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Competition: New Directions in Feminist Studies -
Emotions, Activisms, Intersectionality*

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The 10th Anniversary of the FWSA Essay Competition
'New Directions in Feminist Studies—Emotions, Activisms, Intersectionality'

By Trishima Mitra-Kahn¹ and Katya Salmi²

In this special issue of the *Journal of International Women's Studies* (JIWS), the Feminist and Women's Studies Association UK & Ireland (FWSA) is delighted to present the winning and the shortlisted entries of the 10th anniversary of our annual student essay competition. The FWSA was founded in 1987 as a network of scholars with research interests in feminist and women's studies. Today we are a national association with over 300 members and our members' scholarship range from the social and health sciences to the arts and the humanities. It was in 2004 that JIWS published a special issue showcasing the winning and shortlisted entries from the FWSA's first student essay competition, and we are delighted that this collaboration has continued. Our sincere thanks go to Dr Diana Fox, the managing editor of the journal for her deep spirit of collegiality and genuine interest in amplifying early career feminist and gender studies scholarship.

To honour the 10th anniversary of our essay competition and our enduring relationship with JIWS, the focus of this year's essay competition is on new directions in feminist studies, across disciplines and methodologies. **'Emotions, Activisms, Intersectionality'**, the theoretical focus of our 10th anniversary essay competition, has been the leitmotif of the FWSA's events in 2013-2014. These three interrelated themes are pressing issues for theory and praxis, within and outside academia, as feminist scholars and activists continue to strive for progressive social change within times of *austerity*, uncertainty and political unrest. Our 2013 Biennial Conference—'The Lady Doth Protest', mapped feminist movements, moments and mobilisations within academic and activist spaces. The conference featured keynotes from scholar-activists (to continue the feminist project to blur the boundaries between practice and theory), an advocacy and activism roundtable featuring [The Feminist Library](#), [AWAVA](#) and [WLUML](#) (to showcase feminist organising's 'herstorical context' and her future), Dr Deborah Withers' exhibition *Music & Liberation: Women's Liberation Music Making in the UK, 1970-1989*, and a film screening of *Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years* followed by a Q&A session with the director Dr Dagmar Schultz. Similarly, our 2014 conference (*Rethinking Sisterhood: The Affective Politics of Women's Relationships*) broadened the widely debated and somewhat contentious idea of sisterhood through interactive workshops and papers and sought to reimagine and redefine sisterhood for a 21st century feminist politics. Both conferences provided a space for feminism's practice wisdom to be harnessed and blended theory, politics, and praxis with the aim of extending the boundaries of what counts as feminist knowledge making.

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To all those who submitted entries, and to Professors Mary Evans, Chrystina Hughes, Diane Negra and Imelda Wheelahan who acted as our external judges, we extend our sincere thanks. As Professor Diane Negra writes about this year's essayists:

The authors consistently identified original and important lines of inquiry. Their ability to pinpoint not only un/under-addressed but compelling concerns suggests real hope for the future of feminist scholarship.

The Essays

This year's shortlist of essays is marked by varying explorations of feminist activism and intersectionality from a wealth of perspectives. The essays that comprise this special issue investigate the nature of feminist praxis and epistemologies, analyse contemporary forms of feminism and explore implications of feminist methodologies in social science research. Cultural phenomena ranging from theatre productions to reality television and contemporary adaptations of classical tales are portrayed and dissected in innovative feminist analyses that challenge masculine and patriarchal hegemony. Together, these essays showcase a budding area of feminist scholarship that engages with both feminist epistemologies and praxis, whilst maintaining intersectionality as a central consideration.

Our winning essay is Gemma Miller's "Cross-Gender Casting as Feminist Interventions in the Staging of Early Modern Plays". At its heart, Miller's essay is a brilliant epistemological querying of the disruption of the male gaze (as an activist interruptive endeavour) in female-male cross-dressing theatrical productions within trans-gender theatre. Miller's incisive piece of scholarly writing makes the case for the necessity of a feminist re-working of Shakespearean plays and confidently points to the prospect of such interventions "negotiating a way out of the bipolarity of [gender] definitions." For Miller, a cross-gender casting is a "bold" **feminist activism**, one unlike attempts to simply recuperate "the feminine 'other' from the margins of theatre"; instead it is "radical action: a direct challenge to the masculinist hegemony from within the 'mainstream'".

In Amy Calvert's "You Are What you (M)eat: Explorations of Masculinity, Meat Eating and Masquerade", we are presented with a thoroughly engaging piece of work within the **intersections** of cultural studies of masculinity, food and television. Her essay looks at the reality TV show *Man vs. Food* as a metaphor for what she discerns as a crisis of (hegemonic) masculinity and a "backlash against various social movements, specifically recent feminist and vegetarian/vegan movements". Calvert remains interested in "the gendering of food, specifically meat, as a means of establishing hegemonic male dominance in contemporary Western society".

Kendra Reynolds' "A Rude Awakening: Sleeping Beauty as a Metaphor for the Slumber of Post-Feminism" presents itself with terrific insight at its core. Using the **affective politics** of Julia Leigh's recent adaptation of *Sleeping Beauty* (2012), this original expose of the anti-tale attempts to show "how women have been lulled to sleep by accepting the facade that they have 'made it'" in terms of liberation, politics, and the market. Reynolds contends that anti-tales like *Sleeping Beauty* "mark the bubbling unease beneath the surface of society" and mount a challenge to the post-feminist 'made it' discourse; Whether it be the discounting and silencing of the female voice or the objectification of the female body as a "marketable resource", Reynolds leverages Leigh's *Sleeping Beauty* to warn against relying too heavily on the idea that true

liberation has been achieved lest we find ourselves returning “to the outdated sexism of the fairy tale kingdom”.

In “Sexuality, Religion and Nationalism, A Contrapuntal Reading of the History of Female Activism and Political Change in Egypt”, Jihan Zakarriya offers us a fascinating historical analysis of competing feminisms in Egypt. This essay vividly outlines how Islamist and liberal feminism were at odds in post-colonial Egypt as concerns for nationalism influenced the breadth of feminist activity. Zakarriya argues that during the Twentieth Century, Egyptian ruling governments “politicised” Islamic and liberal feminisms, pitting them against each other. This essay traces the ways in which competing feminisms in Egypt were transformed over time by a shift from a focus on cultural and economic rights to a more political feminist discourse over the last century. Despite the gender-based sexual violence manifested in the Egyptian uprisings over the last few years, Zakarriya identifies strength and promise in the civil and political nature of contemporary feminist demands in Egypt.

Giuliana Monteverde’s essay “Not All Feminist Ideas Are Equal: Anti-Capitalist Feminism and Female Complicity” tackles the complex issue of female complicity through an analysis of two texts. Using two works, *One Dimensional Woman* by Nina Power and *Meat Market: Female Flesh under Capitalism* by Laurie Penny, as examples of contemporary anti-capitalist feminist works, this essay identifies key ways in which such works are limited in their understanding of female complicity in maintaining and furthering “patriarchal practices or beliefs.” The essay does demonstrate the extent to which both Power and Penny link the role of women to wider systemic forms of inequalities, but it also provides a compelling argument for further exploration into the manifestations of female complicity in sustaining a patriarchal system.

In “‘The personal is political science’: Epistemological and Methodological Issues in Feminist Social Science Research on Prostitution”, Emily St. Denny provides us with a convincing breakdown of the inherent tensions of conducting research on often divisive subject matters, using the example of feminist research on prostitution. This essay reflects on the paradox of attempting to “actualize the emancipatory potential of our knowledge without, in so doing, speaking on the behalf of a voiceless and invisible other.” Identifying the role of feminist social science in research as praxis, especially as it relates to emancipatory research, this essay underscores several tensions in the underlying methodological implications, particularly in the ‘false conspicuousness’ that may emerge from reflexivity and activism. Drawing from examples of recent research on prostitution, this essay brings forwards important considerations for future research on prostitution.

Conclusion

We hope you enjoy reading this year’s competition winning and short-listed entries and join us in congratulating the entrants on their success in this competition. We also hope that the publication of these essays will facilitate future feminist scholarship, and that students will be inspired to submit their own work for consideration for next year’s competition. For more information about the FWSA and its initiatives, including the next round of our essay competition, please visit www.fwsa.org.uk.