Gender, Brexit and Trump – Elections and Populism

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.

Panellists:

- Rosie Campbell, Birkbeck, University of London
- Nadine El-Enany, Birkbeck, University of London
- Fintan Walsh, Birkbeck, University of London
- Chair: Kate Maclean, Birkbeck, University of London

Generations of Women

In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir wrote: ‘Enough ink has been spilled over the quarrel of feminism; it’s pretty much closed now – let us say no more about it’. Nearly 70 years later the quarrel continues, as it should, and not just between the various feminisms on offer in the twenty-first century, but between different age groups of feminists. It could be said that women are continually in a state of ‘emergency’ when, more than any other factor, our life-cycle states – personal, political and professional – are determined by psychological and physical changes over time. Following an idea from a 2009 conference (and a follow-up conference in 2011), this session consists of an invited panel of six women representing the age-bands 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s+. It will explore differences among the decade-groups and key tensions or turning-points facing women in relation to continuing choices and limitations. Panellists will pre-circulate short responses to two or three broad questions; in the session, further issues will emerge in discussion with the audience.
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 - Estela Welldon, Psychoanalytical Psychotherapist
- Chair: Naomi Segal, Birkbeck, University of London

Radical Transfeminist Perspectives on Justice

What are radical transfeminist 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 criminalized, 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 Lamble, Birkbeck, 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 Mitchell, Catherine Malabou and Jacqueline Rose, all of whom have made this question central to their work, will discuss how to think about sexual difference, conceptually and politically, in the new millennium.
Panellists:
- Catherine Malabou, Kingston University and University of California at Irvine
- Juliet Mitchell, University of Cambridge
- Jacqueline Rose, Birkbeck, University of London
- Chair: Amber Jacobs, Birkbeck University of London

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 & University of Lincoln
- Hannana Siddiqui, Black feminist activist on violence against women, including at Southall Black Sisters
- Keir Starmer, MP Holborn and St Pancras
- Chair: Joanna Bourke, 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 destigmatisation. 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 activistism, 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

Trouble for Girls: Growing up in Rape Culture

This panel will focus on the ways in which teenage girls in the west are socialized 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
- Catherine Johnson, Author and Screenwriter
- Kim Reynolds, University of Newcastle
- Chair: Julia Bell, Birkbeck, University of London

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**Under the Skin of the City – Film Screening**

Introduction by Laura Mulvey, Birkbeck, University of London.

*Under the Skin of the City* (Rakshan Bani-Etemad, Iran 2001. 1 hour 36 mins)

Rakshan Bani-Etemad is one of the key women film directors in Iran. In *Under the Skin of the City* she tells the story of a working class family in Tehran, particularly from the perspective of the mother, Tubaa, a factory worker who struggles to keep her family together under pressures of class and of legal discrimination against women. The film begins as a social realist drama, but it subtly shifts its cinematic style as the family succumbs to external and internal tensions. The film is an intensely personal observation of its characters’ dreams and aspirations, but also a rigorous analysis of their limited ability to inflect the social circumstances in which they are caught.

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**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
- Nisha Dogra, University of Leicester
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’s 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
- Catherine Rottenberg, Goldsmiths, University of London
- Nina Power, University of Roehampton and Royal College of Art
- Chair: Lynne Segal, Birkbeck, University of London