

**Dr Maggie O'Neill**  
**Making the Connections**  
**End of Year Report for 2007**

Following initial publicity for the network and the acquisition of the research award from the AHRC, a number of useful meetings were held with regional stakeholders, artists and community groups. One outcome of these meetings was the donation of £3000 from the Arts Council East Midlands to support the launch event and subsequent activities. This provided the resources to fund a free launch event on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2006, at the Y Theatre, Leicester. Seven seminars/ workshops have taken place between Nov 06 and Nov 07.

Highlights include the fact that communities of interest are forming around certain issues/themes and the impact of the networking and work together in the various seminars and workshops is rippling out into collaborations between practitioners and academics. For example:

- An Image maker's sub-group has emerged, led by John Perivolaris, a professional photographer. This group has authored a bid to the Arts Council for work to be undertaken with SAEMP (Somali European Media Project).
- Linked to the Image maker's sub-group and sparked by the seminar on destitution a group of participants is working with a self-organised group, African women's empowerment forum (AWEF), made up of asylum seekers and undocumented women. The focus is on a) supporting this group practically –the women's counselling project are devising a basic training programme in listening and counselling skills at the request of the group; an arts organisation are looking at helping the group to find a base with disabled access to produce arts and craft and traditional attire; b) developing an arts/research project focusing upon women's health and well-being as well as focusing on the process of the group formation and mutual help given by members. A bid will go forward based on participatory methodologies to ACE.
- A successful application was made to the AHRC KT Fellowship Programme to develop the work of the network and building also upon the two previous AHRB bids secured by O'Neill for this work in the East Midlands region. £91k has been awarded to take forward some of the work and recommendations emerging from the network events and to build in sustainability: i) improving the web-site so that it forms a hub or repository for work in the region on arts, migration and Diaspora; ii) developing a database of artists and exile and artists with experience of working with refugees, asylum seekers, migrants –this will also help artists gain work and profile their work; iii) an arts/research project focusing upon transnational belonging and place-making. This will include a one-day consultancy for Misha Myers (Senior Lecturer in Directed Theatre, Falmouth/Dartington College). Maggie met Myers and was inspired by her work – A way from home -

at the Royal Holloway Symposium). The arts work will be launched with a one-day performance event led by Misha and the PI and Co-I.

- A blog has been created by the Co-I linked to the web-site to enable more interactive exchanges (see <http://makingtheconnections-network.blogspot.com/>).

Both PI and Co-I are involved in an ESRC network series on *careers and migration* (Nov 07-July 09) that has emerged from the synergy between the AHRC network and the ESRC network leaders' growing interest in migration. In the spirit of participatory action research methodologies (PAR) and Participatory Arts (PA) the network seeks to establish what the key issues are in the region in relation to the asylum-migration nexus (the complex relationship between voluntary and enforced migration - the movement of people across borders as a consequence of civil war, natural disasters, human rights abuses) and also to build relationships with non academic stakeholders. Over 150 members are on the database across the full range of policy-makers; practitioners; refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants (including members of a newly-arrived Polish community) and also students.