**Travelling between the Centre and Periphery: Creating a Feminist Dialogue for the Diaspora**

On Friday 11th July 2014 the IAS Travel and Mobility Studies Research Network held its second annual conference, “Travelling between the Centre and Periphery: Creating a Feminist Dialogue for the Diaspora”. With the aim of developing discussions of diasporic writing and the centre-periphery framework through a focus on feminism in travel narratives, the one-day event included a keynote presentation by the acclaimed Professor Miriam Cooke (Duke University) as well as ten presentations by academics working on contemporary and postcolonial literary studies, migration studies, history of art and contemporary art theory. The day produced rich and interesting discussions on centre-periphery frameworks, theories of the diaspora, transnationalism, mobility and gender, generating a diverse set of feminist perspectives on these themes.

The day commenced with Professor Cooke’s keynote on “Women and the Arab Spring”. Professor miriam cooke provided an overview of the role of women during and after the Arab Spring. She argued that Arab women have a century-long history of participating in their countries’ revolutions, irrespective of attempts to remove them from the public sphere. She provided examples of women who have been forced into exile, and thus continue their activism using social media.

The first panel of the day, “Bodies and Flight”, provided three perspectives on the intersections between gender, mobility and diasporic theories. Lindsey Moore discussed Camilla Gibb’s *Sweetness in the Belly* (2005) to open up wider questions of female identity formation and travel; exploring issues around the representation of religion and spirituality, literacy and reading, and different spaces, Moore ended by suggesting that the text reiterates travelling across boundaries as productive to the identity of the female traveller. Max Andrucki and Jen Dickinson’s paper argued that while economic models are typically privileged in discussions of the centre-periphery framework, a more diverse and mobile concept of centrality and marginality might be posited as a productive theoretical model; two case studies of migrant experiences demonstrated how a ‘performative’ idea of the diaspora could be conceptualised. Anna Ball looked to challenge centre-periphery frameworks through an exploration of bodies in flight, reading three cinematic works that portray Afghan women’s flight to propose the concept of a ‘mobile periphery’.

In “Transnational Travel Narratives”, Ester Gendusa offered a reading of Bernardine Evaristo’s *Soul Tourists* (2005) that raised questions of identity and belonging, suggesting that diasporic belonging can be perceived as an issue of self-identification with particular groups, communities or identities. Maryam Ala Amjadi’s paper explored gender and mobility in the Safavid world, analysing the writing of a female traveller who travelled from Persia to Mecca in the late seventeenth century. Demystifying the figure of the Safavid female traveller, Amjadi drew links with contemporary representations of Persian/ Iranian women and explored the historical implications of these ideas.

Panel C on “Feminism and the Diaspora” endeavoured to examine the impact migration has on women. Latefa Narriman Guemar shared her research into highly skilled Algerian women who emigrated during the 1990s. Dr Enaya Othman focused on Palestinian immigrant women and the meaning ascribed to their choice of dress, which is often used to demonstrate belonging and affiliation.

In the final panel on “the Diaspora in Visual Arts” both papers explored the feminine visual diaspora; art reflecting interactions with place and the effects of diasporic movement. Kuang Sheng began the panel by showcasing the artworks of a Chinese female artist Yin Xiuzhen who creates ‘Portable Cities’, unfolded suitcases full of manipulated second hand clothes designed to emulate different geographical places. Dr Maria Luisa Coelho focuses on the Portuguese female artist Maria Lusitano who tries to recreate the experience of being torn between home and abroad through her autobiographical visual work.

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