

FEMINIST EMERGENCY

International Conference, London: 22-24 June 2017

The Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities
in collaboration with
British Comparative Literature Association (BCLA),
Birkbeck Gender and Sexuality (BiGS),
the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research (BISR),
and Mapping Maternal Subjectivities, Identities and Ethics (MaMSIE)

CONFIRMED KEYNOTES & PANELS

listed in the order of their occurrence

KEYNOTES

Unspeakable Acts: The Tongues of M. NourbeSe Philip

M. NourbeSe Philip, poet, thinker, activist, was born in Tobago, and now lives in Canada. She studied political science and became a lawyer but left the law for a life in poetry and social and philosophical thought. She is renowned for her experiments with language and her combative reconfigurations of received ideas and histories, as she pursues a vision of greater justice. Her publications include poetry, fiction, drama, essays, and two volumes of book-length poems. With her magnificent revolutionary work, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989), she confronts burning issues of our time, bending syntax and vocabulary to shift consciousness in an improvisatory form that pays homage to jazz (it was awarded the Casa de Las Americas prize). In *Discourse on the Logic of Language* (1989) she introduces the now celebrated play on words, central to thinking about gender and race:

... and English is
my mother tongue
is
my father tongue
is a foreign lan lan lang
language
l/anguish
anguish...

The long narrative poem *Zong!* (2008) is a dazzling experimental chorale-like work, which Philip has performed in a collective sound piece; it takes up the case of the 18th century slave ship of that name: slaves were drowned after the captain threw them overboard and later tried to collect insurance. In talking about her own work Philip has said, "fiction is about telling lies, but you must be scathingly honest in telling those lies. Poetry is about truth-telling, but you need the lie - the artifice of the form to tell those truths." In times of danger, when hatred and hypocrisy fill the public and the private space, writers like NourbeSe Philip are light-bearers. In conversation with Marina Warner, she will be reading from her work and discussing her ideas about the interactions of literature and philosophies of emancipation.

Chair: Marina Warner (Birkbeck, University of London)

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Women and Islam – Feminist Emergency: thoughts and themes Leila Ahmed (Harvard University)

Due to the still threatened US travel ban, Leila Ahmed will be addressing the Conference by skype.

Chair: Qudisia Mirza (Birkbeck, University of London)

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uBuntu feminism Drucilla Cornell (Rutgers University), Karin van Marle (University of Pretoria)

Ethical feminists have long argued that intellectual heritages other than those of Anglo-European philosophies can provide feminism with new and original ways of thinking beyond the paradoxes that feminism has faced. For example, think of the contentions between care and justice and the community and individuality. In short summation, uBuntu is a philosophy of affective interconnection which promotes individuation as part of the solidarity that is inherent in our fragility and our dependence on one another. In this paper we will spell out the significance of uBuntu feminism as a feminism that grows out of a South African philosophy of uBuntu and show how it helps us not only resolve some of these paradoxes but gives us a way to think about individuation that feminists have been seeking for a long time. We will explore also uBuntu as a spatial notion and its implications for epistemic and spatial justice.

Chair: Oscar Guardiola-Rivera (Birkbeck, University of London)

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Closing Poetry Readings

Patience Agbabi (poet, performer, mentor and Fellow, Oxford Brookes University)

Denise Riley (Poet and Teacher)

Chair: Ursula Owen (Editor and Publisher)

PANELS

Trouble for girls: Growing up in rape culture

This panel will focus on the ways in which teenage girls in the West are socialised by mainstream culture to be obedient curators of their own objectification. Fitting into this object-status involves, for many girls, a rite of passage to come to terms with what this means for them, and either accepting or rejecting its parameters. It also leads to a great deal of anxiety, mental health issues and self-harm. How do we teach and encourage girls to stand up for themselves and to assert their identity, boundaries, and sexual desire in an environment that is controlled by male-dominated porn, and in which shaming on social media can take only seconds to enact?

Panellists:

- Katherine Angel (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Holly Bourne (Author)
- Marianne Forsey (Brook Advisory)
- Catherine Johnson (Author and Screenwriter)

Chair: Julia Bell (Birkbeck, University of London)



Women and Power?

Feminism and shifting gender patterns in neoliberal times

This panel will consider how feminists can best address issues of power and women's agency, particularly given that some women now occupy the very pinnacle of power whilst so many others remain ever more impoverished and exploited. Thus, alongside the growth of 'corporate feminism' and the sexism and misogyny still confronting women in power, it is clear that class, race and ethnic divisions between women continue to deepen.

Panellists:

- Rahila Gupta (Freelance Writer, Journalist and Activist)
- Patricia Lewis (University of Kent)
- Nina Power (University of Roehampton and Royal College of Art)
- Catherine Rottenberg (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Chair: Lynne Segal (Birkbeck, University of London)



Who cares? The care emergency and feminist responses

This panel addresses issues of care and caring and asks what responses are needed and possible in the context of the crisis of care that has emerged both locally and globally.

Physical and mental health, combined with complex social needs, have produced new urgency at every level of the care agenda. Yet the nature of care and its delivery through our existing healthcare systems would seem to be marked by failure and crisis. Issues of difference, diversity and equality are intricately imbricated in this crisis, both in the realms of professional care – for instance, medical, nursing or social care - and in the spaces of community, domestic and intimate care. This panel looks at four areas of the diverse, interrelated and often over-determined crisis of care: the contemporary experience of nursing and nursing training in the UK; the shaping of healthcare provision and delivery in the UK; the delivery of mental health care across diverse ethnic communities; and the contributions of feminist and queer thought to an understanding of time and care in healthcare settings.

Panellists:

- Lisa Baraitser (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Debbie Field (Consultant Nurse, Complex Ventilation, Royal Brompton Hospital, London)
- Pat Oakley (Former Special Adviser to the House of Commons Select Committee on Health and currently supporting the following Dept. of Health and NHS England's Policy Programmes: 7 Day Services Review; Cardiac Care Services Review, and the Genomics Strategy)

Chair: Carolyn Burdett (Birkbeck, University of London) and Jo Winning (Birkbeck, University of London)



Gender, Brexit and Trump

The year 2016 saw a rise in populism, exemplified by the election of Donald Trump as US President, and 'Brexit', the UK's referendum vote to leave the European Union. This rise has changed the political map and thrown political strategy on both the left and right into disarray. Explanations of these phenomena have cited the failures of globalization to include the working classes, the growth of social media and its susceptibility to 'fake news', the weaknesses of technocratic governance, and the dominance of identity politics. Gender has featured in these analyses, particularly in response to the misogynist rhetoric of the Trump campaign and, for the first time, the presence of a woman candidate in the US Presidential election. However, the prominence of discourses of an alienated working class, nationalism, and a whitelash, has meant that gendered complexities, and the intersection of gender with these categories, tend to be overshadowed in mainstream and scholarly accounts.

The gendered causes and consequences of the 2016 rise in populism pose questions for feminist understandings of representation, identity, resistance and political economy.

Panel one: Nationalism and Borders

Panellists:

- Anita Biressi (University of Roehampton)
- Nadine El-Enany (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Sara Farris (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Chair: Kate Maclean (Birkbeck, University of London)

Panel two: Elections and Populism

Panellists:

- Rosie Campbell (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Erin Sanders McDonagh (University of Kent)
- Tony Perucci (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)
- Fintan Walsh (Birkbeck, University of London)

Chair: Kate Maclean (Birkbeck, University of London)

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Queer Milk

This interdisciplinary panel traces the production, visualisation and psycho-sociopolitical meanings of the bodily fluid, milk. It investigates the intersections between the lactating body, technologies, and markets, in contemporary conditions in which women are demanded on to be constantly productive in the new economy. Examining the visualisation and meanings of milk that circulate in the wider economy alongside its flow as material substance – passing between mothers and infants, milk-sharing between women, between women and men, humans and animals, or human-machine assemblages – the panel additionally opens up the contradictory and ambivalent ways maternal sexual subjectivity, maternal labour and care are imagined, represented, queered, managed, and exploited.

Panellists:

- Jeffrey Baker (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Amber Jacobs (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Melanie Jackson (Slade School of Fine Art, UCL)
- Esther Leslie (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Sharon Tugwell (Birkbeck, University of London)

Chair: Lisa Baraitser (Birkbeck, University of London)

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Sexual violence and coercion in the UK and across the world

This panel arises out of the increasing worldwide visibility of violence against women. In the UK such violence is now recognised as part of the daily lives of many women. Our aim will be to increase our understanding of the roots of such violence and to ask how it can be challenged through critical thought, policy making and activism.

Panellists:

- Sundari Anitha (ASHA and University of Lincoln)
- Hannana Siddiqui (Black feminist activist on violence against women, including at Southall Black Sisters)
- East End Sisters Uncut (a feminist direction group fighting cuts to domestic violence services in East London)

Chair: Joanna Bourke (Birkbeck, University of London)



Generations of Women

Six women representing six different decades of adult life were invited to write personal statements considering both their own situation and that of other women in the same age-band. They were asked to cover three broad areas:

- Responsibility and caring (for children, parents etc): [how] do these fall disproportionately on women?
- Professional life: how has it changed and, more generally, how does it vary for the different generations?
- Love and intimacy: how has this changed in their lifetime, both/either specifically and/or generally?

In this panel each each speaker will amplify her personal statement which will be circulated to registered attendees prior to the conference.

Panellists:

- 20s - Mathelinda Nabugodi (Newcastle University)
- 30s - Tamara Novis (SOAS, University of London)
- 40s - Ricarda Vidal (King's College London)
- 50s - Jean Owen (Independent Scholar)
- 60s - Fatemeh Ebtehaj (Independent Scholar)
- 70s - Chris MacDonald (Retired Teacher)

Chair: Naomi Segal (Birkbeck, University of London)



Feminism, racism and anti-racism

In this panel Professor Avtar Brah, author of many publications on race, gender and ethnicity, including *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Reni Eddo Lodge author of *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race*, and Professor Ann Phoenix, who has published widely on intersectionality and racialization, will talk about feminism, racism and anti-racism in a wide-ranging discussion taking in intersectionality, the academy and the recursiveness of 'popular' and other racisms/sexism.

Panellists:

- Avtar Brah (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Reni Eddo-Lodge (Journalist and Author)
- Ann Phoenix (University College London)

Chair: Nydia Swaby (SOAS, University of London)



Sexual difference in the new millennium

The idea of sexual difference has long haunted feminist debates about the oppression of women, and been at the centre of Western feminism's engagement with psychoanalysis. Today some would question the universality of the concept and argue that it has been made redundant by new forms of sexual being and self-definition, while others consider that sexual difference still decisively lays down in the human mind the lines of inequality between women and men. In this panel Juliet Jacques, Catherine Malabou, Juliet Mitchell, and Jacqueline Rose will discuss how to think about sexual difference, conceptually and politically, in the new millennium.

Panellists:

- Juliet Jacques (Freelance Writer)
- Catherine Malabou (Kingston University and University of California – Irvine)
- Juliet Mitchell (University of Cambridge)
- Jacqueline Rose (Birkbeck, University of London)

Chair: Amber Jacobs (Birkbeck, University of London)



Sex work

Across the world, in recent years, there have been changes in legal and social approaches to the activities that fall under the title prostitution or sex work, including decriminalisation of those selling sex, criminalising the purchase of sex, condemnation of prostitution as a violation of human dignity and the establishment of unions of sex workers for campaigning on labour rights and de-stigmatisation. Sex work is in large part gendered, with a huge majority of sex workers female, while most buyers are male. This panel reviews the 2017 Home Affairs Select Committee report into Prostitution and the government response to it, from the perspective of those involved or interested in

the industry. Voice will be given to critical reflection on the interrelations of race and feminist concerns with sexual labour, as well as evaluating the type of work that sex work might be, and the relationship between feminisms and activism, in the service of social justice for sex workers, will be explored.

Panellists:

- Charity Ann (Sex Worker and Activist)
- Angela Dimitrakaki (Edinburgh College of Art)
- Maggie O'Neill (University of York)
- Laura Watson (Spokeswoman for the English Collective of Prostitutes)

Chair: Julia Laite (Birkbeck, University of London)



Radical transfeminist perspectives on justice

What are radical trans-feminist perspectives and what do they bring to current debates about criminal justice? How can trans and gender-queer feminisms help to address urgent problems around violence, prisons and police?

Trans and gender non-conforming people in Britain, particularly those from communities of colour and working class backgrounds, frequently find themselves in the crossfires of criminal justice policy and practice. Whether encountering the criminal justice system as survivors of violence, or as those who are criminalised, punished and imprisoned, most trans and gender non-conforming people find little protection or support from police, courts and prisons. Instead, the criminal justice system enacts and facilitates high levels of discrimination, violence and harm. In response, community organisers, academics and activists are asking important questions about how to challenge the limits and failures of criminal justice and what is needed to enact new and better forms of social justice.

This panel will consider what radical queer, trans and antiracist feminisms can bring to these discussions, particularly in relation to current debates around prison abolition, hate crime legislation, deaths in custody and questions of justice more broadly.

Panellists:

- Chryssy Hunter (London Metropolitan University)
- Nat Raha (University of Sussex)
- Kuchenga Shenje (Activist and Writer)
- Mijke van der Drift (Goldsmiths, University of London)
- Wail Qasim (Activist and Writer)

Chair: Sarah Lambie (Birkbeck, University of London)

