

Feminist and Women's Studies  
Association (UK and Ireland)

# NEWSLETTER

September 2013 Issue 61

CONTEMPORARY

GENDER

AUSTRALIAN

WOMEN

INTERVIEW WITH ESSAY  
COMPETITION WINNER

RUSSIA

FEMINIST  
RESEARCH

MODERNIST  
INTIMACIES

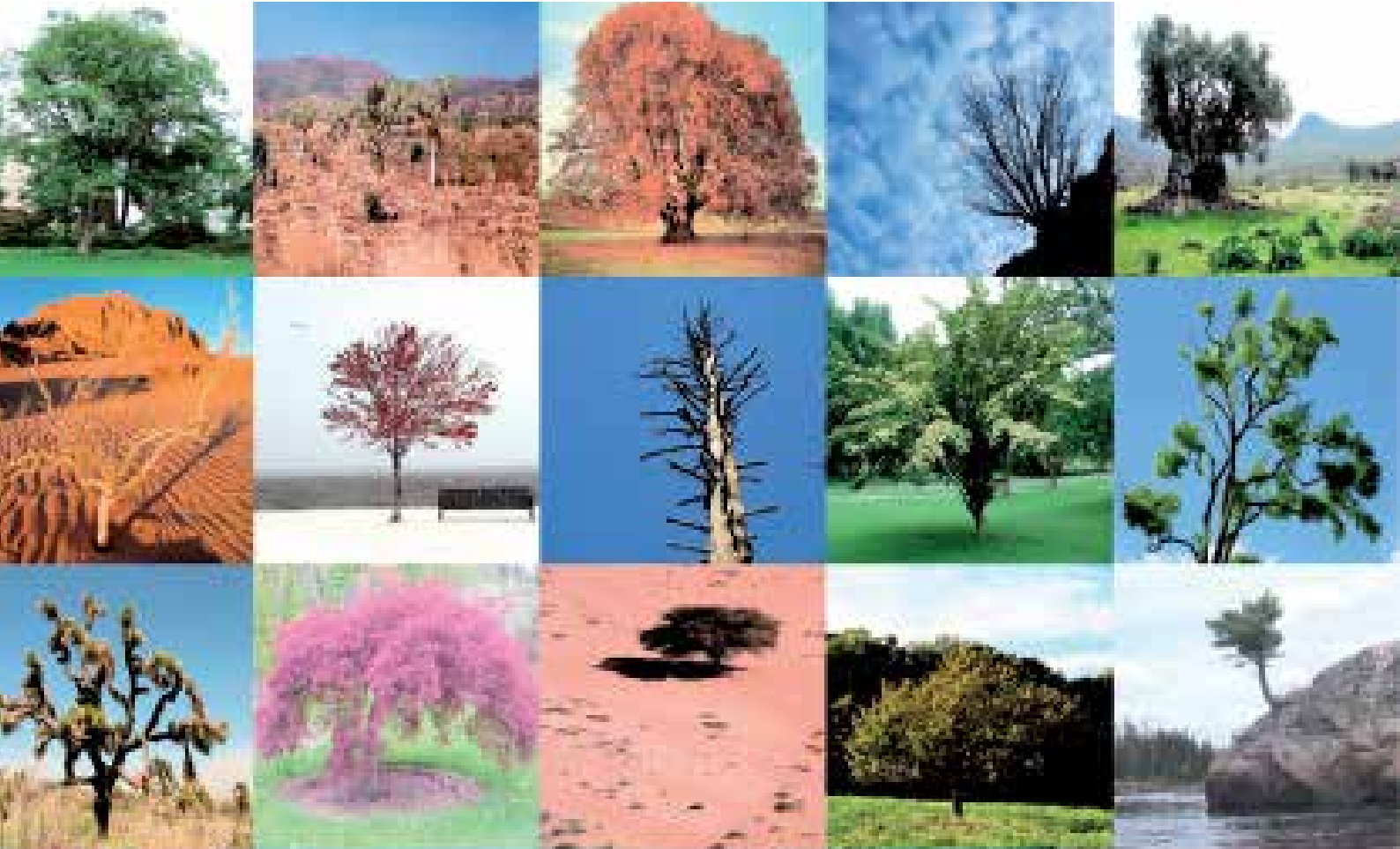
THE LADY  
DOTH PROTEST

REFLECTIONS

MEDIA, GENDER AND  
GENERATIONS WORKSHOP

POLITICAL  
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EDITORIAL



## What is the **Feminist and Women's Studies Association (UK and Ireland)**?

The FWSA promotes feminist research and teaching and women's studies nationally and internationally. Through its elected executive committee, the FWSA is involved in working on issues of central importance to feminist scholars in further and higher education, supporting postgraduate events and enabling feminist research. Recent and upcoming work includes participating in the development of subject benchmarks, funding student-organised seminars, a highly successful student essay competition and the annual conference.

Committed to raising awareness of women's studies, feminist research and gender-oriented issues in secondary and tertiary education, the FWSA liaises regularly with other gender-related research and community networks as well as with policy groups.



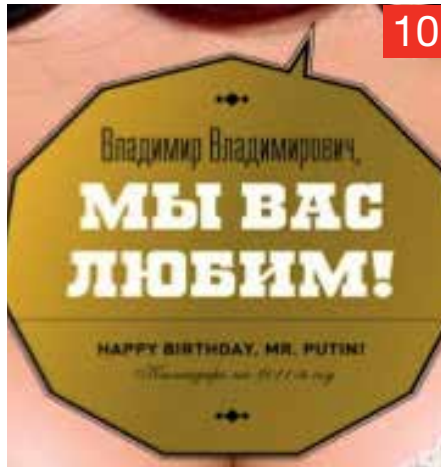
**fwsa**

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## Membership

Membership to the FWSA includes the following benefits:

- Welcome pack
- Discounted registration at FWSA conferences and events
- Funding for student-organised workshops and seminars
- Biannual newsletter
- Email distribution and discussion list
- Election to the Executive Committee.

## Membership fees

Students and retired members  
(Annual rate **£12**)

Student discount rate for three years  
(Three year rate **£30**)

Income of £10,000 – £20,000  
(Annual rate **£20**)

Income of £20,000 – £30,000  
(Annual rate **£30**)

Income of £30,000 – £40,000  
(Annual rate **£40**)

Income of £40,000 +  
(Annual rate **£60**)

Charities  
(Annual rate **£75**)

Institutions  
(Annual rate **£150**)

Application for membership can be done by post or online. Go to [www.fwsa.org.uk](http://www.fwsa.org.uk) for further details.

## Executive Committee

### FWSA Acting Chair

Dr Kate Sang – [k.sang@hw.ac.uk](mailto:k.sang@hw.ac.uk)  
Dr Ayona Datta – [a.datta@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:a.datta@leeds.ac.uk)

### Newsletter Officer

Dr Maud Perrier  
– [maud.perrier@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:maud.perrier@bristol.ac.uk)

### Essay Competition Officer

Dr Trishima Mitra-Kahn  
– [trishima@gmail.com](mailto:trishima@gmail.com)

### Activist Liaison Officer

Finn Mackay  
– [Finn.Mackay.09@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Finn.Mackay.09@bristol.ac.uk)

### Membership Officer

Dr Katya Salmi – [Katya.Salmi@gmail.com](mailto:Katya.Salmi@gmail.com)

### Conference Liaison Officer

Dr Emily Falconer  
– [E.Falconer@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:E.Falconer@mmu.ac.uk)

### Publicity Officer

Bridget Lockyer  
– [bridget.lockyer@york.ac.uk](mailto:bridget.lockyer@york.ac.uk)

### Treasurer

Dr Claire O'Callaghan – [cfo3@le.ac.uk](mailto:cfo3@le.ac.uk)

### Social Media Officer

Joanne Ella Parsons –  
[joanne.parsons@live.uwe.ac.uk](mailto:joanne.parsons@live.uwe.ac.uk)

### Small Grants Scheme Officer

Dr Katy Pilcher –  
[Katy.pilcher@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Katy.pilcher@brunel.ac.uk)

### Administrative Assistant

Zoe Alker – [Z.Alker@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:Z.Alker@ljmu.ac.uk)



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# Editorial

Welcome to the second FWSA newsletter of 2013! The last few months have been very eventful for us at the FWSA with our first online chair elections. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Kate Sang and Ayona Datta, our newly elected Co-Chair since June. This newsletter features a range of conference reviews not least Emily F Henderson's evocative recollections of the last FWSA Annual Conference, as someone who attended the conference Emily's piece brilliantly captures the atmosphere and debates which took place. Vikki Turbine's piece on contemporary feminist activism in Russia...I'm also really pleased that the newsletter showcases both Emma Young and Tori Cann's fantastic work, as supporting postgraduate scholars through the essay and small grants competition is an important part of the FWSA's work.

Thank you to those of you who have sent in your latest achievements for the members' news section, it's exciting to see so many of our members making a contribution to feminism beyond as well as within academia. As this is my last newsletter I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all the members who have generously contributed to the newsletter over the last few years- I'll be staying on the FWSA executive but I'll now be looking after the book prize competition. What I continue to enjoy most in my work on the executive committee is the opportunity to forge meaningful connections, online and offline, with other feminist scholars.

**Maud Perrier**, University of Bristol  
Maud.Perrier@bristol.ac.uk

# Chair's report

This has been an exciting few months for the FWSA. There have been changes to the membership of the Executive (more about that later), our biannual conference and we have been able to award the essay prize, the book prize and the small grant. The conference, 'The Lady doth protest too much...' was a great success. From the fantastic key notes to the individual sessions we were treated to a quite astonishing set of discussions across the breadth of contemporary feminist and gender studies. We were delighted to welcome visitors from across the globe and we hope this helps to further the FWSA's international links.

At the AGM the results of the election for Chair were announced. The combination of an online election, postal votes and a ballot box at the conference resulted in a greater turnout than for previous elections. The election was a close run event and Ayona and I are delighted to have the opportunity to continue our work with the FWSA. Unfortunately the AGM saw the stepping down of Srila Roy who has served the Executive for six years. Jess Cox has also decided to step down as membership officer. Srila and Jess have been invaluable members of the Executive, we will miss them and wish them all the best for their future endeavours. Katya Salmi is continuing as acting membership officer until January.

In other Executive news, Maud Perrier is stepping down as the newsletter coordinator. Maud has done a fantastic job in putting together this valuable members' resource and we would like to extend our thanks. Jo Parsons is our Social Media Officer, with that role increasing in its scope and importance for the FWSA.

As I (Kate) am now co-chair, I will no longer continue with the Book Prize. Maud will be taking on this role with immediate effect. Claire O'Callaghan will be stepping down as Treasurer in September. We will soon start the call for proposals for the 2015 conference and Emily Falconer will be the liaison for this.

The conference all saw the opportunity to explore potential international links for the FWSA. Members

of the Executive met with the co-chairs of the Australian Women and Gender Studies Association (AWGSA). We are currently identifying opportunities for joint ventures, for example, reduced fees at conferences and a webinar. The Executive is keen to expand these opportunities so please do get in touch with Ayona or I if you know of other similar organisations who are open to working with us.

We have also seen the FWSA increase its online presence – our new blog (pictured), book reviews and twitter pages have opened the organisation to a much wider audience. We have received some very positive feedback on the new blog and please do keep your ideas and feedback coming. Many thanks to Jo and Bridget for their incredible hard work in this area.

The start of the academic year is nearly upon us. We hope you have had a productive summer and we look forward to working with you all over the next year.

**Kate Sang** (co-chair)  
**Ayona Datta** (co-chair)





## Conference reviews

### Leftovers of 'The Lady Doth Protest': Reflections of a Conference Researcher

June 2013

This short piece is an offering to the 2013 FWSA Biennial Conference, which took place in Nottingham. I conducted research at the conference for my ESRC-funded PhD study about conceptions of gender – and related concepts – in Higher Education. The aim of the fieldwork was to disorganise and pluralise my understandings of the concepts that we use on a day-to-day basis to represent our research participants and the domain in which we carry out that work. The conference has, as hoped, left me in a state of productive confusion. I have tried to portray here some of the experiences of the conference researcher, the intricate details of conference life that are swept away with the rubbish after the closing remarks, but which form the obsession of my research.

Someone drops their pen on the floor under your chair, and you have a moment of complicity as you decide who will pick it up. Your eyes rove about the room, absently noting who is emailing or reading, your ears fixed on the presentation being delivered at the front of the room, when suddenly your attention foregrounds someone knitting on the front row, and the presentation fades into the background while you collect together other images of knitting and embroidery from academic disseminations events – the quilting together of layers of gauze and silk at the Gender and Education Association Conference, the garment emerging from the needles of a Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES) knitter at the Institute of Education.

You look at the pictures being shown to you on projector screens, of monkeys occupying judicial buildings, Femen baring breasts and bearing bodily inscriptions, Australian activists,

authentically speckled scrap-booked 'zines, poster campaigns about traffickers and the trafficked, you absorb video clips of archived black British feminists and singing Iranians. You find yourself removing these visual aids from the words they illustrate, piecing together a bathetic collage of feminist topics; as the same pairs of breasts recur, this time huge across the keynote's distended screen, the debates fall away into swirling ripples, leaving the starkly symbolic bodies naked of signification.

You train your ear to hear 'woman'. Woman as a throwaway descriptive, as an intellectual device, a demarcating and politicising call to arms, as a label for bodies and words and minds. Your thoughts drift to the newer researchers' event at the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) that you attended some weeks before, where you were asked if the fact that attendees at feminist events were all women introduced bias into the field, whether you could deny the significance of the gender differences in appetite that manifested themselves at women-dominated events, where so much food was left over for the few male participants to eat. You recall the decreasingly patient responses you gave, but also the defence of plural identities that you issued with gusto: Women? What Women? How can you speak of a homogenous, 'biased' field when, even in a roomful of people characterised predominantly by the same set of organs, there are so many myriad manifestations of gender? Tuning in to the variations of Woman being batted about, you tune into a disillusionment you have felt brewing for some time, a conceptual ache that saps your future refutations. You twist and droop between hope and despair: the feminist research field splayed out before you yields a brilliant array of the niches of women's lives, explored respectfully and admirably, and yet the brilliance, a two-tone swatch, is riddled with conceptual essentialism and universalism.

You and your fellow audience-members are asked how you are feeling today, as you are interpolated via a rhetorical question into a common narrative of academic weariness. You are asked to draw a classroom, to depict

the normalcy of your pedagogical imaginings. You are en masse asked if you are a member of the Scottish Women's Budget Group, and, if so, to talk about it. Things are expected of you, and views are assumed. You are probably privileged and having contested feelings about it, you must be staving off-confessing-fighting against the activist-academia imbalance in your lives, you may be abusing the purchase that the intersectionality lever gives you on inequalities debates, you might have a simplistically-unified impression of the Women of Color scene in the United States, you should know a fair amount about Femen, you won't know a great deal about unionising fashion models in India, you don't know enough about the Feminist Library or you would be giving it greater support, you might be shocked by images of vaginas, but judging by the reaction to this warning, the rest of the room will mock you if you are... Yielding yourself to the motion of these perpetual positionings and exhortations, you are buffeted to and fro; you lose a sense of what it is you knew, and what you are sure you always knew, but only needed reminding about: what you thought you believed in and stood for is manoeuvred into opposition by people who seemed to resemble you in outlook and deed, what you have defended in other spheres until your arguments are worn threadbare is shaken out of place and re-set. You let yourself tumble.

You queue obediently for coffee and biscuits, finger food and dinner, you sit mortified at your plentiful plate as the stragglers nibble on salad from a cup, having refused your offer to share. You exchange smiles in the bathroom, texts in the plenary, email addresses in the foyer. You form kaleidoscopic constellations that shift and reform as you realise that the walk between the conference hall and entertainment venue is longer than you think; the stretching promenade unfolds into no place for platitudes. Over dinner, you get stuck into conversation on your direct right, your extended right, your left, your extended left, then, never a good idea, over the table. You describe your research in a multitude of ways, issuing prêt-à-porter summaries and in-depth analyses;

you amass Summer Collection 2013 in return – snapshots of projects that have made it down the funders’ catwalks. You return to your hotel room for the uproarious laughter and intimate conversations of mutual exhaustion, and, awoken at 4am, are haunted by sounds of other delegates returning to their rooms after an unknown and unknowable spree, the after-party you could not crash.

Many thanks to the FWSA Executive Committee, who kindly agreed to let me carry out some of my PhD fieldwork at the 2013 FWSA Biennial Conference.

**Emily F. Henderson**, Institute of Education, University of London

## Feminist Research Conference

University of East London  
July 2013

I’m really interested in the complexity of choices in feminist research and I wanted the opportunity to share this interest with others. I saw the opportunity when the University asked for academics to bid for funding to run a conference. I was fortunate to be one of the successful bidders. This gave me the big opportunity to have a conference on feminist research that would share a vision and to give people a chance to listen to interesting speakers and an opportunity to discuss aspects of feminist research. This vision clearly appealed to other people too because even though July is probably the least preferred time to run a conference, it was attended by over sixty people, many of whom stayed from the first speaker to the informal networking in the evening.

So the vision was to invite speakers who are thought leaders in feminist research. The first speaker of the day was Professor Yvette Taylor from the Weeks Centre at London South Bank University shared aspects of the life of an academic in terms of feminist research with her talk entitled ‘Writing my heart out: feminisms’ passions, pressures and pains?’. One of the key areas of discussion related to ‘feminism’, as academic-activist orientation has long been identified as a ‘passionate’ matter, as that

which drives, centres and ‘does’ feminism as a living, breathing, sustaining practice. In order to get a different perspective, Helena Reckitt from Goldsmiths is known internationally as curator and critic of art and she shared selected art and performance art with a presentation called ‘Writing my heart out: feminisms’ passions, pressures and pains?’ in order to share a different approach. For a group of people who are used to communicating in the written word, Helena’s presentation was enlightening and some attendants said that this had made them see things in different ways.

Dr Kath Browne came from University of Brighton to talk about ‘Commonplace: Something Feminists Could Strive for?’ Focusing on the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival as a feminist separatist space, she aimed to not only highlight the myth of equalities and inclusion, but also point to other ways of living. At the Festival, feminism becomes commonplace in ways that might be seen as creating feminist utopias.

Professor Christina Hughes from the University of Warwick had chosen to talk about ‘Light Thinking: From Reflection to Diffraction – and Back Again?’ After a spell of summer weather, there were heavy storms on the Monday night before the conference. The storms were so bad that a lot of trains were badly affected and so Christina could not travel down to the conference. We had to quickly work on setting up a Skype presentation. This did work well and Christina spoke very passionately and answered questions from the delegates.

In the afternoon, there were separate discussion threads where delegates could go to discuss women and the economy, intersectionality or reflexivity. Delegates found useful sessions in order to share their own thoughts and opinions with others who are interested in the same area. The final speaker of the day was Professor Anne Kovalainen from the Academy of Finland who spoke about her research into how

women are presented in the Economist, ‘Gendering Epistemic Governance’. Another thought provoking presentation that made delegates think about how an internationally influential journal such as the *Economist* does represent women. All in all, it was an enjoyable and interesting day and there is hope that another conference can be organised next year.

**Wilma Garvin**, Royal Docks Business School, University of East London

## Modernist Intimacies

Sussex University  
May 2013

The one-day Modernist Intimacies conference, hosted by the Centre for Modernist Studies, took place at the University of Sussex on 17th May, 2013 and featured papers by, among others, Santanu Das [Kings], Joanne Winning [Birkbeck] and Hugh Stevens [UCL] with an end-of-day keynote from Denis Flannery [Leeds] entitled: ‘How to Live Together; or, Modernist Intimacy in 1897.’

One of the major questions raised by the day was that of the very concept of ‘modernist’ as an organising genre, when modernism itself has been lately, and increasingly, a category under constant threat of erasure [see Gabriel Josipovici’s *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* 2010]. Several papers were also sceptical about the usefulness of thinking about a specifically ‘modernist’ kind of intimacy and conversations frequently returned to the potential contours of this configuration. It quickly transpired that modernism and intimacy are elusive and often fractious objects – both lend themselves to a language of cliché that threatens to obscure more than it reveals.

That said, across the day, many points of contact were found, often between

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texts that initially appeared remote from each other. Various, papers spoke to the art of the cinematic close-up [Charles Burnetts, University of Western Ontario], shame and epistemologies of feeling [Geoff Gilbert, American University of Paris], anger and reading [Jennifer Cooke, Loughborough], and the aesthetics of intimacy in the work of Djuna Barnes and Evelyn Waugh [Karina Jacobowicz, UCL and Ben Clarke, North Carolina].

D.H Lawrence emerged throughout the day as a modernist author preoccupied with intimacy both in his novels and personal correspondence [Hugh Stevens' great paper on the correspondence between Lawrence and Forster delineated Lawrence's often capricious personal style]. Whilst Lawrence has long been considered a writer who deals in the messy stuff of relationships, conversation turned [particularly in an afternoon session entitled 'Missed Connections and Vile Bodies' which featured two papers on Lawrence but also in Santanu Das' impressive paper on wounding, writing and feeling in modernist literature] to a perceived distaste, particularly over the past 20 years, towards Lawrence's type of intimacy. Questions regarding why Lawrence seems to have dropped off undergraduate reading lists expanded into a wider discussion of the uncomfortably intimate affects produced by his writing, affects that seem very 'un-modernist': mawkish, sentimental, florid and melodramatic and thus, arguably, uncomfortable for modernist critics to handle.

Throughout, the conference challenged the dominant critical account of modernism that has it enshrining impersonality and revolted by sentiment, contiguity and the personal. Instead, papers mapped the complex terrain of modernist emotion, where scenes of anger and shame brush, often uneasily, against formalist urges to taxonomize and, thus, manage emotion [Jonathan Foltz's paper on Vernon Lee particularly exemplified this urge]. Overarching, the conference offered a narrative of a period consumed by thoughts of relationality, proximity and different constellations of contact.

**Ruth Charnock**, University of Sussex

## Interview with Essay Competition Winner Emma Young

**Emma Young** is the winner of the FWSA 2012 Essay Competition with her essay 'No Place Like Home: Re-Writing "Home" and Re-Locating Lesbianism in Emma Donoghue's *Stir-Fry* (1994) and *Hood* (1995). Emma's essay along with the other seven shortlisted entries will be published in a special issue of the *Journal of International Women's Studies*. We asked Emma to tell us more about herself as a feminist scholar and her winning essay.

### Tell us a bit about yourself and how you came to submit your essay for the competition...

I am currently entering the final year of my PhD and my thesis examines the relationship between contemporary British women short story writers and feminist politics. The essay itself formed part of my MA dissertation (University of Leicester, 2011) which explored the representation of home spaces in the novels of Emma Donoghue. Being familiar with the work of the FWSA I saw the call for submissions into the competition and thought it sounded like a great opportunity to share my work with a wider community, perhaps gain some feedback if it reached a longlisting stage and (if I was incredibly lucky) to have my work published – it was definitely worth doing!

### What is the central argument of your essay?

The essay argues that in her early novels Emma Donoghue re-writes the home space (traditionally defined through heteropatriarchal familial relations) in order to locate lesbian desire and relationships. I particularly focus on her deployment of objects - closet spaces (a pertinent space in queer studies) and liminal thresholds such as doors - alongside a wider reading of the broader spaces of attics and family homes through to how the relationships between women function to challenge the heteropatriarchal home and define lesbian space. At the crux of this essay is a re-negotiation of contemporary theory and a strong intersectionality. I draw on feminist

scholarship, literary research and work from the social sciences that discuss notions of home space to illuminate this reading.



### What issues does your essay raise that you think are of relevance for feminist studies today?

I think the essay raises two key issues in relation to feminist studies today. The first is that it maps out how literature can be a powerful political feminist vehicle. I attended the FWSA Biennial conference in June this year and one of the key debates that arose across numerous panel sessions was this question of literature and activism: how can literature contribute to feminist activism? What I hope this essay highlights is just how political writers can be in their novels, short stories, poetry, drama and so forth and how this can translate to readers and the wider community re-thinking social issues. Secondly, it demonstrates how literature and social sciences can indeed complement one another! So much of recent feminist debate (particularly in the academy) has centred on this idea of 'intersectionality' and in some small way I hope one outcome of this piece is that it demonstrates how divergent debates around feminism; whether that be between the social sciences and literary studies, feminism and queer theory or across the British and Irish context, can be discussed in sync to develop a productive feminist dialogue.

### What did you learn through the process of researching and writing the essay?

Patience and the need for a sharp-eye! Originally, the piece was submitted as one chapter out of a 20,000 words MA dissertation. Whilst the argument, content and focus did not shift in terms of what I was saying, my reading of the novel and the movement between ideas it did need some editing to make it read coherently as a stand-alone essay. I think what was most valuable therefore about the process was the refining of the piece and learning to take a step away and try and approach it anew as if you haven't really written it! Friends and colleagues tell me that this is a skill that tends to develop at the end of the PhD process when you are editing a thesis so to have had the opportunity early on to experience this has been great. Receiving feedback from the judges as per Peer Review and making further amendments subsequently has also been a good learning curve.

### What are you working on at the moment?

Right now it is primarily my thesis – I am now into the final year and so it is very much a case of the finish line is in sight! I also co-authoring another chapter on Emma Donoghue, this time her historical novel *Slammerkin* with Dr Claire O'Callaghan, following an invitation to contribute to a forthcoming (and indeed the first) collection of essays on her writing. This is particularly exciting as it shows that Donoghue is finally beginning to receive the critical attention she deserves as a writer and co-authoring a piece is also proving to be another fantastic learning experience.

### What does winning the FWSA essay prize mean for your future academic endeavours?

Winning the prize has definitely given my academic confidence a boost. As a PhD student I think you can often feel that you are somehow stumbling to an end goal and it can be quite a disorientating and challenging time. Having won the FWSA Essay Prize it has really uplifted my self-belief and I am sure previous winners have also been grateful for that experience too. As winning the prize results in a journal publication this is obviously a massive benefit to my future academic career as it is a journal article on my CV which, as a PhD student, I hope will stand me in good stead when it comes to applying for future jobs. Overall, winning the prize has fermented by excitement about entering academia and I would definitely encourage students to apply in 2014!

## Spotlight on... the Media, Gender and Generations Workshop

The FWSA hosts an annual small grants competition open to postgraduate students who want to organise an event for other postgraduates around gender/feminism. The 2012 winner **Tori Cann**, one of the organisers, reports on the Gender, Media and Generations Workshop which took place in January at the Open University.



On the 27th of January 2012, armed with an FWSA Small Grant and a UEA Enterprise, Engagement and Employability Grant, the inaugural Gender, Media and Generations Postgraduate Workshop was held at The Open University in Camden, London.

I had the pleasure of working alongside Ester McGeeney in organising this event, and the workshop featured two keynote speakers, six postgraduate researchers, and one group workshop. Organised to highlight postgraduate research taking place at the seven CHASE institutions (CHASE is the Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts Southeast

England), as the call for papers was released, it was clear that issues of gender, media and generation were of interest to researchers far beyond the confines of these institutions. This is perhaps not surprising given the increasing concern over invisibility of older women on British screens, combined with anxieties of young people as media consumers (in both online and offline spaces) prominent within British press reports.

The workshop was organised with the aim that it would provide a supportive space; where postgraduate researchers would be placed at the forefront of the conversation. Postgraduate researchers would therefore





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be able to present and share their work, develop practical skills of presentation and dissemination, and start conversations about their research across disciplinary boundaries. By bringing together scholars researching within this broad field, the workshop initiated a dialogue that was theoretically and empirically intergenerational and interdisciplinary, that took place not just across the institutions within the consortium, but beyond.

The intergenerational and interdisciplinary focus of the day emerged from my own experiences of researching gender and generation within the academy. As a youth media researcher I continue to find myself surprised at the so few conversations we have with our colleagues studying different generational groups, finding myself speaking almost solely with other youth researchers. I felt that this must surely be to the detriment of our understanding of generations, with so much to be learned from the dialogue that crosses these generational boundaries. With this in mind, Ester and I worked hard to ensure a range of perspectives were featured.

The morning session was structured around media texts, with Professor Yvonne Tasker providing the first of the keynote speeches. This was followed by talks from Melanie Kennedy, Claire Mortimer, and Hannah Yelin, whose papers ranged from discussions of Tween girls and celebrity (Kennedy), to the celebrity memoirs of young women (Yelin), to Margaret Rutherford's portrayals of older, unruly women (Mortimer). In these papers we saw the generational shifts in the ways in which women are represented, moving from the pre-sexual Tween, to the excessive Jade Goody, to the asexual Rutherford.

The afternoon session was then concerned with issues of production and reception, with Professor Bev Skeggs providing the second of the keynote speeches. The talks were given by Lies Lanckman, Irene Noy

and Jane Traies and reflected the breadth of research being undertaken in this diverse field. Here, papers spanned the 20th Century, moving from the censorship of children's films in the 1920s (Lanckman), to the impact of Bauermeister's sound art in the 1960s, to audience reception studies of older lesbian women watching older lesbian women in the 1990s (Traies).

As a postgraduate researcher I felt it was crucial that researchers at all stages in their academic careers were able to learn from the experiences of one another, and this was one of the main motivations of asking established and respected academics such as Bev and Yvonne to join the conversation. This led to an unexpected alternative generational aspect emerging, that offered by juxtaposition of the keynotes and the postgraduate researchers (and all of the delegates that fell 'inbetween'). Yvonne and Bev both reflected on their own feminist genealogies, and how, as researchers, their feminisms emerged from distinct socio-historical contexts. This allowed for all of the delegates, at their various career levels, to reflect on their own feminisms; how they emerged and how they are evolving. This reflection continued into the methods workshop that was hosted in the last session of the day, where the activity took place by writing on the table (if only their childhood selves could see them now!). In this session the aim was to ensure that the voices, ideas and experiences of all of the delegates could be heard. We reflected on how we could approach studies of gender, media and generation, as well as how we might define these broad concepts. As well as these ontological issues, the space was also used to reflect on our positions as feminist researchers within the academy, and how the current academic climate has led to increasing anxieties in our feminist academic outputs. In hearing the words of concern and support from our fellow feminists, the session reached an almost cathartic level.

As one of the organisers who had such a great time at the event it is difficult for me to stand back from the day and engage critically with it. Nevertheless, there were some glaring absences that I would like to take the time to recognise. In the first instance there was an overwhelming whiteness in the media texts, audiences and creators that were the subject of academic interrogation, and this should be acknowledged. There was also an absence of focus given to males and non-binary gender identities over the course of the day. This may be indicative of the current state of affairs in media studies, but given some of the important work emerging in these fields I expect that it is not.

Conversations were started that we continue to have and research was disseminated, but much more importantly friendships were made. One (of the many) reasons to be proud to be a feminist researcher is that we support and acknowledge the struggles of our colleagues, and that we foster long standing communities that hold the principles of sisterhood at their heart. This is something that began during the day, continued into the drinks reception, and has carried on since. It is with great appreciation that both Ester and I acknowledge the contribution from the FWSA in allowing this to happen.

Notes from the methods workshop can be found by visiting: <http://gendermediageneration.tumblr.com/>

**Tori Cann** v.cann@uea.ac.uk

## Feature:

# Women's Political Activism in Contemporary Russia: some reflections from the online sphere

Women's political activism in Russia has come under renewed focus as a result of the high profile 'Punk Prayer' protest against the politics of the third Putin Presidency performed in Christ the Saviour's Cathedral in Moscow in February 2012 by the self-proclaimed radical feminist collective 'Pussy Riot'. While this protest gained widespread international attention as an example of human rights activism, until the recent activism against the violations of LGBTQ citizens rights in Russia, there has been little in-depth discussion of the wider gender politics that shape the context in which women can engage politically in Russia.

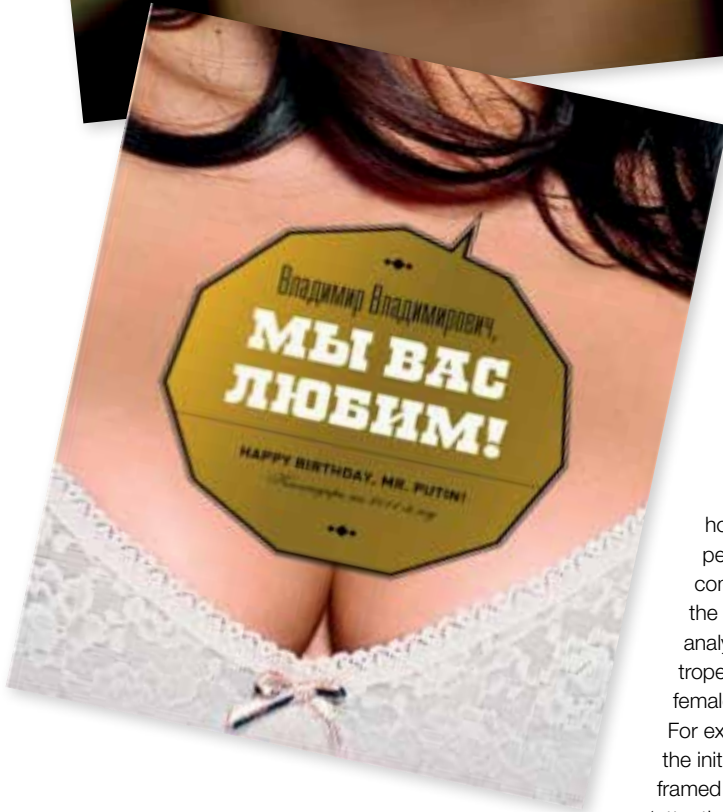
I had the opportunity to address this gap at this year's FWSA conference in my paper 'Rethinking women's political activism in contemporary Russia'. The paper placed the Pussy Riot case within the wider context of women's pro and anti regime activism that was observed online between 2010 and 2013 as part of the ESRC sponsored project 'The internet and Everyday Rights in Russia' that I co-investigated with Prof. Sarah Oates (RES-000-22-4159). This project investigated the ways in which the Internet is providing citizens in Russia with an alternative 'public' space in which to engage in rights activism in areas deemed important to their everyday lives. One of the case studies within this was to explore how women use the Internet as a sphere of political participation and how their political engagement online is perceived.

While I don't have the space to discuss in detail here, it is necessary to say that Russia has a long and complex history with

gender equality and a deeply antagonistic relationship with feminism. As the wealth of existing research on post-Soviet gender politics shows, this can be attributed both to the negative perceptions of the failed Soviet experiment of emancipation, and to a neoliberal, post-feminist discourse that claims the goals of feminism as self-evident rather than an ongoing space of contestation. This rhetoric has resonance with many women in spite of the litany of violations of rights that continue in Russia as evidenced by the clawback of women's rights in relation to employment, childcare, reproductive rights and participation, that the increasingly conservative and authoritarian state is overseeing.

However, there is an equally large body of research highlighting the prominent role of women in civic activism and in campaigning for social and economic rights. In addition, we found that some young women were engaging with 'traditional' political issues, i.e. those that relate to party politics and the state, and were making use of the Internet to do so. In the paper, I discussed one such example from the project; the publication of two Calendars put together by groups of female students in the journalism faculty of Moscow State University (MGU) that appeared online in October 2010. The first calendar posted featured 12 female students posing in their lingerie as a 'birthday gift' to the then Prime Minister Putin. The next day, an alternative version appeared with the women fully clothed in

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black with tape over their mouths. This calendar posed a series of ‘unaskable’ questions about the role of the state in ongoing human rights violations in Russia directly to Putin.

While this showed that some, albeit relatively privileged (in terms of education, class and location), young women were engaging with pro and anti regime politics, I spent the remainder of my paper discussing

how this activism was perceived in the online comments relating to the calendars. Here, the analysis showed familiar tropes of dismissal of female political agency. For example, responses to the initial calendar variously framed the women as ‘attention seekers’, ‘puppets’ of another pro-regime

actors, or as sexualized objects. There was no sense from those commenting that the women may have been exercising political agency. This was all the more intriguing as the comments responding to the second calendar, that clearly made a political statement by highlighting current human rights violations and opposing the sexualised embodiment of the first calendar,

followed broadly similar lines. Again, the focus on the women’s appearance was dominant, congratulating them for their ‘appropriate’ and ‘classy’ representation of journalists in comparison with the ‘whores’ of the first calendar. Thus, any political content or intent became obscured in a debate about female respectability.

While the paper was about young women’s activism in the contemporary Russian context, which is subject to a particularly pernicious gender politics at present, the tropes that served to dismiss women’s political agency are also familiar in other contexts. Indeed, recent coverage of the misogynistic ‘trolling’ of female commentators online in the UK is only one such example to illustrate how the quasi public sphere of the Internet remains as contested a space for women as the traditional public sphere. Women who engage politically online are subject to dismissal, derision or attack. If this is the case in an established democracy, continued research on how women in authoritarian contexts like Russia use the online sphere, is all the more vital. It would be easy to be pessimistic about the prospects of the internet fostering a safe space for women’s activism in Russia based on current events, but feminist activism exists, persists and develops in response to particular gender regimes. It is important that we continue to watch these spaces with interest and remain open to seeing women’s political activism in unlikely spaces and in all its guises.

I would be happy to discuss any aspect of this further, so if you are interested in learning more about this paper, the wider project, or my ongoing work on women’s human rights in Russia, please contact me at [Vikki.Turbine@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Vikki.Turbine@glasgow.ac.uk), or send me a tweet [@VikTurbine](https://twitter.com/VikTurbine)

# Members' News

## Kate Sang

(FWSA co-chair) was a visiting Scholar at the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales in Australia and the Gender and Diversity Research Group at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand in June 2013. These trips to Australia and New Zealand were funded by the Carnegie Trust, Heriot Watt University and the Gender and Diversity Research Group at AUT. The first output from this research was a paper entitled 'Gender and migration in Australia and New Zealand: the case of academics' presented at the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion conference (2013) in Athens which won best paper in its stream.

## Emily Falconer

(FWSA Conference Liaison Officer) has been awarded £2,000 to hold an event called 'Northern Monkey's and Southern Fairies?': Understanding the North-South divide in the UK in an age of Austerity for the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2nd-9th November 2013. She is now starting a new role as a Research Fellow at the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research on the ESRC funded project 'Making Space for Queer-Identifying Religious Youth'.

## Professor Yvette Taylor

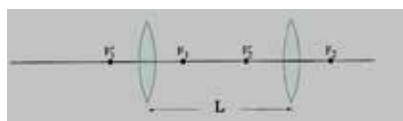
Head of the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research at London South Bank University (LSBU), has been awarded a prestigious mid-career fellowship from the British Academy for a project titled 'Critical Terrain, Dividing Lines and Lives: Re-Placing North-South Regionalism' (2013-14). Professor Tracey Reynolds will be Acting Head of the Weeks Centre during this time.

"A new four-year European network on 'Comparing European Prostitution Policies: Understanding Scales and Cultures of Governance' has been funded by COST (2013-2017, COST Action IS1209, see [http://www.cost.eu/domains\\_actions/isch/Actions/IS1209](http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/isch/Actions/IS1209) for more information). The Action, which involves 21 countries so far, will compare and disseminate knowledge about the multiple contexts, features and effects of prostitution policies

at the European, national and local levels. It will provide an innovative platform of exchange to enhance understanding of how concepts, policies and practices transfer across cultures and contexts, and the implications this has for knowledge exchange and coordination in the field. The Action Chair is Dr Isabel Crowhurst, Lecturer in Sociology at Kingston University (Grant Holder institution), who was one of the proposers of the Action. The Action will be officially launched in London in September 2013.

## Roona Simpson

has a new book coming out in September with Lynn Jamieson entitled *Living Alone Globalization, Identity and Belonging*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.



## Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka

FWSA member, lecturer and researcher in English literature and Irish Studies, has taken a leap onto the other side. Her play *A Pair of New Eyes* will be premiered in Dublin in November this year. The play is about two forgotten but extraordinary historical women who, working in the Irish midlands in the nineteenth century, became world-wide pioneers in art, science, and technology. One of the protagonists of the play is Mary Rosse, architect, engineer, blacksmith (yes, blacksmith), one of the best photographers in history, and an unmatched force in famine relief; the other is her cousin by marriage, Mary Ward, astronomer, entomologist, and accomplished artist, whose books of microscopic images brought a shock to the Victorians. The play will be produced by Born to Burn productions and the Hoops and Hammers group, two community-based and non-profit organisations. A percentage of Box Office will go directly to women's NGOs. To coincide with the premiere, the text of the play will be published in Ireland by Gur Cake Editions. For more information, see: [www.borntoburnproductions.com](http://www.borntoburnproductions.com)



# News from the Australian Gender and Women's Studies Association

AWGSA exists to promote the teaching, study and research of women's and gender studies in Australia and to be a national voice on women's and gender studies issues. We promote links between the eighteen Australian universities that offer a dedicated Women and Gender Studies programs as well as academics working at other institutions who include gender as a key category of analysis in their work and who operate from a feminist perspective. At a time of course rationalisation in many Australian universities this support often takes a very active form and AWGSA has participated in campaigns in the last few years to prevent the defunding of programs in Gender Studies at La Trobe University (Victoria), the University of Queensland and Curtin University (Western Australia).

The organisation also hosts biennial conferences, the next of which will take place at Monash University (Victoria) from June 23rd-25th 2014. We would be delighted to receive proposals for papers or sessions from FWSA members and are currently in the process of organising discounted conference registration fees for FWSA members. In addition, we have an ongoing project of deepening feminist disciplinary work and also fund discipline-focused mini conferences. In 2010 we organised

a feminist literary studies conference, while in November of this year we will be hosting a mini-conference on Feminism and the Museum followed by a Feminist Cultural Studies conference in 2014.

We are currently working on increasing our social media and web presence and also on building international collaborations. Any members of FWSA who are interested in travelling to, or currently work in, Australia should visit our website at [www.awgsa.org.au](http://www.awgsa.org.au) or contact us directly through our

President, Dr Anthea Taylor, Lecturer in Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney ([anthea.taylor@sydney.edu.au](mailto:anthea.taylor@sydney.edu.au)) or our Vice-President, Dr Tanya Serisier, Lecturer in Criminology at the University of New South Wales ([t.serisier@unsw.edu.au](mailto:t.serisier@unsw.edu.au)). We are very happy to assist in connections to help organise research collaborations or opportunities to present your work while in Australia.





**fwsa**

Feminist & Women's Studies  
Association (UK & Ireland)

[www.fwsa.org.uk](http://www.fwsa.org.uk)

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