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

fwsa Newsletter
June 2015, Issue 64
What is the Feminist and Women’s Studies Association (UK and Ireland)?

The Feminist and Women’s Studies Association (UK and Ireland) (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 an 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.

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

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Application for membership can be done by post or online. See [fwsablog.org.uk](http://fwsablog.org.uk) for further details.

Front cover photo credits from top to bottom: York International Women’s Week 2015 (p. 18); Symposium on Occupation, Transitional Justice and Gender (p. 19); Akanksha Mehta (p. 16); FWSA conference 2015 (p. 5); and Union Jill (p. 17).
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Editorial

It was a great honour for me to be selected to take over the post of the FWSA Newsletter Officer from Nic Presley at the start of 2015. My thanks to everyone who responded to my call for submissions to make my first newsletter a rich reflection of the vast array of activities and the hard work and convictions of feminist activists and gender and women’s studies scholars. The vibrant cover photo medley is representative of the body of work published in the newsletter.

Following on from the FWSA 2014 conference ‘Rethinking Sisterhood’, Emily Falconer interviewed keynote speaker Lynne Segal about the unrelenting everyday sexism and other trials and tribulations of working in the neoliberal academy. Kate Sang’s account of her visit to Australia reveals this is a topic being debated on internationally at present. Amongst Lynne’s several nuggets of wisdom is her observation of how no-one is free from being vulnerable. This point is then taken up by Gaia Charis, who was unable to attend the conference due to her caring responsibilities. Her article reminds of the sober reality of life outside the ivory tower that as Lynne says, cannot be divorced from our work within the academy. The work of care in the UK has suffered as part of the austerity measures of the past five years and Nicole Westmarland reflects on how this has and may continue to also affect the fight against domestic violence.

Other contributions draw on the wide range of methodologies that are enabling women and men to spread feminist visions and research: Sharon Winfield describes using performance as pedagogy; through poetry, Polly Chrysochou articulates how ‘woman’ is all and none, and many things in between; Akansksha Mehta uses the powerful tool of photography to reveal resistance in everyday life; and Chiara Bernardi highlights the missing in the visual narratives of data mapping technologies. Finally, four PhD researchers hope to connect with others by sharing their research interests with readers.

Here’s hoping there’s plenty of sunshine when you sit down to read this newsletter.

Lotika Singha

Citing FWSA newsletter articles

Articles in the newsletter should be cited as follows:

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Chair’s report

Welcome to the 2015 summer issue of the FWSA newsletter. Thank you to Lotika Singha for taking on this role and putting together such a varied and exciting newsletter. I also would like to thank Nic Presley for her hard work on previous newsletters. Nic, along with Jo Parsons and Claire O’Callaghan left the FWSA Exec in 2014. I thank them all for their vital contributions to the FWSA during their time on the executive committee and wish them all the best with their future endeavours.

We also have three other new executive members, Rebecca Finkel (co-opted as the new journal officer), and Laura Clancy and Hannah Bows as social media officers – the growing social media presence of the FWSA has meant that the work required is too much for one person to take on alone. I am delighted to welcome Lotika, Rebecca, Hannah and Laura to the team and thank them for their hard work so far this year.

Within the current issue of the newsletter, we have a fascinating interview with Lynne Segal, as well as reports from members about their research and travels. I’ve been lucky enough to do some travel this year, and have reported on this and my work promoting the FWSA internationally. One of the aspects of the FWSA that people have found most impressive is that we have retained our focus on feminist and women’s studies, rather than the less political ‘gender studies’. We offer something unique in a context where women’s studies courses are disappearing and feminism remains (for some!) an eight-letter word. This newsletter highlights the diversity of thinking, approaches and perspectives which feminists and scholars of feminism are using. It’s exciting to see such vibrant and ground-breaking work being undertaken by FWSA members.

Please do think about contributing to the next issue of the newsletter. We welcome all of your contributions!

I hope you enjoy a relaxing and restorative summer break. To paraphrase Audre Lorde - self-care is itself an act of feminist activism, especially in the current academic climate.

Kate Sang
Contemporary sisterhood
Lynne Segal with Sheila Rowbotham and Jacqui Kay

FWSA conferences: recap and reminder

Conference 2014
Reflecting on ‘Rethinking Sisterhood: The Affective Politics of Women’s Relationships’
The conference delegates explored, questioned and challenged preconceived notions of feminism and sisterhood

Since 2002, FWSA has hosted conferences that provide a forum for academics and activists. The 2014 one-day conference was co-organised by FWSA executive committee members Maud Perrier, Emily Falconer and Helen Snaith. It focused on questions such as: What makes me a feminist? What is sisterhood? How can I offer solidarity to those who do not feel that they are a part of this? The final programme offered some insight into the issues surrounding these concepts, and how we can overcome barriers and obstacles facing our fellow sisters.

The day started with a dynamic keynote speech by Professor Lynne Segal: ‘Casting memory forwards: riding the feminist waves’. This was complemented perfectly by the second keynote of the day by Dr Margaretta Jolly: ‘Sisterhood and after: making sense of a women’s liberation oral history project’. In keeping with the multi-format style of the conference, which included creative workshops, video recordings, art exhibitions and activist roundtables, the keynotes were followed by ‘This Community of Mothers’, a poetry reading with Jennifer Militello. The poetry theme was carried through after the conference into the evening event with a special appearance from Jackie Kay’s reading of FIÈRE: Exploring deep friendships between women.

Our joint vision for this conference was to make it a place of sharing, nourishment and attention, practices which we have found are often missing and becoming rarer in academic circles which value competition and narrow definitions of success. Of course one of our aims in our call for papers was also to explore the ambivalence in women’s relationships, which we know can be both competitive and nurturing, and to discuss in which conditions and environments they thrive. In organising the conference we also noticed how certain practices facilitate different ethics better than others: they often take more time and effort but they create different kinds of relationships along the way. For example, Maud asked her friend Davina to teach her screen printing so that we could make our own conference packs rather than buying them, enabling her to learn new skills, spend much overdue time with a friend and make new ones. Davina invited Maud to stay with her for a few days in Cornwall and we printed the packs at the college where she teaches while also discussing our ideas, projects and relationships. This certainly felt like sisterhood in practice: warm company that also involved making something together. The obvious lesson was that when we take time to make things from scratch together – food, conference packs – it helps strengthen as well as grow new connections.

This theme continued during the conference itself, and we were pleasantly taken aback by the number of informal, hidden moments of ‘sisterhood’: throughout the day we found that the participants fully entered the spirit of the conference as we had imagined it, from the lively conversations we overheard to the warm thank you emails we received after the event. When Maud was stuck in terrible traffic after collecting Lynne Segal from the station, the two women discussed life, love, relationships, feminism and careers. Emily reconnected with her mother’s old friend Jackie Kay, who read out a poem for her late mother in solidarity with feminists from past eras, and in support of younger feminists at the start of their journeys and early career statuses. For Emily, the highlight of the conference was the image of Jackie Kay pottering up and down the aisle during her keynote, bottle of wine in hand, topping up glasses. It felt more like a gathering in her living room rather than an academic conference, and there were many tears and laughter. It was Helen’s first FWSA conference as a member of the executive committee, and she was delighted to see so many passionate and inspiring women come together across all generations and share their experiences. At the end of the successful but long, tiring day, several members of the FWSA committee squeezed into a tiny room to wash wine glasses together and discuss the highlights and challenges of the...
conference. There were many more moments like these, which created an arguably unorthodox conference environment where warmth, and personal and political support were always present.

This is not to say that the notion of sisterhood was embraced without critique. Far from it in fact, as the predominant whiteness of the conference delegates was quickly noticed and raised within the first session. Who is represented (or missing) at feminist conferences is a continuing debate within feminist circles, and the notion of ‘sisterhood’ continues to remain problematic. One of our delegates, Gaia Charis, was unable to make it on the day as she works as a full-time carer for her son. With little financial or emotional support, Gaia’s accompanying article in this newsletter (see p. 14) highlights the lack of attention feminism gives those working in disability.

Amongst the warm, hidden moments of solidarity and support there were also moments of tensions and feeling out of place, all of which remain part of feminist conversations. These include the moments of difficult yet respectful interaction during the conference. For Maud, one that particularly sticks was the performance event ‘Finding the Binds and Binding’ by the mother and daughter artist duo Emma Gee and Sarah Gee. Using an app, we used our phones to read two different sets of comments from Emma and Sarah about personal objects that formed the main part of the exhibition. We were then asked to share on postcards what we had learnt with the artists and the other participants. Being asked to reveal someone else’s secrets to strangers and to each other raised sensitive questions, with many participants refusing to engage in the task as they felt it was unethical. But the provocative discussion that followed captured important issues about researching women’s relationships: whether we should try to uncover dark secrets in women’s relationships and how we can use art and collaboration in forging new models of mother–daughter relationships.

Finally, we would like to thank you for all your support throughout the planning of the conference and on the day itself: all of the delegates were so enthusiastic and engaging throughout the entire process. We now look forward to seeing you in September 2015 in Leeds at the biennial FWSA conference ‘Everyday encounters with violence: critical feminist perspectives’. Hosted by the School of Geography at Leeds University, this three-day interdisciplinary conference promises to be a stimulating event that again addresses key issues in feminist thought (see below).

Thank you,
The 2014 conference organisers
Maud, Emily and Helen

FWSA Biennial Conference 2015
Everyday Encounters with Violence: Critical Feminist Perspectives
9–11 September 2015, School of Geography, University of Leeds, stage@leeds

This three-day conference aims to create an inclusive and supportive space for scholars at all career levels to come together in a supportive environment to engage in critical feminist perspectives on violence. We draw upon a wide definition of violence from sources in the arts, humanities and social sciences, seeing this both as an everyday social force inflicting harm, suffering, grief and trauma, and as a transformative force that produces gendered agency, social action and resistance. We will examine violence as embedded in the very fabric of everyday life via gendered encounters with, for example, modernity, neoliberalism, sovereign power, rule of law, globalisation, technology, as well as institutional, popular and everyday cultures. To ensure that the conference is inclusive and accessible to as wide a variety of people as possible, we have included provisions for on-site (subsidised) childcare and a range of accessibility needs. We will also be live tweeting and hosting dedicated conference bloggers from the FWSA membership.

Keynote speakers include Professor Rachel Pain (Durham University), Professor Marianne Hester (University of Bristol), Dr Mo Hume (University of Glasgow) and Dr Igea Troiani (Oxford Brookes University). For further details about the conference themes, schedule and registration, visit the conference webpage on the FWSA website: http://fwsablog.org.uk/2015-conference/.

The 2015 conference organisers
Ayona Dutta and Martin Zebraki
Contemporary feminist challenges

Visibility of abuse through data

Chiara Bernardi is currently developing a project that seeks to establish a connection between data, visibility and crowdsourcing platforms. This article is an invitation, a challenge to feminists and gender scholars alike, to think about the relevance of data, both in terms of wealth of data and lack of data, and the cultural impact of (digital) data.

Given the recent importance placed on visibility through data, one core problematic is the consistency with which data gathering and analysis may, or may not, lead to visibility. As activist Camila Batmanghelidj explains with regards to policies on protection of children, there is a direct correlation between the identification of the real number of children in danger (data) and the need to have policies and instruments to protect them (visibility) (Cohen, 2014). This highlights the clash between the relative obscurity of an issue and the emergence of its visibility through data gathering, statistical processes and analysis. In this working paper, my aim therefore is to reflect on the spatial and archival contribution of a map where cases of neglected and obscured facts of violence find space; this redefines concepts of navigation, geography and the very same perception of space, brought to the fore by mapping software (such as open-source mapping platforms).

The digitalisation of our experiences, shared, posted, commented and stored online, has led to an increasing tendency of mapping connections in this complex digital network that is our world. This has in turn led to the inclusion of space into our reflections of the relationship between technologies, human agency and software. Network visualisation tools are continuously enhanced to map the most diverse objects. The crowdsourced characteristic of many mapping platforms such as Ushahidi (www.ushahidi.com) have challenged the ways in which data is gathered and compound, making the relationship between data, social practices and software gain a spatiality that is yet to be fully recognised. In a way, visualising our social spaces (whether our online relations or offline ties) could help us have a picture of what we are immersed in, allowing us to somehow sit above it and see it from afar. But the map itself is not just about reconfiguring and giving birth to our social space; it is not just a way in which the political weight of software emerges. It can move forward and investigate how data contributes to the existence and visibility of an object, an issue, an event and, as in the cases I want to investigate, a very silent tragedy of violence against men and women, from verbal harassment to feminicidios, disappearances and brutal killings. The project I am working on compares the reporting system put in place in Egypt, by Harassmap, an anti-sexual harassment organisation based in Cairo, and the cases of reported disappearances and the unreported (or neglected) cases of feminicidios in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

Of course, an analysis of data – aggregating, interpreting and displaying data – and showcasing violence clashes with what we usually designate as the technologies of power: statistics and, especially, censuses have been described by Michel Foucault (2007) as forms of control. At the same time, scholars like Jacqueline Urla have argued that ‘minorities may … turn statistics’ into a ‘means of contesting … power and hegemonic construction of social reality’. Such observations further emphasise how data has become the new site of struggle. Urla’s (1993) case study on Basque identity highlights the ‘turn to quantification’ or the ways in which data, when gathered, analysed and elaborated, becomes numbers; such numbers function as ‘pure description or inescapable “facts”’; science without scientists'. Another critical point in Urla’s critique is the practice ‘of envisioning degrees of Basqueness’ ‘through maps’ that show spaces, geographies, sense of boundedness, continuity or, as it happens in the case of the Basque identity, inhomogeneous distribution of a social group. The map ‘gives rise to a visual narrative’, it documents and brings to life the numbers, making them impactful. The map becomes a place where an issue (in this case Basque identity) finds space, is displayed, but, at the same time, it becomes a place where stories and interviews are translated into numbers, thus contributing to the formation of a hybrid data archive and political space, a source of guidance and understanding: it is simultaneously the point of arrival as well as the starting point for political action.

I have analysed at length the case of Harassmap and their crowdsourced map, which records and reports incidents of sexual harassment. I have discussed the ways in which Harassmap not only rewrites the concept of map and directionality but also contributes to the ways in which space is constructed and experienced. Harassmap helps us recognise an algorithmic turn in women’s issues, as well as offering a ‘visual narrative’ of harassment through willingly contributed data. What is also significant is that this data is not just a set of numbers, it does not only comprise statistical reports and accrued values; it consists of several different digital objects. Through the Ushahidi platform, harassment can be reported as soon as it is either witnessed or experienced as text, email, posts, tweets, pictures or videos. Despite their inner differences, these objects are translated into numbers, thus enriching the map itself. The sense of immediacy therefore constitutes an important element in the effectiveness of the virtual narrative offered by Harassmap. Harassmap writes a new geography, that of inclusion of neglected voices of...
harassed victims, women and men alike. It contributes to the construction, consumption and experience of places through the continuous agency of software, a new ‘computerised space’ (Leyshon and Thrift, 1997) that emerges out of software, coding practices and human agency.

The questions that remain unanswered (if they have ever been asked) concern those stories that cannot be directly reported or cannot possess – for various reasons – the sense of immediacy that is the basis of the crowdsourcing experiment of Harassmap. This may be because of technological issues (i.e. internet penetration rate or literacy, or access), neglect or lack of interest. The cases of niña desaparecidas and feminicidios in Ciudad Juárez are part of those stories that remain untold and neglected. These stories are different; data, software and visibility seem never to cross paths. If, on one side, it is possible to talk about uncertain data, where numbers, reports and stories are manipulated and downplayed by authorities and institutions, on the other side, there exists a richness of sparse and scattered data, counts of disappeared men and women, anti-violence exhibitions, social networking activities and social media campaigns (for example #niunasm) that tell the story of disinterest, obscurity and neglect. This data, the digital objects and uninteresting reports, draws a different map, one that is based on a non-visible space, an archive of data that – despite its presence – is still to emerge and become visible. My aim in this article was to point out the necessity to think interdisciplinary in relation to data missingness. What is the link between data (and lack of data) and the missing bodies of the women in Ciudad Juárez and what is its political significance? How can data gathering, archival practices and digital platforms connect and support the emergence of neglected stories, stories that meet with disinterest, stories of ‘missing bodies’ whose existence can be denied or not recognised because of a lack of data, or uncertain data (Hook, 2014).

These stories test the ways in which scattered data can be archived, organised and find a space on and through the digital layer, with its crowdsourcing possibilities and collective efforts. Most importantly, the challenge ahead concerns the ways in which feminists, digital scholars and gender studies can promote a more critical and interdisciplinary approach to the ways in which data, big data and – now – dark data must also include what falls outside of it.

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Bibliography


FWSA Newsletter archive

The Newsletter is a membership perk and in past years it has not been made available online on the FWSA blog. However, this means that newer members are not able to access previously published newsletters. The FWSA executive has now decided to create an archive of newsletters on the blog, which will include all newsletters except those published in the current year. The archive will be updated annually. If you have copies of older newsletters (older than issue number 59) please send them to the Newsletter Officer (ls810@york.ac.uk). This will help us make the archive as complete as possible.
An interview with Lynne Segal
Being feminist in the neoliberal academy and bringing back collectivity

As more and more women come up against the trials of working in the neoliberal academy, the FWSA newsletter offers another opportunity to share the insights of leading feminists into the conundrums of negotiating this increasingly contested space

I

n the February 2013 newsletter (issue 60), Luce Irigaray emphasised the value of an intersubjective and respectful dialogue in current academic communities. For this issue, Emily Falconer follows on from Lynne Segal’s keynote lecture at the 2014 FWSA conference, ‘Rethinking Sisterhood’, and asks Lynne about her personal experiences of circumnavigating the changing academy, as well as revisiting the collectivity that was the cornerstone of the women’s liberation movement – seeing it as once again a way for women (and men) to continue to push forward for gender equality, both inside and outside academia.

Emily: I’d like to start by focusing on your experiences of feminism and changes in academia, both theoretically and in terms of emotional politics, relationships between women and feminists. Thinking back to your 2007 political memoir Making Trouble, how far is ‘trouble making’ still a feminist project for feminist academics (and who is able to do this)?

Lynne: Most people would begin by saying what a struggle it once was for women to claim any space for themselves in public life. As we came out of the protest movement of the 1960s (in which women and men had participated equally) women’s liberation just became inevitable, because of the way in which women had been instantly booted off the stage if they tried to speak, and were treated in the radical press of the time, not as comrades, but in such an absurdly sexist way. So it was at first very hard for women to fight their way into all the various spaces open to our male peers, but many of us did it surprisingly successfully. And, I think this is because when you have a movement, and you are doing things collectively, it’s very different from doing them completely on your own. So, women’s liberation and early second-wave feminism first found a space to develop their ideas just outside the academy. Then feminist thinking and women’s studies found niches inside the polytechnics, which were less policed then, they were still more open than the old universities. So nearly all the progressive moves in education, which began from the 1970s – with the spread of cultural studies and then women’s studies, black studies, anti-colonial struggles – nearly all began in the new spaces opening up in the polytechnics. But by the time we were publishing more and could be seen as quite successful, there was this shift in the scholarly terrain – more radical academics from the polytechnics were being ‘bought up’ by the old universities.

For almost thirty years I taught at Enfield College of Technology, which became Middlesex Polytechnic and then Middlesex University, in the department of psychology. Psychology is one of the most mainstream of subjects, always worried about its scientific credentials. But I was from the beginning always making trouble because I didn’t know how to do anything else within that discipline – which was at the time incapable of placing its objects of study within any historical or social context. Yet, when I was a student, a lot of women had studied psychology because we wanted to understand people, or help people, but then we had found ourselves studying terribly mechanistic, behaviouristic courses, where all you did was run rats or perform very boring experiments on perception. However, at Middlesex I taught a course called ‘Psychology and social issues’, in which I could teach whatever I wanted to, focussing upon gender, race, class and so on. Sometimes the external examiners, if they were mainstream psychologists, would complain and say this is not psychology at all. But at other times we would have some more progressive ones, such as Michael Billig, whom I recall one year saying, ‘I think everybody taking Lynne’s course should get ten more points!’

Before coming to London, I had developed a very anti-authoritarian outlook. Growing up in the incredibly conformist post-war milieu of Australia in the 1950s, I came of age in the sixties when I joined a group of libertarian radicals who simply opposed every aspect of what we saw as hypocritical, bourgeois life – whether of church, state or family. We stood against everything authoritarian – if the world accepted it, we were against it, our whole outlook was anti, anti, anti! So we never had a sense of what we were for, until coming to London as a young mother with a child, in 1970, I encountered women’s liberation – that combined a radical movement with left libertarian politics. Women’s liberation was itself so very much a product of late 1960s radicalism, as it mutated into the 1970s. Setting up community presses, community women’s centres, law centres, community everything – that’s the sort of activity I was involved in, or was relating to.

Emily: It sounded as if making trouble was encouraged. Did it feel like there was space to do that?

Lynne: That’s the space I managed to find in the 1970s. Collectivity was still so much in the air really until the end of the 1980s – this seemed to mark the end of those more hopeful times, when there was still a utopian spirit around in one place or another. In the 1980s there was still much collective resistance, whether in Ken Livingstone’s GLC, in Greenham Common and the peace movement generally. By the 1990s, the only newly blossoming consciousness was interestingly around gay and lesbian politics or queer politics. That was in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, in response to and in response to conservative and media attempts to demonise dissident sexualities. But by then, a much more empowered voice had come out of feminism and gay and lesbian politics. It’s interesting how things are never quite predictable, the unintended consequences of that
appalling epidemic and increasing homophobia was the flowering of queer politics.

**Emily:** You do add a political dimension to psychology, which has often been lacking in a social analysis of gendered power. How important is that still?

**Lynne:** It is always important. Obviously, in the 1950s when I grew up there was just a blanket of silence around gender issues – not just sexism, but the most blatant forms of misogyny. Later, within my area of psychology, the notion of domestic violence barely existed. This was so even among the dissident voices of the 1960s. Think about R.D. Laing’s *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, which addresses the plight of young women in the home, but is silent about gender. It was the same story right across in the media, in the underground press, in radical theatre, for instance, just take a look at John Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger*. So, when I think about those times, while sexism is still around today, it isn’t exactly the same context, because the last thing around it now is silence. There is an endless clamour of conversation around it, whereas in the sixties, and well into the seventies, there was a complete silence. There literally weren’t even the words to speak. When you first begin to criticise things, language itself seems to work against you, because you didn’t have the words, you just had ‘nagging wives’ and ‘neurotic women’, back then! You didn’t have the words that could empower you. Whereas now the words are everywhere: projects that have developed today, like Everyday Sexism, they’re really good.

I also find Angela McRobbie’s work very interesting. She was one of the early feminists in cultural studies in the late 1970s. What McRobbie is saying today is that feminism has been mainstreamed, and that there’s a completely new pressure on young women, and people generally, to succeed at everything. To have the perfect body (which is impossible), to have the perfect job (which is well near impossible in these times), to be good mothers, to be able to do everything, and do it well. That puts a terrible pressure on women, and a mainstreamed feminism makes women more vulnerable to guilt, by focusing on individual success and the complete rejection of any notions of collectivity.

**Emily:** So it’s less of a case of you’re allowed to do things differently, but more that you should just be doing more things and better?

**Lynne:** Exactly, but I don’t completely agree with McRobbie’s analysis. There is increasing pressure on everybody, not just young women. Some young women are in a better position and more able to handle the pressures. I don’t much like the language of ‘victimhood’, because, interestingly, we didn’t have such a victim language in the early 1970s. Although we were talking about rape and violence, the emphasis was all about ‘women together can be strong’. So some feminists suggest women are worse off now because we are all simply individuals today. I don’t think that’s quite right. In fact, I would step back and say it is precisely around sexism that we still join together as women. There’s enormous collective resistance – for instance, anti-Page 3, the recent launch of Everyday Sexism and more – these are collective and successful forms of resistance. It is around so many other issues, including class, that it’s much harder to think how to resist collectively: the effects of austerity; the diminishment from what is seen as personal failure. Certainly some women are very involved in anti-austerity activism. But working out what might become a successful feminist position in neoliberal times is much harder. In today’s ever more competitive workplaces, it’s much tougher for women with children, for instance, to combine caring for their children in the way they would want to and doing jobs (compared, for instance, with the way I was able to do this back in the 1970s). Women in the academy today have a tougher time having children unless they have a full-time nanny. Today’s workplace is so speeded up and there is so much pressure, which are precisely the intended effects of what is best summed up as neoliberalism. Everything is being run as if it is a market, and at the same time you are meant to find individual solutions to make the workplace more compatible with the home.

**Emily:** That leads me to the next question. There has been a great deal of emphasis on surviving in increasing neoliberal times, especially for early-career academics who are mostly under threat by living in very precarious, short-term research contracts. You’re not only doing your job as a research assistant, you’re also then constantly having to make yourself employable and be somebody else. What advice would you give those entering the academy, especially women and feminist academics entering the academy on how to flourish, rather than just survive and keep in there?

**Lynne:** The first point is that it is hard for everyone, at all ages. In general, the older that you get, the more threatened you are. Older women are disappearing, not just from public eye, not just off our TV screens, off the radio, but they’re losing their jobs across the board. The Labour Party report on older women that came out just over a year ago said that almost half the women over 49 had lost their jobs in the last two and half years. So there is a lot of pressure on those older women, who are more likely to have a lower pension pot and find it harder to keep their economic independence over the age of 49. But then, if you feed it back, it puts enormous pressure on younger people. How are they going to keep their jobs? Have families if they want them? The pressure is incredible.

There can only be little steps forward, which are partly thinking about support structures and networking. How are we going to try to support each other better? How are we going to even talk about this? How can we have less exploitative work situations? How can women who are caring for children or who are caring for elderly relatives, or indeed men who are carers – do we not make this a purely gendered issue – find ways of living fully human lives? We have to have that discussion, and to try to feel more confident about it – that if I don’t get that book written this year, if I don’t

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*Sexism is still ubiquitous, but it isn’t exactly the same as in the sixties and seventies, because the last thing surrounding it now is silence*
get that article done, it’s because there’s other important things that just have to be done!

Emily: That’s a very difficult thing to do if the success of your research, your department, your institute is going to depend on that. But these conversations do need to be had?

Lynne: Individually and collectively too. Yes, certainly exposing what is going on. One is never totally safe, whatever you do. You only have to end up with a health problem or an elderly parent who is becoming ‘demented’ and you would be in trouble. Unless you become the sort of person that certainly feminists, but also the socialists, never wanted to be. Because you never wanted only to think about your own life, as if only your own career matters. Indeed, if you are simply thinking about your own life, you are more likely to end up more frustrated and miserable.

Sometimes one can incorporate resistance in one’s work. For example, how do we get more women into management? The whole problem about women in management relates to this broader problem. You can get more women as long as they don’t have children, or ‘too many’ children, or so long as their husbands are rich enough, like Thatcher’s was, to get a permanent nanny, so they can get on with their paid work. But there is some evidence from Norway that women in management have created happier workplaces. It also puts on the table issues of sexism, because often there’s even more complaints about women managers, indeed, from women as well as from men. We all have a certain competitiveness, and it can be even harder if it is a woman telling you what you have to do or not do. But we have a lot more women deans nowadays, and while they seem to abide by all the official codes of what has to be done, I think it has created a slightly warmer atmosphere as well. It’s really the outcome of the history of collectivity, networking, like the women’s studies network. You can have a sense of being a little more powerful through talking to like-minded people, even when you can’t come up with all the solutions. Sharng the problems is a big step.

Emily: Yes, absolutely. So, what are your best feminist writing tips, and how can an emerging feminist academic protect herself while also bringing the personal in her academic writing?

Lynne: It’s not easy! But it is good if you can – through one’s reading and discussions, as in feminist reading groups – be aware of what the latest theoretical fashions, but not being buried by them. This does connect to your earlier question on how feminism has changed in the academy. It was much easier in the 1970s because our job was to bring in women’s hitherto absent voices. Like in Sheila Rowbotham’s classic text Hidden from History: what did women do in history or in politics? Bringing women into the picture was so empowering. But then, in the 1980s, with the impact of the latest cutting-edge theoretical work in both psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, we needed to think again about questions of experience, because you can’t just universalise from your own position. So one of the early challenges and disputes within feminism was that once you’ve got blackwomen on board, once you’ve got working-class women on board, once you’ve got dissident sexual voices

involved in saying what it is for me to be a woman, then it’s going to become a lot more different.

So, for instance, in dealing with sexism, it was predominantly the young white feminists who were talking about being treated as being dependent, fragile, passive, and so on. Black feminists, such as Hortense Spillers, or Patricia Collins, were soon saying things like: ‘Hang on a minute, we’d like to be more feminine, we’d like to spend more time at home with the kids, we’re the ones treated as beasts of burden!’ And so you realise that, historically, the black woman has been barely allowed any ‘femininity’ at all. At the same time, from psychoanalysis came new ideas about the complexity of desire, and how we situate ourselves in the world. For example, in one of those classic articles from 1975, ‘Visual pleasure’, Laura Mulvey wrote that all the pleasure that comes from cinema has been about identifying with a man’s gaze, looking at the female object as the object of desire. The only active way to situate yourself, she argued, is from the position of the man. But with more thinking through psychoanalysis, some people were soon saying, perhaps we switch our subject positions, perhaps it doesn’t have to be as well as active, and women may also switch subject positions, at least in fantasy, in the mise-en-scène. I wrote about this in my book Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure, you can’t simply assume that we all have these straightforward subject positions, or desires. And this happens then, in the 1980s, but particularly in the 1990s, with the influence of Foucault and Lacan and more, is that the contradictions of subjectivity come very much to the fore. Subjectivity itself became more and more complicated, and the discourses surrounding it more paradoxical. So it became harder to know what actually were the distinctive feminist questions within academia. That is why there was a much bigger split between the activists on the outside, say with her anti-Page 3 campaign, and the academic busy reading Judith Butler and theorising subjectivity.

Those sort of splits were inevitable, and the more deeply you think about something, you realise that your politics never can relate in some immediate, instantly concrete way to the complexities of the world. Still, it’s much easier to understand theory, if you write yourself in. For instance, Gender Trouble is a tough read because it is all situated within Butler’s post-Hegelian, post-structuralist theory of subjectivity, constructed around an axis of heteronormativity. But if you read Undoing Gender, where Butler is rethinking all that she wrote about gender previously, she says she never expected Gender Trouble to have such a big impact. She thought that only a few hundred people would read it. And she says, remember you have to think about what my position was then, as a young dyke, going to these gay bars and seeing all these men who could do femininity so much better than I ever could and certainly ever wanted to. So she explains what brought her into all this heavy theoretical work, and if you can do that, it’s easier to grasp, even unforgettable.

This kind of writing can be exposing, yes. But it does make things so much easier to understand, why people are attracted to the theories they have been attracted to, why we do the work we do. There is always a personal link. In some ways we are all absolutely unique, and in another way we are not so different, in terms of our

“We have to feel more confident about ourselves – that if I don’t get that book written this year, if I don’t get that article done, it’s because there’s other important things that just have to be done!”

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fears, phobias and paranoia. If we can bring all that in, as well as our pleasures and hopes, we draw in the reader ...

Emily: So do you think that's a good kind of place to come back to and, kind of, focus on our own emotions and our own emotional responses in making sense of social life?

Lynne: What we have to focus on, both as feminists and for me as a socialist, is how to keep any sort of utopian spirit and collectivity alive. The question is, how do we keep hope alive – when for so many of us life is so much harder at all levels, it is so much more perilous, around jobs, around family life. For me, it is how you get away from the near idiocy of thinking that life is a self-project, and we don't need each other. The inspiring feminist poet, Adrienne Rich, is particularly important here because she was so physically challenged, and from quite early on. Although she was very successful, she had very bad arthritis from her late twenties. She was in constant pain, and she talked about basically surviving by, in certain ways, trying to see her own pain in terms of relating to the pain of the world. To affirm life and to survive life is to be aware of pain, both your own and the pain of others. Feeling any emotions strongly is always going to be better than having no strong emotions at all, which in a way, is the sort of robot they want in the workplace – just get on with the job, regardless. So that was my idea in writing about ageing, in Out of Time: The Pleasures & Perils of Ageing. There is so much being written nowadays about happiness, but which is seen, on the whole, in purely individual terms. For me the notion of 'happiness is individual' is almost nonsensical. Because if you can't share your feelings, feeling both at peace with yourself and with others, there's no strong attachment to life there.

Emily: Absolutely! My next question is about masculinity – this idea that men, especially young men in particular, are the highest social group with a risk of suicide. There are constant reports about young men and mental health, about not being emotionally articulate. But then there is this move towards finding non-competitive all-male spaces. A space where men can talk about their feelings and express themselves in different ways. Thinking in terms of your book Slow Motion, how do you think about men-only spaces and the future of this?

Lynne: For me, it is always wrong simply to say men are the problem, rather it is sexism that is the problem and gender hierarchy that is the problem. I would begin by thinking how alike men and women are, apart from the fact that there is huge pressure on men to affirm their ‘masculinity’ as some form of dominance, some position of power, and that’s what also destroys them. It’s quite true it destroys many of them, because they are so far from being powerful, they are so far from being independent or being autonomous, or any of those things that men are meant to be. And they suffer terribly, some kill themselves, or they are violent towards other people, both women and men. So to me, gender hierarchy is unquestionably oppressive for men, even though it is, of course, more oppressive for women. (Although in some ways women have been surging forward partly because ‘No, we won’t be oppressed’ can be our mantra, whereas it’s harder for men to see themselves oppressed as a sex) It’s been easier for women to bond together against that, the so-called enemy – the man – than it has been for men to bond together, except in dislike for or derision of women. It is still men, symbolically, and some men, concretely, who by and large rule the world. Public prominence is usually not made compatible with all the things that women can do, and many want to do, like having children and caring about their communities, and other less prestigious activities (things a lot of men too do care about as well).

Therefore, having autonomous spaces for women to reflect collectively is essential, but it can also be rewarding for men, at least when men create less gender normative spaces (as some gay men have often done). To have a space to think critically about what it is to be a man, to think, indeed, about what it is to be human and accept how mutually dependent and vulnerable we all are, that is as useful for men as for women. And never more so than now. This to me is an essential part of my feminism, quite as much as an essential part of being on the left and wanting a better, fairer, peaceful world. There are gay spaces for men coming to terms with being gay, and more recently the greater visibility of trans spaces, and struggles. But straight men probably do lack places to think about the perils of masculinity. And part of this is realising how horrid, abusive or dismissive men are to women. Not all men are, of course. Women’s liberation did originally evolve from many of those ideas around participatory democracy and the significance of cultural issues coming from the new left – from Stuart Hall, E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams. Also thinking about community and how to have meaningful lives, and how basically to refuse to let the market rule your life. Of course men and women have so much in common to think about and resist, but absolutely gender must be inserted into that as a key axis of power, as is the case with ‘race’ and ethnicity. This is why now everyone talks about ‘intersectionality’, or what I still think of as multiple oppressions. So the issue of masculinity remains absolutely one of importance.

Also, on the one hand, ‘masculinity’ has certain positive attributes that we want too, like independency. On the other hand, it is the idea of interdependence that feminists began talking so much about: that there is no Self without the Other. That’s a thought that we have to keep pushing, we are nobody without each other. We’re not somebody because we think we’re so successful at work. Obviously, that’s such a less orthodox aspect of being a man, all the more worth thinking about.

Emily: Finally, what’s the most exciting development you see in contemporary feminism today?

Lynne: Well, for me personally it’s precisely about communicating across the generations. Obviously as an old person one absolutely needs to do this, but young women too can benefit: by thinking more historically, you are not so stuck in the present – the past before us, as Sheila Rowbotham and other have put it. So that openness to community and openness to others, working together and working together across differences, that’s one of my big hopes for the future.

Emily: Thank you.
Domestic violence, women’s organisations and ongoing austerity

As public services cuts continue, Nicole Westmarland reassesses the challenges for reducing domestic violence in the UK

Women in the North East of England have been hit particularly by cuts to public sector funding for several years now – with Government Office North East and local councils being major employers of women. In terms of violence and abuse funding, we were devastated at the scaleback and forthcoming closure of the Northern Rock Foundation. It is not an exaggeration to say that when the foundation’s safety and justice programme was founded in the early 2000s, they saved two services from closure and allowed a third to significantly expand its services. More broadly, changes to commissioning structures are taking a major toll on small voluntary-sector organisations, many of which are women’s organisations. When Liz Kelly from the London Metropolitan University and I conducted research into what domestic violence perpetrator programmes add to a coordinated community response to domestic violence (Project Mirabal), we found that a combination of austerity measures and commissioning changes was impacting on both voluntary and statutory-sector organisations. These changes had fundamentally altered the way in which organisations engaged in multi-agency working – something long recognised as vital within the field of domestic violence. One participant described multi-agency domestic violence meetings now as being like ‘getting into a pond of piranhas’.

The North East Women’s Network and Women’s Resource Centre’s 2012 report focused specifically on women in the North East, and found that the rate of unemployment for women was higher in this region, with some elements of welfare reform disproportionately impacting on women. The report concluded that these factors are making women further financially dependent on men, embedding gender inequality even deeper. This was also a theme in a recent inquiry by the Joint Committee on Human Rights (2015) into violence against women and girls. The inquiry found that women experiencing or recovering from violence and abuse are the most vulnerable but who are treated the worst. Of particular concern is the treatment of women seeking asylum who had fled severe levels of violence and abuse, and the conditions they are detained in once in the UK.

What will this mean moving forward under the new Conservative majority government? The disproportionate impact of welfare reforms on women is likely to continue, and rollbacks to legal aid show no sign of abating – this has massively affected women seeking to leave domestic violence relationships. Many see it as positive news that Theresa May remains home secretary. May is the first home secretary to personally chair domestic violence meetings and show that responsibility for improving the policing of domestic violence must come from the top. She has also kept the promises she made to Rape Crisis Centres, and moved towards longer funding periods rather than the 12-month cyclic funding they were previously operating on. For many others though, a general disillusionment about the ability of party politics to make the changes needed to increase gender equality and reduce domestic violence would have existed regardless of the outcome of the 2015 general election. The swell in numbers of women joining the new Women and Equality party, to be formally launched in September this year, and the regional and local party groups that are popping up, has not gone unnoticed. Although it feels a long way off, it will be interesting to watch which party is considered to be best representing the interests of women in the run up to the 2020 general election.

Nicole Westmarland is Director of the Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse at Durham University. Her new book explores fifteen different forms of men’s violence against women from a criminological perspective. Use code FWR40 for a 20% discount when ordering direct from Routledge (http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781843923985/)

Bibliography


Academia and the carer: who cares?

In 2014, the FWSA accepted a proposed submission from Gaia Charis for inclusion at the ‘Rethinking Sisterhood’ conference, but she was unable to attend. Who cares?

The title of my intended presentation was ‘All dis, no sis... how feminism fails carers’. The context was both analytic and autoethnographic, embodying a lifetime’s experiences of feminism, its associated academy and the strictures of unavoidable disability care. Ironically, I could not attend the event due to the demands of that care.

Today in Ireland, nearly 200,000 people are caring for disabled and elderly family members. I am one of them. This is usually due to the absence of services and supports, and the frequent lack of standards and suitability in those that exist. This caring is consequently not a saintly choice. It’s a necessity that regularly decimates the life chances of the carer, of whom 80 per cent are women. Their work saves the state billions every year but we don’t see that cash. Caring allowances are both mean and means-tested. There are 168 hours in a week and I receive care for just ten of those, to help me with my 21-year-old son, who has severe autism and intellectual disability and who is entirely home-based. My full-rate carer’s allowance of €204 (around £150) per week, when divided by the 158 hours I care for my son, means that the care I provide for him is worth around €1.20 (about 80p) per hour.

My son has made great progress by being at home. He has managed to avoid the behavioural difficulties and the hefty medications that plague many of his peers. For me this makes it all worthwhile... but that’s not the point and nor does it make it a free choice. When he was born I was a doctoral researcher and part-time lecturer at the School of Education, Bristol University, specialising in gender and social policy. The acute demands of his care abruptly ended that career, as it does for so many others. I have been a single parent for most of his life, another predictable pattern as marriages falter at higher than average rates under the strain of disability. And invariably, it’s women who are left in the place where the buck stops. Let’s be clear, I am not unusual, not in Ireland, not anywhere. Carers like me constitute a vast twilight army in any country and you probably know nothing about us because we are invisible.

I am now 62 and this positions me as having first encountered feminism at the time of its ‘second wave’. It was a feminism that spoke passionately to my teenage self, most especially in its promised liberation from the impediments that had bedevilled every generation of women before me... the obligation and expectation of care and the curse of invisibility. I was born into the rigid gender stereotyping of 1950s Britain and the resultant injustices premised upon my femaleness were the driving force behind my embracing of that feminism and my subsequent entry into the feminist academy. The former embodied the practice of activism, the latter held the promise of analytical and theoretical support. So what went so terribly wrong? Because my contention is that it certainly did. This short contribution can’t cover all the points I would have made at the conference but it raises a few for feminism and its associated academy to consider.

To designate oneself as ‘second wave’ is, contemporaneously, an all-too-often invitation for derision and critique. An oft cited criticism is the perceived failure of feminists of the time to have ‘reached out’ to women outside of their own cultural boundaries. It’s easy to be pc once pc had been invented, post the advent of women’s and gender studies, the dramatically incremental rise in female higher education, and a popularisation of social and cultural knowledge so great that signing up to Facebook is equivalent to sociology 101. But if 1960s feminists failed to see beyond themselves, what is the excuse of today’s activists and academics when it comes to the invisibility of the multitudes like me, whose everyday responsibilities and remunerations would be illegal if covered by employment law and a certain contravention of human rights in any other situation?

When I googled research on caring last year, I found a void when it came to women carers. But I found recent works by academicians on the relatively new phenomenon of male carers. This academic attention to, and consequent foregrounding of, the 20 per cent male minority reflects both a historical eminencing of maleness and the dynamics of contemporary grassroots supports. I have never attended events organised by my local state-funded carers support organisation as I find the prospect of flower arranging and crochet too personally wall-climbing to contemplate. The advent of male caring did, however, bring both yachting and archery onto the agenda. I am not, apparently, allowed to do either, as these activities are part of a specifically funded initiative for male carers. Protest and pursuit of this matter by myself revealed it to be quite legal, leaving my only recourse to be the taking of an equality case to the Irish ombudsman (who is actually a woman). This lengthy and time-consuming procedure would, of course, have to be squeezed into my ten free hours per week.

I have been feministically active in writing and speaking on the subject of caring, with my work being picked up by Women’s Views on News and various women’s groups. The plight of carers, especially its female majority, continues, however, to fall into a void of feminist silence. In the past year I have resigned from inclusion in feminist groups. It’s the only protest that I can feasibly make, given my current restrictions. I will always be feminist in principle, how could one not be? But feminism in its current incarnation fills me with a despair that I just don’t have the time to articulate or to counter.

In the ‘Rethinking Sisterhood’ report on page 5, the organisers kindly refer to my inability to attend in the absence of ‘emotional and financial support’. But I don’t want ‘support’, I want feminism and its associated academy to do what it promised 50 years ago. Care and its practical enactment is the bedrock not just of sisterhood but of all humanity. Second-wave feminism has been berated for an essentialisation of ‘woman’ and yet the responsibility for and enactment of care has always been, and remains, overwhelmingly ‘women’s work’ in every culture, everywhere, with all its historical inequalities intact. When the shitwork hits the fan the world’s women are still the place where the buck stops.

Listen up Sisters, it could so easily be you.

Gaia Charis is a full-time carer and a freelance writer and researcher in the fields of gender and disability; gaiachariswordsmith@gmail.com
PhD research briefs

Gender and education, respectable femininity, Polish women’s work experiences in Scotland, and women’s engagement with right-wing movements

A cross-cultural analysis of gender and teacher–child interactions in early childhood settings: cases in Scotland, Hong Kong and mainland China

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My PhD looks at whether and in what ways teacher–child interactions in early childhood settings are gendered. It also seeks to understand how culturally specific gender discourses impact upon the gendered interactions (if any), from perspectives of both teachers and children. My research is conducted in contexts where the numbers of men working in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are globally low; and that there have been appeals for increasing male participation in ECEC by governments, media, and various stakeholders, for reasons such as men’s contributions to children’s gender construction and their widely assumed role as ‘male role models’ for boys. However, the actual differences that men may bring into ECEC are still under-researched, with even more misunderstandings than encouragement towards those men who work in ECEC. My study hopes to inform understandings about the diversities that both men and women can contribute to global ECEC and about cultural differences and their influences on gender, and to shift traditional gender stereotypes in our societies. Ultimately, my research aims to promote awareness of a more gender-balanced, equal and inclusive early childhood environment.

Boundaries of respectable femininity: new women of Bangladesh

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Colonial, post-colonial and nationalist ideologies of middle-class respectable femininity in South Asia construct women’s religious and cultural roles within the home and the family as normative conceptions against which respectability is measured. In this research, I identify urban, highly educated, professional, affluent middle-class women of Bangladesh as new women who introduce alternative forms of respectable femininities through their encounter with the neoliberal economy. Using qualitative research methods, combining audio-visual materials, focus group discussion and in-depth interviews, I examine the complex and heterogeneous constructions of new womenhoods in the country. My conceptual framework, derived from Bourdieu’s understanding of social class and West and Zimmerman’s framework of redoing gender and class, facilitates analysis of the everyday interactional negotiations of new women in relation to their gendered and classed practices of respectable femininity, and the potential for this boundary work to enhance their agency.

My analysis illuminates three aspects: first, new women are part of the neoliberal affluent middle-class and they construct their class identity as a status group, claiming inter-class and intra-class distinction from other women. Their claims to distinction rest on their levels of higher education, types of paid employment and exposure to transnational lifestyles, alongside their gendered, classed and culturally attuned selfhood, performed through ‘smart’ aesthetic practices, 50–50 work–home-life balance and female individualism. Second, new womanhood is legitimised by alternative and multiple practices of respectability, varying according to women’s age, stage of life, profession, household setting and experience of living in the West. Finally, as new women forge alternative forms of respectability, theirs is not a straightforward abandonment of old structures of respectability; rather they conform to, negotiate and potentially transgress normative conceptions of middle-class respectable femininity, substituting, concealing or legitimising particular practices in particular fields. Overall, my thesis shifts the focus of respectability research in South Asia from exploring the binary of respectable and unrespectable practices to evaluating how women make and remake their respectable status and class privilege in neoliberal Bangladesh, and the implications for gender relations.

Social inequality at work, intersectionality and inclusion

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My main research interests centre around social inequality at work, intersectionality and inclusion. My PhD research aims to provide an account of migrant women’s work experience. By examining the intersections of privilege and disadvantage, I look at the role of social identities in Polish women’s experience of work in the Scottish hospitality industry. My research objective is not only to advance intersectional understanding of gender inequality at work but also to discuss how migrant women position themselves with respect to inequality and what impact this can have on the structure of inequality in a workplace. My early findings show that Polish women working in hospitality industry are unaware of the privileges that can derive from their intersecting identities of gender, age, nationality and ethnicity. For example, all the research participants were able to instantly find jobs either before or during economic recession. In some cases the interviewees were able to find employment in customer services even without basic language skills. This could be a result of the popular positive stereotype of the ‘hardworking’ Polish migrant.
Negotiating space on the ‘right’: politics of Hindu Nationalist women in India and Zionist Settler women in Israel-Palestine

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Until recently, women in right-wing movements have been at the periphery in both scholarly and popular narratives. Feminist scholars often find themselves in conflict with women’s participation in right-wing movements as these movements subscribe to patriarchal ideological structures. However, the diverse participation of women in right-wing movements and the increasing number of women joining such organisations implies that scholars can no longer ignore the ‘problem’ of right-wing women. This ‘problem’ has ‘forced’ feminist scholars to re-evaluate feminism’s conflicted relationship with the right. Analyses that focus on combating the ‘problem’ of right-wing women neglect that women’s participation in the right opens up arenas for public and political participation by women, and construct the right as an homogeneous entity that stands against feminism. This ignores the heterogeneity among movements of the right (as well as of feminist movements) and the diverse ideologies they stem from, the variety of discourses they employ, and the diversity in their engagement with the gendered self and other. Moreover, these analyses overlook sites of complexities, contradictions, subversions and resistance among right-wing women.

My PhD researches the roles and politics of women in two specific right-wing movements, the Hindu Nationalist movement in India and the Zionist Settler movement in Israel-Palestine (see photo essay below). Using ethnographic research conducted in 2013–14, I examine how women in these right-wing projects negotiate space and spatialities to further their politics and create sites of agency. Specifically, I analyse four spaces – spaces of pedagogy, spaces of charity, spaces of leisure and pleasure, and spaces of violence – to detail the mobilisations of right-wing women as they further the exclusionary and violent politics of the right while simultaneously contesting ‘everyday’ patriarchy. Furthering debates on agency and empowerment in feminist international research and politics, my research raises questions about feminist methodologies and the ethics of researching ‘violent’ women.

Occupying the old city of Hebron

Akanksha’s photo essay presents narratives of settler colonialism and occupation of the old city of Hebron in Palestine. In the 1970s, a group of women, who refer to themselves as ‘pioneer’ women (Photo 1) led the movement to settle Hebron and ‘fight for the city’. These ‘pioneer’ women, now in their seventies, have taken back-seated roles of mentorship, giving way to younger women leading the movement to ‘settle Israel’ (Photo 2). Currently, although only a few hundred settlers remain in Hebron, the nearby settlement of Kiryat Arba is flourishing and growing. These photographs present stories of everyday contestations and violence that have marked the old city of Hebron, carving themselves on its walls and occupation fences (Photos 3 and 4), truncating childhoods and lives (Photo 5), as well as bringing out the ‘everyday’ subversions and resistance to violence and occupation (Photo 6).
Events round-up

Performance and pedagogy

Feminist folk duo Union Jill took part in 'Learning, Transforming, Technique' (10–13 April 2015) at the Create-ahh community space in Drefach Felindre, Carmarthenshire

The residential weekend, 'Learning, Transforming, Technique', was designed to explore learning techniques and transformational education practices, but it wasn’t an average education weekend. We had submitted our show as a session – not just to contribute to ideas on pedagogy but to investigate how our own techniques could be further developed as audience-based methods. Our project is feminist and we felt this weekend would be a safe and constructive space in which to experiment. It exceeded our expectations.

Entering Melin Dolwion, the rambling, atmospheric converted mill tucked in the Welsh countryside, we were pleasantly surprised by the friendly informality and creative buzz that greeted us. At one end of a large, light-filled upper room, delegates appeared engrossed; but keen to scope the space for our own session, we unloaded our equipment and paced out a stage area. As performers, our aim was to showcase how our act developed from passive audience experience to an experiment in feminist pedagogy. We no longer ‘just sing’ – we hop over that fourth wall and work with the audience through an entertaining set filled with comedy, banter, activity and, of course, music. Though the brief was broad, we hoped our session would not be too incongruous.

Some delegates drifted around holding articulated puppets, beautiful caricatures that indicated the level of creativity being explored, a chance to shake off some of the academic dryness with which we become easily accustomed. Indeed, the event was crammed with opportunities to jolt rigid thinking, be bold with approaches to disseminating knowledge and to generate unique self-learning experiences. That isn’t to say we disengaged our intellectual motor; grappling with Deleuze in one session still itch to recalibrate to the rhythm of a relaxed but challenging residential. The facilitator skilfully had us talking and listening deeply to each other, experimenting with the way sounds, smells and spatial awareness affect how we absorb and process information. It also gave us chance to suss out our ‘audience’ for our own contribution that evening.

Our session was a mock-up of a show and as we played through the set we pushed the themes much further than we do in a folk club. It was fascinating to see how delegates entered into their role as audience and contributed to the content of the show in ways we had not seen before. The experiment gave us clear sight of boundaries that can be played with and understand which elements of the show create a learning experience. We were grateful for the feedback and the ensuing discussion, which was excellent preparation for our next project – the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The weekend as a whole took us out of our comfort zone at times, but was an unforgettable experience that has shaped how we think about our show. Look out for this event next year, it may provide some fascinating insights.

For further information, contact Debi on create.ahh@gmail.com; create.ahh.org.uk; facebook.com/createahh; tweet to @createahh.

Helen Turner (top pic) is Head of Programme for Fine Arts at York St John University. Sharon Winfield (bottom pic) is about to complete an MA in Women’s Studies and begin a PhD at the University of York.

Poetry feature

WO-MAN

Licentious angel and angelic demon,
A natural Eden and a burning enigma,
She moves in sheets of darkened grey
And indefinable black,
Dark holes and infinite specula,
A veritable hieroglyph.
Denaturalised yet real,
Real and yet unreadable,
Infinite bounty and prolific flesh,
Phenomenal chora and misty sign,
Cipher, syphon, deadly siren,
The space of shapes and symbols,
Myth and dreams,
Realms of languages ethereal,
The fairy that haunts our silent screams,
Pushing for her own logos, the
Speech of phantoms and real men,
The tongues of kings and noble gents,
With upturned hats and bulky pants,
Who write the Law in stone and the
Thunderbolts of mighty Zeus.

She is there, forever in my dreams.
With arms outstretched and face
Forlorn, fata morgana,
Eternal mother, goddess, symbol,
Enigma,
Ghost,
Mist in twilight,
Vision of visions!
Defined by all that is not man,
Wo-man,
Womb,
She rises from the east and sets
In the dawns of time,
Enshrouded in dreamy metaphors
And fluid as watery dew...

Water, womb, earth and soil,
Fire, air and timeless spirit,
All and none,
Woman be thy name.
Panayiota (Polly) Chrysochou
is Lecturer in Gender Studies
at the
University of Cyprus
Feminist travels
When Kate Sang made a trip down under recently she was pleased to find the work of the FWSA is known internationally

In January and February 2015, I was fortunate enough to travel to Australia and New Zealand on an academic visit. This time of the year is a fantastic time to go to these countries, not only are you escaping after Christmas and New Year, but you get off the plane into bright sunshine. Not to mention seeing some beautiful parrots! As part of my visit, I first went to Macquarie University, Sydney, where I was hosted by Professor Alison Pullen. Along with Professor Carol Woodhams, Head of Organisation Studies at the Business School at Exeter University, I presented research on feminist academics at a workshop exploring feminism and intersectionality in academia. The discussions were fascinating – my own research suggested that some academics are reluctant to identify themselves as feminist and also to engage in activist work, including through trade unions. The audience reflected on the differences in culture between Australia and the UK, suggesting that feminism is an identity that women are proud to claim within academia. Feminists are trouble-makers within the academy and we should value this! (Editor’s note: see the interview with Lynne Segal in this issue, as she also makes this point.)

Carol Woodham’s work examined important data revealing the intersections of privilege and disadvantages experienced by men and women in the workplace, with a significant pay gap for disabled men. Alison Pullen’s work explored the neoliberal university and the damages done to those who live and work within it.

In February, after a short (ish!) plane ride to Auckland, I was a speaker at a seminar organised by Professor Judith Pringle at AUT University: ‘Is research (feminist) activism?’. The other speakers were Professor Alison Pullen, Dr Janet Sayers from Massey University, Albany, Auckland, Dr Deborah Jones from Victoria University in New Zealand and Dr Irene Ryan from AUT University itself. My own presentation was a personal narrative of my time in academia, particularly in business and management schools. On both occasions it was a delight to be surrounded by so many engaged feminist scholars and practitioners (mostly women!). As I have often found, the discussions and the post-discussion gatherings around drinks and dinner were inspiring, rewarding and helped to reaffirm my own sense of self as an academic. It is a luxury to be able to visit universities in other countries to learn of the experiences of women there and the exciting work which is being done to further gender equality. The work of the FWSA is known internationally, and it’s useful to have a reminder of how lucky we are to have an organisation which retains its focus on feminist scholarship.

Kate Sang is Associate Professor of Management at the School of Management and Languages, Department of Business Management at the Herriot-Watt University, UK.

STOP PRESS: The last date for the 2015 FWSA Ailsa McKay Travel Grant is 1 July. Visit the FWSA website for further details (http://fwsablog.org.uk/prizes-and-grants/ailsa-mckay-travel-grant/)

York International Women’s Week: get involved
York International Women’s Week (YIWW) has been a feature of the city’s calendar for many years, drawing together a wide range of activities and events run by individual women and groups. Based around International Women’s Day – 8 March – the enthusiastic grassroots activity in York fills a whole week. The programme for 2015 detailed over 100 events, ranging from theatre to craft, from feminist book talks to a Reclaim the Night march. For full details of the programme visit www.yorkwomen.org.uk.

The success of this year has encouraged the organising committee to aim even higher in 2016. We are planning to make the festival longer and more high profile. It will spread over two weeks instead of one, and we are looking to further harness the power of grassroots activism, women’s businesses and the third sector to create an bigger buzz in the city, drawing attention to women’s issues as well as women’s achievements. From 4 March to 20 March 2016, there will be a variety of events, some small and intimate, some larger and sponsored. Our goal is to engage with a wider audience and to stimulate activism from women and men who have not been involved in York International Women’s Week previously.

We welcome contributions to the programme and our deadline for submissions is 25 November 2015. We are excited about the possibilities for next year and years to come as the event goes from strength to strength. Contact us on yorkwomensweek@gmail.com for more information or for taking part. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sharon Winfield for the YIWW organising committee
More than 40 postgraduates, researchers, scholars, practitioners, and members of the Belfast community came together for the symposium on Friday, 8 May 2015 at the Belfast campus of Ulster University. Besides FWSA funding, the symposium was also supported by TJI, the Research Graduate School (RGS) and the Institute for Research in Social Sciences (IRISS), all at Ulster University.

Professor Christine Chinkin, Emerita Professor of International Law and Director of the Centre on Women, Peace and Security, London School for Economics delivered the keynote address. She touched on the gendered experiences of women during prolonged occupation, utilising examples from the Sahel/Western Sahara and Gaza. We know little of the realities of occupation for women and gendered bodies are not the focus of law or scholarship. Internationally, human rights bodies have been silent with regard to demanding accountability for women under occupation. Professor Chinkin noted from her research and firsthand experience, for women under occupation, the home is often a site for active resistance, which challenges the liberal feminist theory of the public-private divide. Furthermore, Professor Chinkin confirmed the dearth of academic engagement on the symposium’s themes of occupation, transitional justice and gender.

Post-graduates based at institutions in the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands presented papers grouped into five panels.

Protecting women during and after conflict: The panellists addressed a spectrum of harms against women during and after conflict and the difficulties in addressing these harms. Kelly Mackenzie’s poster analysed the search for justice for female rape survivors. Eithne Dowds explored the concept of female vulnerability within ‘exceptional’ circumstances as a means to impact international criminal law’s attention to rape. Concerning ‘protection’, Fiona Tate analysed the challenge in ensuring the protection of females from sexual abuse and exploitation in peacekeeping missions. Marieke Oprel addressed Dutch policies after the second world war, concerning gendered concepts of citizenship during post-war transition.

Intersectional identities: ad hoc and international courts: Sheri Labenski examined the importance of the narratives of gender and race and their intersection with transitional justice in Rwanda, while Rodrigo Vaz looked at the debates around punishment in the Gacaca Courts. Sarah Creedon looked back to the foundational Nuremberg Trial and its failure to address sexual violence. Kaitlin Ball looked at the way transitional courts have (not) addressed wartime sexual violence against minors, analysing jurisprudence from tribunals in the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Sexual violence against men: conflict, transition, and international law: Philipp Schulz’s paper called on researchers to reconceptualize masculinities in the wake of growing acknowledgement that men are also victims of sexual and gender-based violence during conflict. Parisa Zangeneh advocated for greater attention to harms to men, especially sexual violence, in international criminal courts. Laetitia Ruiz argued that feminism now has an opportunity to incorporate male victims within its understanding of gender and transitional justice.

The impact of conflict on masculinities: Jan Melia and Seamus Campbell addressed the various nuances of how masculinities are manufactured, performed and stifled during conflict, occupation and/or transition, in addition to times of peace. Elizabeth Stubbs Bates’ research employed hegemonic masculinities as a framework for understanding the UK’s practice during interrogation during the conflict in Iraq.

Women in Northern Ireland and the legacy of the Troubles: The final panel looked at the variation of women’s lives during and after the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Christina Taylor examined the experiences of women in republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations during the conflict. Examining women’s lives post-conflict, Danielle Roberts focused on women’s political participation after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, and Andrea Garcia offered an anthropological study of a cross-community women’s group whose weekly meetings are viewed as more of an act of friendship than political subversion.

A praxis session was held with representatives from Bridge of Hope (BoH), a Belfast-based organisation that engages with victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland conflict to assist in communicating ‘across the divide’. Helen Kinsella, Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, concluded the day by articulating the recurrent themes of the day’s presentations: sexual violence, failure and vulnerability. Calling for greater engagement with the framework of intersectionality when addressing gendered concerns of transitional justice mechanisms and the persistence of occupation, as well as greater utilization of feminism, sexuality and (structural) power in future research, Dr Kinsella highlighted how ‘gender, sex, and sexuality are collectively, if uneasily, implicated in relations of power, ‘inefaceably’ marking the structure and dynamics of politics, and our interpretations of it’.

Elizabeth Stubbs Bates (SOAS, University of London) received the best paper award and the runner-up was Andrea Garcia (formerly of Queen’s University, Belfast).

Portions of this entry were originally posted on the Political Settlements Research Programme website.

Stephanie Chaban (left) and Rimona Afana (right) are PhD candidates at the Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University, County Antrim.