

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

# NEWSLETTER

May 2014 Issue 62

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## 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.



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



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Please note that the views expressed in the newsletter and any enclosures or advertisements are not necessarily those of the 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

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# Editorial

Welcome to the first FWSA newsletter of 2014! This is my first newsletter as Newsletter Officer for the FWSA and I've been delighted to join the executive committee.

The newsletter features both of our upcoming conferences: 'Rethinking Sisterhood: The Affective Politics of Women's Relationships' to be held at the University of Bristol in September 2014, and the just-announced 2015 conference: 'Everyday Encounters with Violence: Critical feminist perspectives' to be held at the University of Leeds in September 2015. Both of these events look brilliant and we hope to see many of you there!

Bridget Lockyer introduces us to her AHRC-funded project 'Moving Beyond Boundaries: Gender, Knowledge and History', a student-led skills development programme. Bridget and Abigail Tazzyman will be working with local sixth form pupils to gauge perceptions of women's history.

Kate Sang conducts a fascinating interview with Adela Suliman, founder of 'International Women in Libya' (IWIL), which includes details of how FWSA members can support the work of this organisation. Maria do Mar Periera discusses the status of Women's, Gender and Feminist studies in the academy in her article 'Toxic Corridor Talk'.

Many thanks to all members who have sent news and articles for this newsletter. Do send anything you'd like to be considered for inclusion in the Autumn.

Nicola Presley, Bath Spa University  
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# Chairs' Welcome

Welcome to the April 2014 issue of the FWSA newsletter. As Kate and I (Ayona) settle down in the second year of our roles as co-chair, we are pleased to reflect on the continued success and growth of the FWSA. There have been some changes to the membership of the Executive (more about that later), and we have announced the successful hosts of our biannual conference, been able to award the essay prize, the 2013 book prize and the small grant.

For our annual Essay competition, the external judges have received all the entries and are aiming to declare the winning and short-listed entries by 19th May, 2014

We have also initiated a new travel fund to commemorate Prof. Ailsa McKay who sadly passed away this year. The fund aims to support PhD students to present their research at a conference, with a particular focus on the impact of the research. Ailsa was a good friend to the FWSA and her loss is felt deeply.

Our Interim conference 'Rethinking Sisterhood' has attracted a good response, with over 60 abstracts received. The event will be taking place in Bristol on 13th September 2014. The FWSA AGM will also take place on the same day.

This year we also saw an increased interest in our call for proposals for the 2015 conference with four very high quality applications submitted. The applications were independently reviewed by an external judge and the 2015 FWSA conference was awarded to the team in School of Geography in University of Leeds (comprising Ayona Datta, Deirdre Conlon, Martin Zebracki and Emma Kerry). Congratulations to the team who will now organise the conference and send further details in due course. Emily Falconer was the liaison for this, and we thank her for her work in executing the conference application process successfully.

In other Executive news, we are delighted to welcome a number of new members to the Executive - Helen Snaith who is our new Honorary Treasurer, Sherah Wells who joins us as a new general executive member, and Rose Holyoak, who has been appointed as our new administrator. Sadly, Trishima Mitra-Kahn is leaving the FWSA executive. The executive would like to thank her for all her hard work, particularly with the Essay Competition. We will also be circulating calls to apply for new positions of Membership Officer and Essay Competition Officer very soon.

We have also seen the FWSA increase its online presence - our new blog, 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 end of the academic year is nearly upon us. We hope you will have a productive summer and we look forward to working with you all over the next year.

Best wishes,  
Ayona and Kate

# 2014 Conference details

## Rethinking Sisterhood

### The Affective Politics of Women's Relationships



Jackie Kay confirmed for evening event

The emergence of intersectionality and the politics of difference within feminist theory have long critiqued the notion of a shared political 'sisterhood', yet the affective and ethical dimension of relationships between women requires further exploration. Whereas the trope of the mother-daughter relationship dominates feminist theory, comparatively little work has conceptualized the significance of horizontal relationships between women. Much feminist research has shown how central female ties have been to sustaining feminism within and beyond activism. Yet the depth of the (dis)affections between women does not necessarily translate into feminist transformation. This forthcoming conference asks how the much-contested notion of sisterhood requires redefinition for 21st century feminist politics and how the contemporary ethics and aesthetics of sisterhood could be reimagined.

**Confirmed keynote speakers:**  
**Professor Lynne Segal and Dr  
Margaretta Jolly**

**REGISTRATION NOW OPEN**

**Jackie Kay Evening Event**  
**'FIERE: Exploring Deep  
Friendships Between Women'**  
**Bristol University**

The FWSA are delighted to announce that Jackie Kay will be joining us on the evening of

the 13th September, at Bristol University, to provide a talk as part of the 'Revisiting Sisterhood' conference proceedings. The talk, entitled **FIERE: Exploring Deep Friendships Between Women** will look at poems and stories that explore the bonds and affinities between women over the years. This event will begin at 7pm, and **will be ticketed separately** to the events taking place during the day. Tickets will also be on sale to the general public, although discounted rates will be made available for FWSA members.

#### **Biography**

Jackie Kay was born and brought up in Scotland. THE ADOPTION PAPERS (Bloodaxe) won the Forward Prize, a Saltire prize and a Scottish Arts Council Prize. FIERE, her most recent collection of poems was shortlisted for the COSTA award. Her novel TRUMPET won the Guardian Fiction Award. RED DUST ROAD (Picador) won the Scottish Book of the Year Award, and the LONDON BOOK AWARD. She was awarded an MBE in 2006, and made a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2002. She is Professor of Creative Writing at Newcastle University.

For a full list of Jackie Kay's work, please select the following link:  
<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/jackie-kay>

#### **Bristol University**

##### **How To Register**

##### **Conference fees:**

Non-member day rate: £45  
Waged FWSA member day rate: £40  
Unwaged FWSA member day rate: £35

##### **Jackie Kay tickets (evening event, to start at 7pm)**

Non-member ticket price: £10  
Waged FWSA member ticket price: £8  
Unwaged FWSA member rate: £5

##### **If you attend the conference during the day, you will receive the following:**

- Access to all panels and workshops
- Lunch
- Refreshments throughout the day

##### **If you attend the Jackie Kay evening event, you will receive the following:**

- Access to Kay's talk 'FIERE: Exploring deep friendships between women'
- Free wine reception

Please note that there is an extra charge for the Jackie Kay tickets. You may purchase these at the same time as paying for your conference fee, or you may return to buy them at a later date (availability not guaranteed).

##### **Important Dates**

The FWSA requests that all presenters register for the conference by **Friday 18th July** at the very latest. All other (non-presenting) delegates have up until **Friday 29th August** to register.

##### **And finally...**

When making the payment to Paypal, please use the reference '**Revisiting Sisterhood**'.

If you are unable to pay via PayPal, please contact the FWSA at [administrator@FWSA.org.uk](mailto:administrator@FWSA.org.uk) to make alternative payment arrangements.

## 2015 Conference Announcement

The FWSA would like to announce that the 2015 Feminist and Women's Studies Association (FWSA) biannual Conference will be hosted by the School of Geography at the University of Leeds. The theme of the conference will be:

### **Everyday Encounters with Violence: Critical feminist perspectives**

9th – 11th September 2015  
School of Geography, University of Leeds

As with previous years, we received excellent proposals from competitive institutions. The first stage of the review process was carried out by selected members of the FWSA Executive Committee (some executive members were withdrawn from this process if there were deemed to be any potential conflicts of interest). The final decision was carried out by an experienced, external judge who had no affiliation with the FWSA or the applicants.

We would like to congratulate the School of Geography at the University of Leeds, and we look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible in 2015.

**Emily Falconer**  
**FWSA Conference Liaison Officer**

## 2015 Conference Details

### **Everyday Encounters with Violence: Critical feminist perspectives**

9th – 11th September 2015  
School of Geography, University of 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, globalization, technology, as well as institutional, popular and everyday cultures. We foresee a range of different types of sessions fostered in this conference. In addition to traditional plenary and paper sessions, we are looking to include practitioner panels, performative workshops,

talking circles and world café style interactions between participants.

A detailed Call for Papers will be announced by early June 2014 where we will announce a range of registration levels along with further information on venue, accommodation and social/networking events. We are keen to ensure that the conference is inclusive and accessible to as wide a variety of people as possible and therefore have included provisions for on-site (subsidized) childcare, a range of accessibility needs and (reduced-rate) virtual attendance. As an FWSA conference we will also be live tweeting and hosting dedicated conference bloggers from the FWSA membership. We are also looking into providing a limited number of travel bursaries for postgraduate students.

Please contact Ayona Datta **A.Datta@leeds.ac.uk** or Martin Zebracki **M.M.Zebracki@leeds.ac.uk** with expressions of interest in being part of these events and to add your name to our email list when we will circulate information and regular updates related to the conference.

**Save the date and do not miss out on this critical, engaging and welcoming event.**

## Small Grants Scheme Deadline

The FWSA offers a small grant of £250 for workshops, seminars, conferences and networks organised by and for postgraduate students. This money can be used for a variety of purposes and can be used alongside other awards. The lead organisers named on the application form must be FWSA members at the time the application is made and at the time the initiative is to take place. They must also be postgraduate students.

The deadline for applications is **1st June 2014** and decisions will be communicated by mid July 2014. Enquiries should be sent to **K.Pilcher@Aston.ac.uk** and submissions must be made electronically to **administrator@fwsa.org.uk**

For entry requirements and more information, please see our website: <http://fwsablog.org.uk/prizes-and-grants/small-grants-scheme/>

## Special Issue - Journal of International Women's Studies

Katy Pilcher and Katya Salmi have co-edited a special issue of the Journal of International Women's Studies entitled 'New Writings in Feminist and Women's Studies'.

This issue includes the winner of the FWSA's annual student essay competition: Emma Young's 'No Place Like Home: Rewriting "Home" and Relocating Lesbianism in Emma Donoghue's Stir-Fry and Hood'.

The short-listed articles also feature in this special edition. <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol14/iss4/>

# Women's History in the School Curriculum

The FWSA is really pleased to announce our collaboration with an AHRC funded project 'Moving Beyond Boundaries: Gender, Knowledge, History', a student-led skills development programme run by Abigail Tazzyman and Bridget Lockyer from the Centre for Women's Studies, University of York.



With continued debate over the proposed changes to the history curriculum and in light of the recent and successful campaign to have historical women represented on British bank notes, this project will focus on how women's history is taught in secondary schools.

Engaging with women's history can be transformative, a way to understand women's past experiences and to reflect on women's position in contemporary society. Yet history education, across all levels, is often patchy when it comes to the history of women, with the tendency to focus on one or two well-known (usually elite) female historical figures. The inclusion of women's history in this way can seem tokenistic, separate from the 'real history' being written about and discussed.

Working with three local York schools, the project gauges sixth-form pupil's perceptions of women's history. We are training nine eight postgraduate students, who will use

their research expertise to develop and deliver interactive workshops on elements of women's history not usually explored in schools. We hope that the workshops will give students a greater and more diverse knowledge of women's history, and will encourage independent thought and critical engagement with their own curriculum.

This project aims to open a dialogue on issues of gender representation and inequality in the school curriculum with researchers who work in this general field. To do this, we will work with the Historical Association (HA), a national organisation of 6000 members who advise on curriculum issues at all levels, informing policy makers and ministers. Both the HA and the FWSA will work closely with the programme organisers to disseminate the project's findings.

The FWSA hopes to develop and roll-out similar schemes over the next few years, expanding the geographical focus and training

more postgraduates. We hope that this pilot will be used as model when developing these future programmes.

If you have any ideas or suggestions about this project or future projects please get in touch at **moving.beyond.boundaries@gmail.com**, follow us on Twitter **@moving\_b** or take a look at our blog **genderknowledgehistory.wordpress.com**.

Bridget Lockyer  
University of York  
**bridget.lockyer@york.ac.uk**



# Interview with founder of International Women in Libya Adela Suliman

Kate Sang interviews Adela Suliman, founder of the women's organization: International Women in Libya. Here, Adela shares her experiences of being a professional woman, an expat and her complicated relationship with feminism.

## Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and the work you are doing in Libya?

I am a 25 year old British Muslim female. My father is from the Sudan and my mother is English. I grew up in Manchester and Kent before studying law at SOAS. I then undertook a two year Training Contract with a city law firm in London and later in Dubai.

I have always been an avid explorer and sought to travel to lands less trodden. I was therefore keenly interested when I heard that my law firm was due to open an office in the newly liberated Libya. I was keen for an adventure and to practice my Arabic language skills, so I moved to Tripoli in October 2012.



I have thoroughly enjoyed living here and I'm currently straddling the two worlds of law and journalism. It quickly became evident to me on arriving in Libya that the vast majority of my interactions were with men—both expat and local. I therefore set out to establish IWIL (International Women in Libya) with Yolanda Zaptia a British/Italian lady who is married to a Libyan and has lived in Tripoli for many years. IWIL is a voluntary social network and a platform for cultural exchanges and friendship between Libyan and foreign women.



## Would you describe yourself as a feminist – what does feminism mean to you?

I struggle with the word “feminist”, mostly as I don't feel academic enough to fully comprehend what it encompasses. I have a rather half-bit knowledge from my own personal reading, but I do feel that it is a loaded term that often conjures up polarized connotations. From being a special sisters club that one is anointed into when you have proven yourself to be angry and bra-burning enough, to the other end of the spectrum as an almost curse word flung at you when you've pointed out a mild gender discrepancy. Is there a happy middle ground within the spectrum of what a feminist may be? If so, I would like to live there!

I don't feel that women are the same as men, nor should they strive to be. I have always had a passion for women's rights and the rights of any oppressed contingent within a society. I grew up in a household of 5 women and have a large female extended family, I went to an all girls school and do tend to socially

gravitate and feel more at ease around my own gender. However, I don't think that feminism is a unified crusade; I feel that we're all a bit feminist in our own lives at different times and that includes both men and women. Be it the decisions we make from how we treat other women, to shattering that age old glass ceiling—ultimately I think the debate centers around justice.

I think for my mother's generation feminism was a more united movement, for my own generation I feel less certain if such a united movement exists and if so, what its agenda and goals comprise of. This is a shame given that feminists purport to speak on mine and other women's behalf. I also feel that the global feminist movement can sometimes be exclusionary and tilted to a “western” bias. We live in an increasingly global and interconnected world. We need to prevent the reflection of our own narrow microcosms and reach out to understand that feminism is situation and cultural specific. There is no one size fits all blueprint, the feminist

movement in Botswana should necessarily look different to the feminist movement in Nicaragua, if it is to be truly worthwhile. As Virginia Woolf wrote “As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.”

Although I’m wary of labels and definitions, not least because I don’t fully understand what they entail, I do support women’s rights and justice and do strive for a spirit of collectiveness amongst my gender. Women’s voices are rich and diverse we need to work collectively and equitably to echo them fairly, if the word “feminism” is to retain any relevant import in the future.

**Our members may not be familiar with the situation facing women in Libya – could you tell us a little bit about this?**

Upon moving to Libya I was armed, like many, with a number of preconceptions about women in the Middle East. Neighbouring the tourist friendly Tunisia and Egypt, I imagined Libya would be relatively liberal and used to foreigners. I was surprised, in fact, at how closed and cut off Libya seemed to be. 42 years of dictatorship under Mu’ammar Ghadaffi has left an immensely significant imprint on the Libyan consciousness.

On arrival the Libyan women I encountered were relatively closed, I didn’t receive the standard social invitations to coffees and weddings as I had done on my visits to other MENA countries. Yet, all of my colleagues are female bar two. Well educated Libyan women, bilingual and working for international companies. I soon found my stereotypes of repressed Arab women to be shattered. The

meetings I was attending were always well mixed between men and women. I was surprised also that in general Libyan women are more likely to speak English than the men. So although I think women were less immediately forthcoming than elsewhere that I have visited, Libyan women are very present, engaged and active in society here. I think living under a dictatorship for 4 decades has had more of an impact on society in Libya than anything else.

There are of course significant issues for women living in Libya which cannot go unmentioned. The most common, I would argue, is the petty harassment which occurs to women on a daily basis—from walking down the street to having telephone numbers thrown into your car window, or being followed around shopping aisles. This is unfortunately, part and parcel of living here. Positively, however, public campaigns have been undertaken to tackle this social issue. Blending in also works well, although I can understand that not all women are happy to do this.

Other more serious problems include young marriages, the silent suffering women who made up the large Ghadaffi harem and now have had to submerge back into society with that stigma, rape as a crime that occurred in the revolution, access to jobs and education, general security fears etc. These problems are broad and I’m sure not peculiar to Libya. Although one does have to make a number of adjustments to living here, I hope that in time Libya will undertake a social as well as a political revolution.

**What can FWSA members in the UK and Ireland do to support your organisation?**

IWIL is a voluntary social network seeking to build and improve ties between Libyan and foreign women. You are welcome to “Like” our Facebook Page ([www.facebook.com/IWILibya](http://www.facebook.com/IWILibya)) we don’t yet have a website but you can also email us on [iwil.libya@gmail.com](mailto:iwil.libya@gmail.com) I would also urge you to support other local women’s charities and NGO’s in Libya, for example ‘The Voice of Libyan Women’ or ‘The Phoenix Women’s Centre.’ Many thanks.

**Adela Suliman, @ASBintBattuta**



## An experiment in critical friendship Workshop call for papers

### Rethinking Sisterhood: The Affective Politics of Women's Relationships Feminist and Women Studies' Association interim conference, University of Bristol, Saturday 13th September 2014

#### Organizers: VIDA, the Critical Management Studies Women's Association

"A critical friend can be defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work." (Costa and Kallick, 1993: #5)

The often masculinist, acid and all too often scathing tenor of academic writing and debate in academia can be regarded as a particular challenge for female scholars. So can the low numbers of senior female role models in academic institutions of all kinds. Equally, women who are fortunate enough to find sympathetic male mentors may end up on the receiving end of a variety of sexist judgements about their relationships with these men. This is all made more complicated and more persistent by the ways in which women (the writers of this call included) just as much as men enrol in the discourses which produce and reproduce these problematic effects.

As a result, VIDA (<http://www.vidascholars.org/>) has been set up to establish a formal network which is consciously aimed at offering encouragement, advice and above

all friendship to women academics at a whole variety of career stages whose work connects to Critical Management Studies, wherever they are located geographically and intellectually. We want to work collectively in order to 'inhabit' academia 'differently'. We want to challenge the 'automatisms' of academic work that tend to reproduce existing processes and ways of being. One aspect of this challenge is to create collective spaces for reflection, connection, mutual support and knowledge formation and exchange. For us such practical interventions provide safe havens from which new collaborations, partnerships and friendships can emerge amongst women scholars.

This second experiment in critical friendship is one such intervention. We ran our first experiment at the Critical Management Studies Conference in Manchester in July 2013 and you can see an article about the experiment here: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/constructive-criticism-without-the-machismo/2005317.article>. Participation is limited to women. Any female scholar attending Rethinking Sisterhood - at whatever level, in whatever discipline - who is seeking constructive, friendly and supportive

criticism from other women can submit a working paper in advance. This paper could be anything from a set of preliminary notes and a sketchy outline all the way through to something which is almost ready to submit to a journal. It could also be a paper which the applicant plans to present in one of the other streams at Rethinking Sisterhood, or at any other conference. Draft chapters from doctoral theses are also welcome. We ask that the maximum length of any submission is 10 000 words. The only criteria used in terms of selecting the papers for our experiment will be the time and numbers of critical friends we have available. We will select papers on a first come, first served basis if we are not able to accommodate all submissions. We have been allocated a 90 minute session at the Rethinking Sisterhood conference

Women whose papers are discussed in the experiment will not present their papers and there will be no formal discussants. A lead 'critical friend' will be assigned to each paper, just to kickstart discussion. Authors will also be asked to indicate to us when submitting whether there are areas of their work they are particularly keen to have comments on. This will be a round-table, collegiate and egalitarian engagement with the author's

ideas, a dialogue between peers: conventional academic hierarchies will not be in play. All those attending the stream will be expected to have read the papers in advance and to come prepared to comment. Papers will be pre-circulated by e-mail and as such those who are simply interested in attending will register that interest with us. This is an experiment which very much depends on generosity, because those attending and not submitting a paper will not get anything 'tangible' from the sessions.

If time allows, the experiment will end with a session where participants reflect on the experience, the kind of space we have created, the extent to which we have succeeded in leaving conventional academic practices of peer review 'elsewhere', the balance between criticality and friendship we have managed to achieve and so on. If time does not allow, then this discussion can be held afterwards, online. After the workshop, where written feedback on each paper exists, it will be sent to the authors if they wish. Authors can also engage in a continuing dialogue with our critical friends about their work's progression.

Built into all of the above are the core VIDA values of equity, democracy, support, friendship, collectivism,

challenge and intervention, amongst women, by women and for women. The organizers of this experiment, on behalf of VIDA, are Jo Brewis and Sarah Robinson, both University of Leicester. To submit a working paper, or just to register interest in attending the experiment, please email Jo Brewis at [j.brewis@le.ac.uk](mailto:j.brewis@le.ac.uk) by 14th July 2014 at the latest. If submitting a paper, please indicate whether there are areas you are particularly seeking comments on. Enquiries about the experiment can be sent to Jo at the same address.



## Conference Report: 'In Conversation with the Women's Liberation Movement: Intergenerational Histories of Second Wave Feminism', British Library, 12th October 2013

**Eleanor Broadbent**

**MA Student in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, University of Leeds (eleanor.m.broadbent@gmail.com)**

This weekend was an exciting one for feminist debate in the UK as the British Library in London hosted an intergenerational conversation between feminist activists. As a research assistant to the Using Archives to Teach Gender project based at the University of Leeds ([www.gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk)), I was keen to strengthen our links with the British Library's Oral Histories project *Sisterhood and After* (<http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/sisterhood>) that had inspired us so readily months before. The conversations that unfolded over those seven hours were illuminating, invigorating and at times painful.

The event had already been expanded to meet public demand three times, swelling to over two hundred attendees. Approximately three quarters of those there were women activists who had lived through the Second Wave feminist movement themselves, with a smaller number having been involved in the British oral history project directly. The other quarter of the conference were young research students and academics with varying interests in Gender Studies.

The conference was divided into five sessions intended to broadly reflect the themes identified in the original *Sisterhood and After* project. The

open dialogue flourished over the demarcated discussions on Women's History (Sally Alexander & Catherine Hall), Reproductive Choices (Denise Riley & Jocelyn Wolfe), Sexualities (Sue O'Sullivan & Beatrix Campbell), Race (Gail Lewis & Amrit Wilson) and Work and Class (Lynne Segal & Cynthia Cockburn). Each pair were interviewed by senior and junior scholars on their memories, before discussion was opened to the floor in each forty-five minute segment.

The British Library had made a tangible effort to welcome the participation of transgender attendees by promoting the meeting as an event inclusive to all genders. However, as tensions came to a head in session four on Sexualities, younger participants felt disappointed that Sue O'Sullivan and Beatrix Campbell, as well as older contributors from the floor, were not using trans\* inclusive language. There were also concerns about the invisibility of bisexual women and the notions of queer identity used on stage as Second Wave activists spoke. Similar abrupt disagreements arose in the discussion of race and class. Where were the working class activists on the panel? asked one attendee; why were white women not acknowledging black female sexuality in a respectful or representative manner? asked

others. It was absolutely important that these crucial questions were raised by some brave individuals, but they were not answered to any sufficient degree.

At various intervals throughout the day, the gulf between older and younger activists of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) widened. The importance of language and the politics of identity became clear points of contestation that cut across not only young and old, but middle class and working class, black and white. These eruptions were undoubtedly difficult to endure, but they also encapsulated some of the complex contradictions that have marked feminist theory for over fifty years. In this event, they were playing out in front of our eyes.

What is clear is this; this is a conversation which is too fruitful to abandon. However, as Susuana Antubam (from NUS Women's Campaign) eloquently demanded in her closing remarks, no woman must be left behind. Perhaps next time it is we as the living 'Third Wave' who will get to do the talking.

## Toxic Corridor Talk: The Dismissal of Feminist Research in Everyday Academic Life

**Maria do Mar Pereira**

Women's, Gender and Feminist Studies (WGFS) has made undeniable and ground-breaking contributions to knowledge and social transformation; yet, it has always had to deal with a persistent questioning within academia – is WGFS really 'proper' knowledge?

In 1973, Adrienne Rich wrote that in the US 'feminist teachers are [considered] "unscholarly," "unprofessional," or "dykes"' (1995: 130). More recent literature shows that WGFS continues to be perceived as too 'trivial' (Marchbank and Letherby, 2006) and 'not very academically demanding' (Griffin and Hanmer, 2002: 38). The nature and intensity of the dismissal of WGFS varies across countries, disciplines or institutions, but the overall picture is clear: WGFS is not always taken seriously and this has very serious negative impacts on WGFS scholars and students.

If one considers only the claims made about WGFS in public spaces and official speeches or documents, such an assessment may seem harsh. Indeed, most contemporary universities present themselves as equal spaces of diverse academic inquiry, and in many contexts explicit public denigration of WGFS has become rarer and less acceptable. However, that public climate does not always match what happens in university 'corridor talk', as I discovered in a recent study (Pereira, 2012).

In my ethnography of academia in Portugal, I found that claims that WGFS is not proper knowledge are frequently made informally

and humorously, creating what one interviewee called a 'culture of teasing' around WGFS. A senior WGFS scholar explained that 'colleagues sometimes make teasing remarks. Feminism is seen as something which is ridiculous, laughable, that does not have academic quality.' One junior scholar told me: 'My colleagues make jokes about our Gender Studies degree all the time. Whenever I invite a colleague to speak at a seminar, one of them says "there comes another one of your feminist friends. I wonder if she shaved?'. He'll describe this as just a joke, just innocent teasing, but other fields are never the butt of such jokes.' This culture of (so-called innocent) teasing means that even when formally institutionalised as an equal field, WGFS can be invested with a halo of unscientificity and lack of credibility that works to position it as inferior.

Humour is also used publicly to dismiss feminism. While conducting this research, I attended a lecture for an undergraduate social science course in a British university where a non-WGFS lecturer described a range of theories put forward to explain a particular social phenomenon. At the end, he mentioned feminist approaches. One Powerpoint slide summarised how WGFS scholars theorise this

phenomenon; the next had the title 'Maybe, but...' and offered two points that framed those theories as easily dismissible. Each was introduced with a sexist, heteronormative joke that elicited much student laughter. The lecturer's jokes portrayed WGFS as risible, something that the students should not take as seriously as the other approaches, all presented in a balanced and admiring tone.

Understanding the current status of WGFS therefore requires an examination of corridor talk, classroom comments and humour. It requires analysing how they make it possible to maintain old sexist prejudice in apparently modern and progressive institutions. It requires taking the powerful effects of corridor talk and academic humour very seriously indeed.

Griffin, Gabriele and Hanmer, Jalna (2002). "The UK" in G. Griffin (ed.), *Women's Employment, Women's Studies, and Equal Opportunities 1945 - 2001: Reports from Nine European Countries*. Hull: University of Hull.

Marchbank, Jen and Letherby, Gayle (2006). "Views and Perspectives of Women's Studies: a Survey of Women and Men Students". *Gender and Education*, 18 (2), 157-182.

Pereira, Maria do Mar (2012). "Feminist Theory is Proper Knowledge, But...: The Status of Feminist Scholarship in the Academy". *Feminist Theory*, 13 (3), 283-303.

Rich, Adrienne (1995). *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966 - 1978*. New York: Norton.

## Spotlight on...

# Greenham Women: Actions and Impacts, Then and Now



A cross-disciplinary group of five academics from Northumbria University organised an event on 7th December 2013 to mark the 30th anniversary of one of the biggest demonstrations at Greenham Women's Peace Camp, back in December 1983:

'Greenham Women: Actions and Impacts, Then and Now'. The event was a mixture of public engagement, academic contributions, panel-led discussions and activities:

- We held a 'Show and Tell' session, where women who had been at Greenham or supported it, brought their memorabilia along and used the items to tell their own stories, leading to others remembering and recounting further narratives.

- We re-created the 'Greenham Fence' at the entrance to the event - decorated with knitting and other crafts, webs, photos, letters and other items. Many original objects were brought by participants and displayed for the duration of the conference (for instance, a charge sheet!)

- We enlisted the support of a local choir, who sang a number of Greenham Songs along with the participants.

- The final panel was made up of local (younger) feminists talking about their current activism and making links between feminist concerns, issues and tactics then and now.

- We showed the film 'Carry Greenham Home' (Dir: Beebron Kidron, 1983)

The Organising Group is shown in the photo attached, L - R: Julie, Carol, Sue, Karen and Ruth. And a short film of the day is available at: <http://youtu.be/fWEPk07WWM4>

Despite a short timescale for publicity and invitations, over 100 people expressed interest in participating and over 90 attended on the day. It was funded by our departmental Research Support Funds, and the University's Public Engagement and Impact Fund.

We have been overwhelmed (and over-excited) by the interest and ideas from women who attended and are in discussion now about progressing this as a research project.

If anyone else in FWSA is working on Greenham Women-related research, please get in touch - it'd be great to link up

## Members' News

### **Maria do Mar Pereira**

Maria do Mar Pereira's book *Doing Gender in the Playground: the Negotiation of Gender and Sexuality among Young People in Schools* (published in Portuguese in 2012) has won the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry Award for Best Book in Spanish or Portuguese (2010 – 2014). This award is conferred to the 'member of the international qualitative community who has published the Spanish or Portuguese-language book that best represents an important contribution to qualitative inquiry'. Maria will be receiving her award at the 10th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, which will take place in Illinois in May.

### **Katherine Natanel**

Katherine Natanel was recently awarded a PhD in Gender Studies from SOAS, University of London and is currently a Senior Teaching Fellow at the SOAS Centre for Gender Studies. Her doctoral thesis is titled 'Active (Dis)engagement: The Gendered Production of Political Apathy in Israel' and presents a gendered analysis of how sociological norms, codes and relations structure political engagement and action among Jewish Israelis in Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem. Katherine's research interests continue to include gender and political participation in the Middle East and beyond, and her future research plans additionally involve youth cultures and participatory methods.







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