

July 11- July 15, 2018

Barcelona, Spain

International Studies Conference for Global Studies: “Fearful Futures”

My travel to Barcelona has been a very rewarding experience both culturally and intellectually. Throughout my time in Barcelona I was able to visit various places such as the Sagrada Familia, Parc Guell, Placa Catalunya, Las Ramblas, Parc Ciutadel, and the Gothic Quarter. Although this trip was primarily for the academic purpose of attending the IAFOR Global 2018 conference, I found myself learning just as much from the city and making several connections to my studies. For example, while walking down the Eixample District I came across a free exhibition that displayed the work of Carme Solé Vendrell demonstrating how her work has evolved over the last 50 years. This exhibit caught my attention due to the intriguing canvas hanging from the side of the gallery of children’s faces with the word “Why” written below them. As a student whose research focuses on the injustice of the current migration crisis, I immediately thought those images were of migrant children. This art exhibit was a wonderful representation of art activism related to the migrant and refugee crisis.



Attending the conference was a great learning experience as it allowed me to network with other scholars and also work on my presentation skills for future conferences. This conference was not specific to my field of study, and therefore exposed me to the work scholars are doing in other fields. For instance, one of the presenters in the *Fearful Futures* panel came from a background in South African literature. Specifically, her research focused on the themes of race and the European standards of beauty in post-apartheid South Africa. Although she approached the issues of race, colorism, and colonialism from a literature standpoint, her analysis on the effects of generational trauma closely resembles the analysis I find in previously colonized areas of Latin America. Her work made me reflect on how I can

use literature to show cultural legacies that are still tied to the trauma of the past for my own research.

The plenary panels on the first day of the conference informed me about the current regional politics in Catalonia and of the independence referendum that has stirred a lot of political unrest in the region. I particularly enjoyed the presentation by Professor Cornelis Martin Renes from the University of Barcelona as he drew parallels between the Spanish police brutality seen during the referendum and the ongoing oppression against the Catalan language and traditions which closely resemble the repressive violence that neocolonial projects employ. It was very interesting to hear about the long history of the Catalonians in feeling alienated by the Spanish government as this is something not touched upon by the media. Through my stay in Barcelona, I realized that many community members continue to carry out protests and hang banners from their balconies in support of Catalanian independence.



While Barcelona is a beautiful city, full of art and unique cultural traditions, it is also important to highlight the very visible social problems within the city. For instance, it is clear that Barcelona has a large migrant population which was very visible as I walked through the most touristy areas of the city. It made me reflect on my own privilege of being able to travel so easily from one country to the next, while many people who are not from a Western country must endure trauma and exploitation due to their “illegal” status. For example, in the picture below you can see predominantly black migrants selling souvenirs to tourists (left of

photo), while on the right you can see the expensive restaurants that are predominantly visited by white tourists. This photo reflects the socio-economic disparities that are intimately interconnected with racial hierarchies, and as a student who seeks to be critical of the positionality of non-Western people living in the Global North, it is necessary to bring this problematic situation to the forefront of my experience. Thus, my time in Barcelona was both wonderful and challenging, but I am glad I was able to witness the solidarity of various scholars and activist in fighting against these social, political, and economic injustices.

