

Representing/Resisting Empire: Gender, Transnationalism and the Discourses of Difference

Chair: Heather Latiolais, University of Texas at Austin

This panel traces the role played by women in the gendered discourses of empire, nation and transnationalism in nineteenth-century France. Following Anne McClintock's claim in *Dangerous Liaisons* that, "The representation of male *national* power depends on the prior construction of *gender* difference" (89), we examine narratives by women and narratives of women as they seek alternately to resist or represent empire and otherness. Where de Staël and Owenson formulate early responses to the hierarchies of difference articulated in post-revolutionary national identities, Dora d'Istria's travel writings present a counter-discourse to the construction of the colonial self through the orientalized other of the Levantine women of Turkey, Greece and Albania. Finally, Empress Eugénie, the Spanish-born consort of Napoleon III, is fleetingly transformed into a symbolic Cleopatra as she sails through the newly opened Suez Canal in 1869, as the press and the nation imagine the triumph of French imperialism, only to see it crumble several months later. In each case, French national identity is constructed and subverted through images of foreign women (Italian, "Oriental," Egyptian): distanced Others who highlight the intersections of difference in the hierarchies of gender and national identity. This panel will be comparative and interdisciplinary scope, as our papers analyze fiction, travel writing, popular journalism and illustration/photography in the hopes of mapping out the concrete as well as symbolic roles played by women's transnational interventions in the discourses and counter-discourses of empire in nineteenth-century France.

Alexandra K. Wettlaufer
University of Texas at Austin

Resisting Empire, Representing Difference: *Corinne* and *The Wild Irish Girl*

The questions of art, national identity, gender and difference played a central role in the works of Germaine de Staël (1766-1827) and Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan (1776?-1859), whose novels, critical texts and travel accounts proposed a counter-discourse to the dominant narratives of nation and empire. Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806) and de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807) challenged the hegemony of British colonial rule and French imperialism in a pair of tales that highlight a more international or cosmopolitan vision of the dominated cultures of Ireland and Italy while at the same time establishing the political engagement of the female author. Each centers on a woman of genius who embodies the culture of her colonized nation and her British lover, who overcomes (at least temporarily) his nationalistic prejudice as he learns to love the foreign Other. Both novels were enormously popular throughout Europe, inspiring imitations and acolytes while demonstrating the powerful role women could play in art and in the nation. In reading their novels as political interventions, I will examine the ways in which this pair of proto-feminist writers presented alternatives to the hierarchies of gender and nation at the heart of empire. Focusing on the ways in which *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Corinne* stage difference and the cultural encounter, I will highlight Owenson's and de Staël's new models for seeing and conceiving the foreign Other and new kinds of imagined communities that cross the boundaries of gender and nation.

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Heather Brady
Monmouth College

Dora d'Istria's *Femmes en Orient* (1860) and *Les Femmes, par une femme* (1869):
Feminism Translated between 'East' and 'West'

Elena Ghika (1828-1888), a Romanian aristocrat, traveler, writer, painter, alpinist and feminist who wrote under the pseudonym of Dora d'Istria, wrote prolifically on diverse topics ranging from Albanian nationalism, to popular songs, Swiss customs and Greek antiquities. Ghika spoke nine languages, lived most her life in Switzerland and Italy, and flourished in the intellectual company of great figures such as Alexandre von Humboldt, George Sand and Harriet Beecher Stowe. While Ghika's essays on cultural nationalism and democracy are experiencing a well-deserved renaissance today in Albania and Romania, her French-language articles published in journals like *La Revue des deux mondes* and *Le Tour du monde* have suffered from neglect. And even though she produced an enormous amount of travel writing in French from the 1850s to the 1870s, her writings have drawn surprisingly little attention from scholars of travel literature. This body of writing merits closer attention: in her travels eastward to Turkey, Greece, and Albania, Ghika developed unconventional views of "Oriental" women that opposed mainstream colonial discourse. This paper explores two feminist works, *Femmes en Orient* (1860) and *Les Femmes, par une femme* (1869) as testaments to the writer's unique, transnational feminism. In discussing women's rights across the East-West divide, these works offer readers a glimpse into women's experiences across multiple cultures, and thereby contest the dominant colonizing gaze that hoped to possess the Orient, and with it, women under the guise of national development.

Keri Berg
Indiana State University

Cleopatra for a Day: Empress Eugénie and the Opening of the Suez Canal

On November 17, 1869, Empress Eugénie, looking, in Henri Ibsen's words, "as lovely as Cleopatra," opened the Suez Canal. Eugénie's Imperial yacht, l'Aigle, was the first boat to sail through the newly constructed waterway. Ibsen's comparison of Eugénie to Cleopatra encapsulates the symbolic and real significance of the Empress to the canal. Like that of the ill-fated Egyptian queen, Eugénie's ascendancy was short lived, her inauguration of the canal the last of her public appearances as Empress. Escorted by Ferdinand de Lesseps, the canal's builder and the Empress's cousin, Eugénie was the only female European dignitary in attendance. The Emperor's absence—Napoleon III forced to stay in Paris to negotiate the transition to the planned liberal Empire—placed the spotlight directly on the Empress. This was fitting, as Eugénie was arguably the driving force behind the building of the canal: it was her support of Lesseps that encouraged Napoleon III to financially back the project and assure its completion. Yet, as the Cleopatra comparison suggests, Eugénie's presence at the opening announced the end, rather than the triumph, of French imperialism. In less than a year, the Empire would be dissolved and the Empress exiled to England. This paper revisits the opening of the Suez Canal as a key moment when the French Empire's fragility and ultimate bankruptcy bleeds through the carefully

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constructed ceremonial show of power and prestige. As with Cleopatra, the construction of Empire and its fault lines occur in the presentation and performance of the Empress. Using press accounts, travel writing, letters and illustrations of the event, the paper will chart this performance, investigating the nexus of representation, gender and power.