

Introduction:
**Winning and Short-listed Entries from the 2007 Feminist and Women's Studies
Association Annual Student Essay Competition**

By Yvette Taylor¹ and Michelle Addison²

In this special issue of the *Journal of International Women's Studies* we are pleased to exhibit the winner and shortlisted finalists of 'The Feminist and Women's Studies Association' (FWSA) annual student essay competition. The FWSA was founded in 1987 by a group of women who were dedicated to researching and talking about women's lives. As well as being a proactive presence around feminist issues in the political, social and cultural sphere, the FWSA continue to sponsor a biennial international conference, a postgraduate seminar series, as well as a celebrated book prize which recognises innovation across disciplines in feminist and women's studies. In the FWSA student essay competition the standard of submissions continues to be of remarkable quality and spiritedness year on year. We are always surprised and encouraged by the creative range of topics and debates tackled in this competition. The essays included in this special issue stand out in particular not only for their attempts to interrogate accepted 'knowledge' in feminist and women's studies, but because they also captivate our academic imaginations for the future of feminism.

This particular special issue sits in an important new decade for feminist and women's studies. Collectively, these new, ambitious writers take down the dust sheets and shake off the cobwebs from subjects such as 'feminist politics', 'feminine performances', 'the body', 'birth control' and the 'representations of women', in an attempt to generate new topics in areas which some might say have been allowed to grow bulbous and sluggish. What these writers succeed in doing is to introduce a fresh perspective to cases within and across feminism which have been previously shelved at the back of the proverbial academic filing cabinet, along with some old paper clips and a forgotten post-it note.

You might consider whether we even need feminism in 2010? Or, you may feel sceptical as to whether we need to continue developing women's studies. After all, you might say, 'feminism'- the calling card of women's liberation, seems *so* dated. Nowadays, women 'can do' all: work, have children, go out and party, have multiple relationships, build new and complex families, claim femininity and masculinity. So is 'the feminist' is an old spectre clinging to the noughties? A six year old relative bitterly recalled not being allowed to join in a game of football on the school yard – when asked 'why?' she repeated what she'd been told: 'because I'm a girl'. In response she stood in the middle of the 5-aside football pitch and refused to move: she was finally allowed to play. An enduring struggle? An enduring success? Of course, no two women are the same. The intersection of identity categories, practices and situatedness (beyond the football pitch) makes the task of studying the changing lives of women in the next decade an important and open-ended undertaking.

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The winning entry, written by Catherine Martin, is titled 'Speech, Silence and Female Adolescence in Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*'. Within these two texts, Martin focuses on representations of female adolescence and sexuality as connected to the body and language, analysing how feelings of ambivalence and grotesqueness arise out of the characters' experiences and perception of abjection. What Martin does here is to encourage the reader to question whether the female body is now a site for transformation and possibility, or contrastingly objectified and constrained.

Alice Szczepanikova entry is titled 'Beyond 'Helping': Gender and Relations of Power in Non-governmental Assistance to Refugees, where she discusses the repeated subordination of refugees from the former Soviet Union settling in Eastern Europe. In this ethnography, Szczepanikova follows refugees' experiences of seeking aid from non-governmental services. Through a complex set of power relations, these services, Szczepanikova argues, reward submissive, *feminine* performances of 'refugeeness', (re)producing a narrative of marginalisation. Through these expected performances, Szczepanikova argues that these refugees are relinquished of any political power to influence their situation.

In 'Women's Political Representation in Post-Conflict Rwanda: A Politics of *Inclusion* or *Exclusion*? 'Carey Hogg problematises claims that women in post-conflict Rwanda are now the most politically represented women on the planet. Hogg gives attention to an alignment of greater female political inclusion with the effacement of ethnic identification or political dissent. Hogg notes the external positioning of Rwanda as an 'authoritarian state' and asks if women can or will change the political climate, and whether this has any substantive *meaning* in post-genocidal Rwanda.

In the next article 'The War on Terrorism as State of Exception: A Challenge for Transnational Gender Theory', Sarah Blake examines how power is constructed in 'state of exception', discussing connections between the ongoing struggle over representations of 'Third World Woman,' among feminists, and mainstream discourses that established the United States' invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. She aims to problematise power dynamics mitigated via theorisations of 'the body'. Blake is focussed on illuminating historical, social, cultural and legal contexts between the 'state of exception' and 'gender theory'. She argues that these contexts present particular, pressing ethical demands for how power is exercised internationally.

Clare Makepeace discusses 'To what extent was the relationship between feminists and the eugenics movement a 'marriage of convenience' in the interwar years?' She looks at the relationship between feminists and the eugenic movement starting from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the Second World War. She examines the extent of a relationship between Francis Galton, the first President of the Eugenics Education Society, a prominent feminist and a renowned supporter of the Anti-Suffrage Society, alongside Eva Hubback who encouraged women's organisations to preserve 'racial stocks'. In her discussions, she argues that an apparent 'marriage of convenience' between feminists, arguing for birth control, and eugenics was mainly propagated by eugenicists.

Finally, Naomi Garner writes about 'Seeing through a glass darkly': Wollstonecraft and the Confinements of Eighteenth-Century Femininity'. In her article Garner revisits Wollstonecraft's representation of women, reinvigorating analysis for

the 21st century. Garner looks at how Wollstonecraft positions her texts as ‘a mirror of society, reflecting, revealing and finally undermining the male through mimicry of the masculine position’. Garner argues that Wollstonecraft tried to usurp the prominence of ‘femininity’ as conflated with women, rather than change the dominant patriarchal social structure. Garner concludes that Wollstonecraft’s feminism is infamous for problematising male inconsistent logic and dominance over women. We hope you enjoy these varied pieces! For more information on the FWSA, and the student essay competition in particular, please go to the FWSA website at www.fwsa.org.uk.