



**Opening Address introducing the HII distinguished guest lecture series speaker**

**Professor Sneja Gunew on the topic of**

**Who Counts as Europeans? From Orientalism to Occidentalism**

**Ned Costello, Chief Executive of the Irish Universities Association**

**Wednesday May 9<sup>th</sup> 2007**



*Professor Sneja Gunew pictured in foreground with Ned Costello, Alice Feldman and Marc Caball*

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished speaker. It gives me great pleasure to speak to you here this evening and I am grateful to Marc Caball and Alice Feldman of the Humanities Institute of Ireland here at UCD and the Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative, specifically, for the opportunity to do so.

Prior to my relatively recent arrival at the IUA, I was head of Science, Technology and Innovation Policy at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and have been fairly extensively involved in policy formulation over the past twenty years or so.

Given my background in policy, I was especially glad when Alice asked me if I would talk a bit about evidence based policy and practice. As you may know, developing evidence based practice in Irish integration policy is a specific focus of the Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative – the MCRI.

Coming from what would be regarded I think as a strongly policy driven Department, I think I can safely say that it is still surprising how much policy making is still based on various combinations of expediency, special pleading and partial analysis. Simultaneously, we are investing heavily in university based research, much of which has tremendous potential to input to policy formulation.

This has never been more vital. However, the reason underlying that vitality contains a paradox. If one projects oneself back to the bad old days of the 1980's, one could conjecture that there was actually a stronger culture of analysis and evidence based approaches to policy. For example, one thinks of the Telesis review of industrial policy subsequent reviews of industrial policy and the development by ESRI of the very sophisticated model for assessing the economic return from, for example FDI projects. However, to the extent that this was true, it derived in part, from the terrible stasis our economic and social situation at that time. There was more time to think because there was less to do! Today, we find the polar opposite. The pace of change in the socio economic environment has increased exponentially, and the entire policy and programmatic environment has become much more turbulent and unpredictable. We therefore find ourselves in a situation where the need for evidence based approaches to practice are needed more than ever, but paradoxically, where the absorptive capacity of the policy making system is under pressure.

In that context, I would entirely agree with the view advanced by Cross, that the quality of relationships is possibly the most important factor in making conditions conducive for research policy partnerships. This is an area which I think needs sustained focus on the part of both academics and policy makers. The core elements of the evidence based approach to policy making and practice can, I think, also play an important role in this regard in building bridges between the academic and policy making community. Those elements include: short term applied data gathering in conjunction with longer term theory-driven research approaches, and with the development of structures which facilitate cross-sector stakeholder participation and collaboration.

Cross-sectoral and, indeed, interdisciplinary approaches have, I think, much to recommend them. So many of the problems, issues and opportunities that we face as a society are complex and multidimensional that they virtually demand such approaches.

All of those reflections find a clear analogue in the Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative. The speed at which Ireland has made the transition from a virtually monocultural to multicultural and cosmopolitan society (and I accept that these terms are open to debate) is still hard to comprehend. As the MCRI has pointed out: "Ireland is now an exciting context in which to study issues concerning migration, diversity, equality and social change. An increasing body of scholarship is being generated in these areas. Its particular historical and material circumstances make it unique for research on the impacts and dynamics of international migration, the processes of ethnic diversification of Irish society, the evolution of cultural pluralisms within its institutions and the emergence of the country's global face".

I am delighted, as part of the MCRI initiative, therefore to welcome Professor Sneja Gunew. Professor Gunew is currently Professor of English and Women's Studies and Gender Relations at the University of British Columbia, Canada. She has published widely on postcolonial, multicultural and feminist critical theory and has worked in the area of cultural policy, serving as a member of the Australia Council, a federal arts funding body. She has edited and co-edited four anthologies of Australian women's and

multicultural writings. Her most recent book is *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms* (Routledge 2004).

Professor Gunew's talk is entitled: *who counts as European's? from orientalism to Occidentalism* and will explore post war migrations and the ways notions of cultural difference have been designated by shifting terms such as multiculturalism, globalisation, transnationalism and diaspora.