

Report on participation to the conference in Lausanne, 13-15.12.12

by Daniele Cantini

I had been invited to take part as a speaker at the international workshop on The Trouble of Love in the Arab World: Romance, marriage, and the shaping of intimate lives, organised by the University of Lausanne and held there on the 14th and 15th of December 2012. There I presented a paper on “Romantic versus Acceptable Love: Jordanian university students and their loving subjectivities”. The workshop saw the participation of a network of scholars from different and prestigious institutions (ZMO in Berlin, CNRS in Paris, Georgetown University in Washington DC, University of Lausanne, University of Zurich, University of Edinburgh and University of Turin), other than the participation of members of the Swiss Society for the Study of the Middle East, and it was rather productive. As a result of it, a publication in a peer-reviewed journal is planned, under the direction of three among the organisers, namely Corinne Fortier (CNRS), Aymon Kreil (Zurich) and Irene Maffi (Lausanne). The aim of such a publication is to shed light on such a neglected field of study in the field of Middle Eastern Studies.

The topic of this workshop is indeed quite relevant for the understanding of the dynamics of desire that are at the root of movements of social as well as political change, especially in an area where studies have usually focused on more normative aspects of life. Open aim of this workshop has thus been to explore contemporary romantic love as a highly ambivalent field of experience that can stand in a tense relationship to ideals of family involvement in spouse and husband choices, gender segregation and roles, class privilege, economic security, and confessional identity – an ambivalence that has been increased by the spread of ideals of hetero-normative marriage based on romantic love. Love and marriage follow distinct logics, and their coming together is also the source of great hopes, uncertainties, and conflicts alike, the analysis of which is all the more needed at time of deep and sudden social and political change. It is understood that the analysis of such an important phenomenon will need to be continued, and another workshop in Paris is planned for the coming year with new participants.