
Uneasy Landscapes: There's Nothing to Fear But...

Discussant & Panel Summary: Fatima Sattar, PhD candidate, Sociology, Boston College

Panelists:

Danielle Moran, MA candidate, Gender/Cultural Studies, Simmons College

"Shame on You! An Analysis of Sexual Harassment and the Production of Public Space"

Jacqueline Sutton, MA candidate, American Studies, New York University

"Mechanisms of White Fear: The Creation of the Black Male Criminal in Urban Space"

Asimina Ino Nikolopoulou, PhD candidate, English, Northeastern University

"Urbanism, Transgression, and the Feminist Re-appropriation of the Gaze: Contesting Gender Roles in "A Question of Silence"

Danielle Moran presented her analysis of women's narratives of street harassment in New York City published on the website hollabacknyc.com. She used Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space to explore the ways in which sexually harassing language influences women's mobility in the streets of New York City, arguing that women's mobility is restricted in such "free" public spaces through various socially constructed places and ideologies. Using examples from women's online postings of stories and pictures, Moran showed how sexually harassing acts of speech contribute to the production of space and the perpetuation of men's regulation of women's movements. However, women, she argued regain power through recreating their harassment experience on this website. Thus hollabacknyc.com functions as a source of resistance.

The next presenter, Jacqueline Sutton, discussed gender, race, and urban space in her study of the creation of American segregation and black criminality. Using case studies she deconstructed the notion of white fear and the construction of black criminality in the contemporary United States. She argued that white fear actually creates new crimes, generates more anxiety, and essentializes the “black male criminal” which consequently perpetuates the socio-spatial apartheid that exists in private and public spaces. She used a case of residential segregation and the housing market as one example and suggested that we do not live in a post-racial society but rather an era of white hegemony given the covert practices of racism such as in the U.S. housing market. Sutton’s paper raised an important question: is the criminal justice system a representation of American crime or is it rather a manifestation of white fear? Analyzing the mechanisms of fear construction she reviewed the literature on race and case studies to show the problematic nature of race relations and so-called race-neutral policies. This study revealed the importance of evaluating issues of race and segregation in contemporary America.

The final presentation on the panel by Asimina Ino Nikolopoulou was a critical film analysis of gender roles in urban settings in Maurleen Gorris’s film *A Question of Silence*. Nikolopoulou argued that the masculine gaze influenced by society and cultural norms creates a social setting that renders women passive receptacles of cultural meaning. When three women in the film murder a shop owner, it results in their social and physical effacement from society. This is because they do not abide by the stereotypical patriarchal norms pertaining to women. The act they commit represents a feminist response to disrupt rigid patriarchal categories of women’s marginal social positions in society. Nikolopoulou concluded that the film portrays these women’s silence and laughter as an alternative feminist discourse that gives women in modern urban settings the freedom of self-expression.