

New Writings in Feminist and Women's Studies

Winning and Short-listed Entries from the 2018 Feminist and Women's Studies Association's Annual Student Essay Competition

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The Feminist and Women's Studies Association UK and Ireland (FWSA) is delighted to present this special issue of *Journal of International Women's Studies* (JIWS) featuring the winning and shortlisted entries to our annual student essay competition. We had a variety of thought-provoking and well-written essays submitted to this year's competition, and it was hugely cheering to see such a wide engagement with feminism, gender and women's studies across undergraduate and postgraduate students. Thank you to all who submitted entries – we wish we could publish more! Thank you also to our external judges for this year's competition, Dr. Deborah Jermyn and Dr. Victoria Cann, for such thoughtful, constructive, and insightful feedback on the shortlisted essays.

JIWS originally published a special issue featuring the winning and shortlisted entries from the FWSA's first student essay competition in 2004. The FWSA is delighted to work with JIWS to provide a platform for the next generation of feminist scholars; thank you in particular to Dr. Diana Fox for her ongoing commitment to and enthusiasm for the competition. The open access online format of JIWS is hugely important in an increasingly precarious academic environment, enabling those without institutional affiliations to access the latest feminist scholarship, as well as facilitating an international readership.

The FWSA was founded in 1987 as a network of scholars with research interests in feminism and women's studies. Today we are a national association with members across the UK and Ireland, incorporating a diverse body of scholars/activists, whose work ranges from the social sciences to the arts and the humanities. The FWSA's principal mission is to promote feminist research and teaching, whilst providing support for productive collaborations among scholars, students, non-HE organisations and community partners. Our annual Book Prize was won in 2018 by Maria do Mar Pereira from the University of Warwick, for her book *Power, Knowledge and Feminist Scholarship: An*

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Ethnography of Academia. Drawing on data collected over a decade in Portugal and the UK, US and Scandinavia, the book undertakes a ground-breaking ethnography of academia inspired by feminist epistemology. FWSA also host an annual Small Grants Scheme, which provides funds for workshops, seminars and conferences organised by and for postgraduate students. The latest recipients of the award were Marion Hallet and Elizabeth Miller for their one-day postgraduate conference ‘Women in the Wake of May 68’ which took place on 16th May 2018 at Kings College London. FWSA funding provided travel bursaries for postgraduate speakers who otherwise would not have had the means to attend. Finally, the Ailsa McKay Travel Grant, named after leading feminist economist Professor Ailsa McKay, provides small grants to enable PhD students or Early Career Researchers to attend a conference. The FWSA will continue with its commitment to supporting feminist scholarship, both new and established, over the next few years, and will soon be launching exciting additional schemes to extend our facilitation of this. We hope that this issue of JIWS will inspire and provoke discussion around some of the important issues concerning feminism today.

Sites of Feminist Resistance: Mapping, Archiving, and Commemoration

This year’s essays are broadly themed around gendered spaces, and the politics and practice of traversing or commemorating these sites through feminist research. The broad range of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives demonstrates how various sites can become productive spaces for the resistance of gendered norms – from geographical space, the environment, the media, or the body. Charlotte Sanders, Sarah France, Rijak Grover and Angelika Strohmayr all consider the practice of walking and the mapping of gendered spaces, and how women’s in/ability to move between or reclaim physical spaces is a feminist issue. All of these authors speak to the conceptualisation of feminist research as facilitating the commemoration and archiving of these mappings and movements, and how this act of recording might lead to changes in lived experiences of gender and social life. This theme of resistance comes out strongly across the essays by Matthew Kovac, Isha Karki and Alexa Warnes. In these pieces, we see how the body, or representations of the body, can be used as productive sites of struggle or defiance against domination or control. In resisting gendered norms, protest becomes inscribed on or through the body, and has the potential of triggering both changes in policy or practice *and* empowering lived experience.

The winner of this year's competition is Charlotte Sanders's 'Cartographers of Disrupted Belonging: Sudanese Mothers Drawing Maps of Portsmouth (UK)'. Sanders uses map making in order to explore women's lived experience of migration in Portsmouth, UK. Drawing on ethnographic work with Sudanese women, Sanders describes the women's experiences of space and place as fundamental to their feelings of belonging and 'othering', as they sketch out their movement in an unfamiliar urban space. Moreover, Sanders describes how these maps reflect classed, gendered, and racialised formations of space, as the possibilities and limitations of these women's experiences are brought to life through illustration. Portsmouth becomes a space in which these women's experience of mothering is embodied and lived, as they emphasise "motherly" or "domestic" spaces such as schools, hospitals, and shops, and their mobility to wider urban areas is limited by both their duties as mothers and their economic hardship. Sanders's wonderfully evocative map-making data provides invaluable insight into the lived experiences of migrant women, and the ways in which urban space intersects with their im/mobility and in/visibility in wider society.

Rijak Grover continues the theme of women's access to space and walking in 'Far from the Factory? Investigating how women travel to work in rural Cote d'Ivoire', by taking a feminist perspective on the sociological concept 'spatial mismatch' – costs for workers in travelling between home and work. Using interview data with women who work in a cashew factory in Findon, Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa, Grover investigates what happens when women overcome constraints and enter the labour force, and the extent to which these women are willing to travel for work. Grover uses the rich data gleaned from this fieldwork to make the lived experiences of these women in rural developing countries more visible, and to emphasise the differences and similarities between these women's involvement in the labour force. In so doing, Grover builds an argument about the double burden of economic exploitation and domestic labour for women in rural Cote d'Ivoire, and the ways in which commuting times might ease or further complicate these experiences.

In 'Walking Out of Dualisms: Material Ecofeminism in Olivia Laing's *To The River*', Sarah France undertakes a feminist reading of Olivia Laing's novel *To The River* (2011). Reading the novel through theories of material ecofeminism, France argues that the novel uses ontological binary divisions of female/nature, male/culture in order to resist male urban

space. More specifically, she argues that the book explores ‘walking into nature’ as a way of “going beneath” the male gaze’ and resisting masculine cultures. In using the body as a form of resistance, Laing repositions the body as an active mechanism, and the mind and body are brought together. Exploring the book in particular through themes of liminal spaces, abject waters, destruction/renewal and death and the afterlife, France reads Laing’s novel through feminist theory in order to argue that the mind/body dichotomy can be used productively, co-opting the language of female subjugation by rewriting it as a form of resistance.

In ‘Using technologies to commemorate International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers in the North East of England’, Angelika Strohmayer considers walking as a form of commemoration and resistance, as she explores the use of digital technologies at the commemorative events of International Day to end Violence Against Sex Workers. Drawing on her own engagement with these commemorations in North East England in 2016 and 2017, Strohmayer suggests digital technologies have the ability to enhance the experiences of sex workers and sex work support services. In this case, Strohmayer suggests that digital technologies provided a space for new interactions in commemorative events, and facilitated new forms of reflection and remembrance. From taking photographs of the events, to using a projector screen to document the names of those sex workers who had recently passed away, digital technologies allowed the participants to engage in both public and private forms of advocacy for sex worker support. In so doing, Strohmayer not only contributes to literature on sex workers and sex worker support services, but also offers a model for how digital technologies can be used for wider forms of activism and commemoration.

Matthew Kovac considers women’s resistance historically, as he seeks to explore the gendered dimensions of the persistence of mass violence after the First World War. In ‘Red Amazons’? Gendering Violence and Revolution in the Long First World War, 1914–23’, Kovac argues that there is a correlation between those countries which experienced more extreme gender violence and those which experienced the greatest post-war violence, because in countries where women were subjugated, less force was needed to contain patriarchal threat. Drawing together a wealth of data from a series of international post-war conflicts, Kovac argues that gender analysis is not just necessary, but central, if we want to understand the violence inherent to this period. Through this

framework, Kovac draws attention to the ways in which women's bodies are used and subjugated in greater political conflicts, and the centrality of patriarchy to scripts of warfare and revolution. As he says, understanding this 'offers crucial lessons –and warnings – for our own dangerously promising political moment.'

In 'Scripting Resistance: Rape and the Avenging Woman in Hindi Cinema', Isha Karki explores representations of rape in contemporary Hindi cinema to consider how this can be used as a form of bodily resistance against domination. Analysing *Angry Indian Goddesses* (dir. Nalin, 2015) and *Pink* (dir. Chowdhury, 2016), Karki argues that these films subvert the typical 'avenging women' genre by making visible the problems inherent in the visualisation of rape. Karki describes the 'ever-present double bind for feminist filmmakers, writers and critics', whereby representations of rape depend on scopophilic depictions of women's victimisation as sexual object, which become a commodified spectacle for the film industry. In comparison, Karki argues that *Angry Indian Goddesses* and *Pink* resist this victimhood by rewriting cultural rape scripts, dismantling typical narratives of victim blaming and the "good" rape victim by erasing male aggressors and allowing the women to narrate their own experiences. In this narrative, the women end the film not as rape victims, but rather with their own identity reasserted.

Finally, in 'Exploring Pronatalism and Assisted Reproduction in UK Medicine', Alexa Warnes considers women's relations to bodies and boundaries by exploring the UK's National Health Service's (NHS) access criteria for *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF), and the ways in which these medical discourses might promote pronatalism. Warnes suggests that the high value placed on biological motherhood is potentially harmful for those who do not, or cannot, subscribe to this model of the family. Critiquing ideas of women's reproductive autonomy and constructions of 'normal' bodily functioning, Warnes explores the effect of IVF on women who are reproductively marginalized (same-sex couples, trans groups, women of advanced maternal age). In so doing, Warnes explores the possibilities IVF might open up for these women, and also the limits and tensions of these discourses in reinforcing pronatalism and stigmatising non-biological motherhood. In conclusion, Warnes makes a set of recommendations for the medical profession in helping to reduce pronatalist bias, while still providing important services to liberate

women who desire a biological child and remaining attentive to the ways in which many of these are wider structural issues, rather than problems with individual IVF services.

Concluding Thoughts

We hope that you enjoy reading this year's competition winning and short-listed essays, and join us in congratulating these emerging feminist scholars on their success in the competition. We are very much looking forward to reading next year's submissions, and hope that students will be inspired by this issue to submit their work.

For more information about the FWSA and its initiatives, including the next round of our essay competition, please visit www.fwsablog.org.uk

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