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Editorial

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Emergencies, Emergences and Polycrises: The enduring need for critical feminist interventions

Recent years have once again brought the concept of 'emergency' to the fore. In the current moment, war and conflict, not least of which is the conflict in Gaza and the continuous state of emergency for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, are among the 'emergencies' that are forefront of the public consciousness. But conflict is not alone as an emergency: the overlaying of multiple catastrophic threats have been labelled a "polycrisis" (Rajat et. al. 2024). Applying the term 'polycrisis' to the current conjuncture demands an appreciation of multiple overlapping and mutually-constitutive crises including climate disaster; social and cultural emergencies including sexual and domestic violence; forced displacement; authoritarianism; imperialism; colonialism; the re-emergence of familyist, essentialist, pro-natalist and binarizing discourse; and the unpredictable impacts of artificial intelligence in these contexts. And yet, despite the sense of urgency and fear that such emergencies may generate, many of the challenges we are currently facing are not, in fact, newly emerged.

The current volume of Dearcadh marks our fifth year of publication. Dearcadh aims to give voice to new and emerging feminist researchers, coming mainly, though not exclusively, from the Centre for Global Women's Studies in the University of Galway. In spite of the global upheaval that characterised its beginnings (the first three volumes were all affected by Covid-era public policy measures, introducing significant constraints to the choices that researchers and the editorial team could make in going about their work), this five-volume milestone points towards important trends and patterns that have become visible over time within the research that is profiled in this journal. In Dearcadh, we see researchers responding to contemporary issues with the best tools available to them. Emergencies and responses can feel bewilderingly novel, yet they are always historically situated, arising out of deep-seated power structures and sustained social and cultural norms. As media and funding organisations

relentlessly focus on innovation, feminists, including Dearcadh authors, continue to excavate the origins of our thinking genealogically, seeking to understand the sources of the ideas, concepts and dynamics that are brought to bear on the problems of our time.

Feminist scholarship and activism have long been at the front lines of emergencies: indeed, feminist movements have invariably arisen in response to the emergency of gender inequality. Anti-imperialist women activists were instrumental in India's democratic movement (Prasad, 2024); and the organisation of women politicising their roles as mothers was pivotal in confronting the military junta in Argentina from the 1970s onwards (Howe, 2006). Feminist activism has been central to environmental, peace and anti-nuclear movements (Lockwood, 2012; Berger 2014; Choi and Eschle, 2023; Shor, 2024). The engagement of feminist activists in civil rights movements in the US in the 1960s and 70s highlighted from an early moment that race, class and gender are inherently connected in our experiences of discrimination, inequality and violence (Davis, 1982; hooks, 1990). It has fallen to feminists within broader struggles to relentlessly return the focus to the ubiquity of gendered violence against women, including within liberatory movements (Crenshaw 1991).

While these emergencies highlight the critical role of feminist interventions and feminist thought in tackling crisis globally, clear gaps remain in relation to who, and what issues, are visible. Xenophobia, racism and classism results in the reproduction of inequality, not just between the Global North and Global South, but within the Global North and South, with the most marginalised, often migrant and displaced women of colour, often overlooked in gender equality policies and legislation. The neoliberal and globalized economy exploits these gaps, relying on the exploitation of women's work, particularly in relation to care work, and reinforced through the control of women's lives through violence to maintain its structure (see Cusicanqui (2010) for an example about the Bolivian case). These issues remain pressing concerns for feminist academics and activists.

Through their commitment to equality and justice, feminists have always been activists in states of emergency. In our time working in this field, we have observed the specifics and languages of emergencies change, while at the same time, many elements remain constant. When the MA programme in Gender, Globalisation and Rights programme here in the University of Galway took in its first students in 2008, key concerns – emergencies, if you will - included globalisation, neoliberalism and the need for substantive recognition of women's human rights. Today, following global political upheavals involving ruptures to democracies including the UK and the US, and conflict within Europe adding to ongoing imperial and neocolonialist conflict worldwide, the specifics of the emergencies we face have shifted and arguably worsened. The language used in scholarship and wider public conversations is changing; with critical interventions emphasising the ongoing relevance of imperialism, (neo)colonialism(s), and the intersecting trifecta of gender, race and class. Scholarship is increasingly alert to the rise of the far-right, a distant concern as recently as 2008.

And yet, while the language and specifics demonstrate change, the underlying factors driving emergencies are consistent, and taken up by the authors in this volume. Walsh explores the dynamics of neoliberal globalisation, which persists in both economic and cultural forms, increasing inequalities, disrupting gender relations, and influencing dynamics of violence. Keighron reflects on the multiple contradictory gendered impacts of globalised cultural transformations. Technological advancements have not only improved communications, an aspect of globalisation, but have also intensified and added to the forms of gender-based violence women are exposed to, as interrogated here by Hayman and to some extent, Chippendale. In spite of what many pundits and right-wing commentators would argue, the feminist objective of gender equality is far from achieved. As both Connolly and Moreno note here, women continue to take on the primary role of carer - often under-valued in society and uncompensated, even in, if not more so, contexts of emergency such as the recent Covid 19 pandemic.

Thus, while the language through which we talk about the challenges we face has changed, there are clear continuities that connect previous crises with our current ones, and perhaps those continuities can offer some grounding in insecure times. In spite of certain dramatic changes, such as the digital revolution, fragmented and all-pervasive media contexts, and the multi-polarisms of twenty-first century international relations, many of the issues that concern authors in this volume of Dearcadh echo earlier responses to globalisation.

Drawing attention to these historical roots allows us to see the persistence of feminist analyses and critiques, and to observe certain strategies and responses being passed from one generation to the next (Ruggi, 2023). Changing patterns of language and discourse can elide such continuities, which can in turn be used to weaken opposition to contemporary oppressive regimes, removing us from our grounding in generational solidarities.

The articles presented in this edition of Dearcadh reflect this continuity of feminist concerns, from the experiences of migrant mothers to social norms that result in victim blaming, to new means of inflicting violence against women. They also offer ways of understanding and creating change that are fitted to the current and local context, from the adaptation of labour practices, to policies such as Universal Basic Income for carers, to the potentially transformative role of celebrity feminists. In drawing attention to these continuities we are also issuing a reminder: feminist scholarship and activism have been critical in understanding and managing emergencies and remain a critical and potent force in this present moment of polycrises.

The themes of globalisation, inequality and continuity are evident in the first article of this volume; Walsh's The Fruits of Labour. In her article about globalisation and gender relations in Chile, Walsh investigates how processes of globalisation reinforce, disrupt and/or reshape gender norms and relations, by analysing the situation of female employment within the Chilean context in the commercial agricultural industry. Her engagement with the gendered impacts of the global fruit supply chain recalls important feminist critiques of

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globalisation (e.g. Elson and Pearson 1984), including how the feminisation of care work leads to the systematic under-valuing of women's work (Folbre and England 1999). Walsh's discussion engages the contradictory trends of globalising forces, which may simultaneously have supported a disruption to restrictive Catholic gender norms in Chile; brought about greater earning and decision-making power for individual women (Bee, 2000); and provoked violent and patriarchal responses from men, potentially increasing the risk of gender-based violence. The dynamics of globalisation, as Walsh outlines, are far from fully understood, and far from spent: it remains crucial to understand them if we are to address the emergency of gender based violence.

Picking up on a newer trend in international discussions about inequality in the global economy, Moreno explores the relationship between care work/ social reproduction and Universal Basic Income (UBI). An innovative proposal to reorient the valuing of workers' time under capitalism, UBI is sometimes promoted as a way of overcoming some of the greatest pressures of the unsustainable neoliberal world system. Moreno's feminist engagement is of great importance: as she highlights, discussions of UBI do not always or necessarily consider the gendered impacts of such policy proposals, nor indeed their other intersectional impacts. Reviewing existing literature on the subject, she notes the potential for UBI to support more gender-neutral distribution of care; and to support single-parent families in particular, through a reorientation of the welfare system. Nonetheless, Moreno notes that UBI is a fundamentally depoliticising initiative which must engage with citizens to have success. In itself, UBI does not challenge the gender norms, classism or racism that underpin inequality; Moreno therefore concludes that change requires policy interventions alongside more profound structural change.

Public policy concerns are again taken up by Lorraine Hayman, in her article introducing the concept of cyber-located sexual violence (CLSV). Returning, as Dearcadh authors often do (Scriver, Ballantine and Chippendale 2023), to the ongoing emergency of gender-based violence, Hayman focuses on the terms used to describe, define and address violence against women (VAW). Hayman considers forms of VAW which are facilitated by technologies, and therefore constitute non-physical behaviours and harms. As she affirms in her research, the act of naming is essential to understanding and addressing the problem of violence (Kelly, 1988). Situating her research within conceptualisations of the continuum of violence (Kelly 1988; Vera Gray and Kelly 2020), Hayman acknowledges the intersectionality and diversity of women's experiences. Her analysis of a survey on unwanted negative, sexually-based online behaviours leads to her proposal of a new term, Cyber-located sexual violence (CLSV). Hayman suggests that the incorporation of CLSV into formal measurement and responses to sexual violence in Ireland might contribute to a broader change in how such violence is conceptualised, shifting from essentialised and binary definitions to ones more grounded in the words and experiences of women themselves.

Maintaining the focus on the emergency of gendered violence that confronts us, and the ways old patterns intersect with new technologies, Róisín Chippendale conducts an innovative analysis of texts related to the infamous 2018 Belfast rape trial. Chippendale's

enquiry draws on affect theory and the writings of political theorist Chantal Mouffe to explore the political potential of expressions of disgust in relation to sexual violence. She problematises the simplifications of #MeToo evangelism, which can make too much of the potential of social media activism to bring about real social change, and at worst, can tend towards a narrow individualistic and apolitical engagement with social issues (Kennedy, 2021). Chippendale's close analysis of tweets responding to the Belfast rape trial with expressions of disgust illustrates how affective engagements of disgust, contrary to some feminist arguments [Sullivan 2022, Nussbaum 2004], can indeed re-politicise the terms of discourse related to the crisis of sexual violence and hence provide momentum for practical action. This subtle argument advances understandings of political emotions as they relate to inequalities and resistances.

In her intersectional and feminist exploration of the experiences of migrant mothers in Japan during the Covid-19 pandemic, Abigail Connolly also teases out new crises with timeless dimensions. Her qualitative inquiry explores the institutional discrimination against women due to their role as primary unpaid caregivers to children with an intersectional lens. She highlights how migrant women are additionally disadvantaged, although this disadvantage is mediated by language, with English speakers privileged over others. An analysis of two Facebook groups, Connolly's research shows how social media was operationalised by migrant mothers during the Covid-19 emergency to find new information and overcome the limitations of Japanese government responses. Social media is presented here as a source of connection that can help overcome inequalities and barriers to inclusion; in contrast to its role in undergirding cyber-located sexual violence (Hayman, this issue). As with much that is new in our current moment, the underlying power dynamics inherit much from the past.

Shaping the social norms that influence policy and behaviour, is also the cultural sphere. In Keighron's analysis of celebrity feminism, focusing on the popular icon Miley Cyrus, she considers how feminist agents can move forward equality agendas through their art and activism. Interpreting five performances by Cyrus through a Queer theory approach, Keighron explores how these performances help (or hinder) the feminist stance in relation to gender and sexuality. She queries the extent to which Cyrus challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. Keighron's thematic analysis focuses on agency, visibility/representation and breaking societal norms thanks to data collected from Cyrus's performance. The article brings into question traditional ideas of femininitis and masculinities- understood as performative acts, while promoting gender fluidity and sexual liberation to create a more inclusive society. This article also highlights a critical concern for feminism – its reproduction across new generations. With the advent and growth of post-feminism and the challenge of familyist, anti-feminist, gender essentialist ideologies, feminist intervention is as critical as ever. For young women to engage with feminist ideas, often counter to those of their peers, feminist role models are necessary. A question remains however, about who counts as a 'good' feminist role model – but perhaps this too is a binary idea that Cyrus challenges.

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Conclusion

The five articles presented in this, our fifth volume of Dearcadh, draw attention to a range of emergencies in the contemporary world that are of concern for postgraduate feminist researchers. Ongoing concerns about the impacts of globalisation and neoliberalism necessitate a return to earlier case studies, as done by Walsh, and a consideration of how to challenge inequalities resulting from such structures, as Moreno does in her consideration of Universal Basic Income from a gendered lens. The ubiquitous issue of violence against women presents as an ever-present emergency. Hayman deepens understanding of new means of conducting violence against women and the changes a new method of perpetrating the same old violence might bring. Chippendale also engages with violence against women but interrogates the role of disgust in sexual violence cases – bringing us perhaps to new conclusions on its function in withdrawing from, or engaging with, the politics and structures of sexual violence against women. Finally, with Keighron's investigation of feminist celebrity, we may find hope for the emergence of new feminists and evolving forms of feminism. In the midst of what appears as a never-ending state of polycrises, feminist scholarship continues to provide critical interventions to understand, challenge, and provide solutions to emergencies.

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