewhat somber context.

In his *Intellectual Autobiography (Postscriptum de ma vie)*, Victor Hugo (1907) writes: “Our life dreams the Utopia. Our death achieves the ideal.” After dreaming the Utopia with us, Regis, please guide us to see hints of the ideal.

We dedicate this issue of IJBIDE to the memory of Prof. Regis Machart (1968-2016), one of the founding editors of this journal.



*Fred Dervin*  
*Julie Byrd Clark*  
*Editors-in-Chief*  
*IJBIDE*

## REFERENCES

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