

Vice-Chair's report, delivered final MC Meeting, Rabat 27 May 2023.

In early 2018, when Giovanni and I began developing the project that would become – to our amazement and joy – the COST Action 18140 'People in Motion', we wanted to use history and historical experience to understand and re/frame what was circulating in the media as the contemporary [European] 'migration crisis'. It was not that this was not a 'crisis' in terms of movement across and around the Mediterranean – whether measured by either the number of refugees moving or the numbers of lives lost. It was, we thought, that the language of 'crisis' worked to both to catastrophise movement, and paradoxically at the same time to *obscure movement and displacement*, as not only a condition of human life and experience across millennia, but also as perhaps *the condition* of the human condition.

This project, we hoped, would begin to recover and communicate those histories of travel, migration, displacement, exile, and exchange, and restore them to the current intellectual and public conversation. It was my own hope, in developing the language of 'displacement' in connection with these histories of human movement, that I could help to find, or create, a vocabulary that would allow us to bring together all these various forms of human movement into dialogue with each other, even to de-hierarchise and destigmatise them, without eliding the very specific personal and human differences in those histories. Perhaps it might even form the basis of a radical humanitarian and sympathetic politics of movement.

I think Giovanni and I were both very energised by the collaborative and interdisciplinary research of the Australian Research Council History of Emotions, which was how we had met – a historian of seventeenth-century religion and ideas, and a literary historian of eighteenth-century English writing and travel. We could see how the histories of objects, ideas, lives, letters, economics, science, psychology and social sciences could be brought together to explore the history of a phenomenon – then emotions, now motion – in productive and unexpected ways.

I think too we were probably profoundly shaped by our own unstable and mobile circumstances at that point. Neither of us had permanent positions in academia; both had worked for many years on precarious and contingent contracts; and both of us were moving (not always by choice) between Australia and Europe basically in search of work and financial stability, in what was – and remains – a crisis of the humanities in universities.

Movement and displacement were then a set of circumstances we were living ourselves, in a privileged form, and, for me at least, in ways that drew into tighter focus the historical and contemporary relevance of the project. These dynamics of displacement, mobility, and immobility have continued to frame the Cost Action PIMo in significant ways.

The University of Florence proved the right 'home' to host PIMo, not least because Brexit – another unwelcome displacement – made my participation in the Action highly unclear in the first two years. At Florence we are indebted to Denise Cuccia and Serena Menabeni for their invaluable administrative contribution to making this complex financial venture actually run. In Brussels, COST Science and Administrative Officers have been vital to the success of the project; Rosella Magli in particular, in the past two years, has been a great supporter and advocate of our Action.

Those formative ideas of Giovanni and I have been embraced, developed, and transformed by the members of the Core Group (many of whom we will hear from today), and especially the four WorkGroup leaders who I would like to recognise and thank here: Louisa Simonutti (with us from the

very beginning of the project) – Ideas; Jose Maria Perera – Paper; Rosita D’Amora – Objects / Material culture; Catia Antunes - People

Over the course of the past four and half years we have discovered the possibilities and limitations of the Action structure: it allows researchers to make connections – to meet, to share research, ideas, and collaborate – but it cannot always support research itself. Within that scaffolding we have been resourceful, creative, and, I think, remarkably successful. (My measure here is not only the extraordinary number of research ‘outputs’, but the range and promise of the scholarly conversation that PIMo has generated).

My role as Vice Chair has been in the development of these intellectual and research agendas, and then a steady diet of administrative and management tasks, including workplans, budgeting and reconciliation, overseeing reimbursements, and reporting. I would include among these the very real challenges of conducting a humanities project within a framework that is more used to STEM research, and in the middle of the global Covid pandemic. Constraints on movement meant taking many of our events online, reallocating budgets swiftly in response to changes, and ultimately applying (successfully) for an extension to the project and budget. There have been interesting disciplinary challenges too within the structure of the COST Action, and this has involved writing substantial petitions to COST regarding open access research publication, and publication timelines for example, which were important to the success of our project.

I am perhaps most proud of the way the project has grown and changed – has travelled – in the hands of other researchers over the past five years. This, for me, has been exciting and incredibly rewarding. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to create a conversation with a diverse and amazing group of scholars from around Europe, and the world. The final summer school and conference here in Rabat was a critical, and fitting, further reorientation to the ‘other’ shores of the Mediterranean. I think – I hope – this is only the beginning of our historical-informed conversation.

I am particularly proud of the support the Action has been able to offer young and disadvantaged researchers through the STSM and Conference support schemes. I am indebted to our Core Group, and to the small, sometime unexpected research collaborations and friendships that have grown out of PIMo. I would like to thank, most of all, Giovanni, for his stewardship of a project that has been enormous, challenging, exhilarating and exhausting!

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