ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Editorial

Stacey Scriver & Carol Ballantine
Centre for Global Women's Studies
School of Political Science and Sociology
National University of Ireland, Galway

Introducing *Dearcadh*: A tradition in feminist academics and publishing

Thirty years ago this year, the Centre for Women's Studies was established at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway).[1] Ireland, in 1990, was a very different place than today: the constitutional ban on abortion, then just 7 years old, was seemingly unshakeable; divorce was constitutionally prohibited and would remain so for another five years; and homosexuality was illegal. Yet change was imminent: Mary Robinson was elected Ireland's first female President in 1990, not only a woman but a feminist activist, and women's studies programmes were emerging across Ireland from 1990 onwards (Byrne, 1992), contributing to a sea-change in social attitudes towards women's rights and gender roles that have resulted in significant legislative amendments in recent years. An interdisciplinary, collaborative initiative, the Centre for Women's Studies at NUI Galway, formally became an academic discipline in 1991, through the provision of a variety of third level teaching programmes that built on pre-1990s teaching and activism on women and gender at NUI Galway. The Women's Studies Building was officially opened that year by Mary Robinson. Members of Women's Studies at NUI Galway continued to engage in political and social reform through the Centre, and operated a publishing house, perhaps best known for the journal *UCG Women's Studies Centre Review (1989-2004)* and, latterly, *Irish Feminist Review (2004-2007)* (Clancy, 2009). A key feature of Women's Studies was the diversity of members enabling Women's Studies to draw from across social sciences, humanities and arts for women and gender focused research and teaching. As co-founder/chair of the Centre, Anne Byrne, describes,

> *'a collective community of multi-disciplinary and activist scholars focussed on putting gender on the academic agenda for teaching and research was a truly transformative act. I can claim with some pride that we were among the first generation of Irish academic feminist scholars who were working in all of the higher education institutions to bring about change - inside and outside the university.'* (Anne Byrne, Personal communication, April 29, 2020).

Much has changed since then. The number of Women's Studies undergraduate programmes have contracted across much of Europe and North America, while new variations of old programmes, now focussed more broadly on gender and sexuality, and a wide range of gender-focused modules delivered through other disciplines, have also emerged (Marchbank, 2009; Dayton and Levenstein, 2012). At NUI

---

[1] The University was called University College Galway (UCG) between 1908 and 1997, whereupon it was renamed NUI Galway. In this article, for the sake of simplicity, we use 'NUI Galway' throughout.

Editorial

Galway, Women's Studies has similarly evolved: the discipline of Women's Studies, under its current guise as Global Women's Studies and soon to be renamed as Gender and Women's Studies, was relocated to the School of Political Science and Sociology in 2008. The range of academic programmes has also contracted to now focus on the MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights, while staff continue to deliver gender and women-focused modules across the School and University. The publishing house came to an end in 2007 and the *Irish Feminist Review* was retired.

Nevertheless, women's and gender studies is as relevant as ever. *Dearcadh: Graduate Journal of Gender, Globalisation and Rights* carries on the tradition of gender-focused academic publishing at NUI Galway. The articles in this volume reflect the importance of gender research, across disciplinary divides, that interrogates cultural, social and political inequalities and gender dynamics. The articles reflect developments within Feminist theory more broadly, recognising the intersecting inequalities that shape women's experiences in various spheres of life (Parris, Geoghegan) while also engaging with classic Feminist approaches, including radical (Ruf) and psychoanalytic feminism (O'Shea, Geoghegan, Parris).

This journal also represents new and diverse voices in an academic media – the seven authors, former students of the MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights, represent six different countries of origin, across four continents, and are all new to academic publishing. The journal thus creates space for voices and viewpoints from those who may otherwise find academic publishing spaces difficult to access. Indeed, 'Dearcadh' is a particularly apt title for the collection of articles in this volume: an Irish word depicting a point of view, a way of seeing or perspective, an attitude, or a standpoint.

We write this introduction in extraordinary times. Physically separated due to social distancing and a broad 'lock down' in Ireland resulting from the COVID 19 crisis, uncertain of the future, the impacts of gender as they intersect with race and class are as evident as ever. Increases in domestic violence, disproportionately affecting women (Taub, 2020), illness and deaths of frontline workers, also disproportionately women and particularly women of colour (Schnall, 2020), and the juggling of multiple caring and work roles within the home (Garijo, 2020) all pay heed to the gender inequalities that persist across the world. As this crisis evolves and more is learned about vulnerability to the virus and the impact of the measures taken, bringing a gender-lens to analysis will be of critical importance. This crisis, like others before it, acts as an acute reminder of the ongoing need for women's and gender studies to contribute to knowledge and solutions that account for difference and are just and equitable.

The demand for equality and the need to identify inequalities in overlooked spaces (social, cultural, technological) are over-riding themes in the works presented in this volume; written 'before' COVID 19, relevant 'during' this crisis, and with much to offer to understand the gender dynamics of what emerges 'after'. Authors, in most cases drawing from their MA research, have engaged with a range of contemporary gender issues, analysed through various feminist lenses, to identify the processes through which inequalities and patriarchal structures persist. The works account for a plethora of human, gendered, experiences, from labour and care-work practices (Sheridan, Mutariswa), to the racialized and gendered impacts of new forms of media with a focus on Instagram (O'Shea, Geoghegan, Parris), to the cultural reproduction of gendered inequality in Game of Thrones, one of the most popular television shows of the last decade (Ruf, Trejo Morales). The viewpoints they contribute provide important inputs to understanding the function and practice of gender inequality today and into the, rather uncertain, future.

The Cultural Reproduction of Patriarchy: A focus on 'Game of Thrones'

Television programmes as a form of cultural output both reflect social attitudes and produce them (Newcomb and Hirsch, 1983). The television programme *Game of Thrones* emerged as one of the most significant cultural products of the decade between 2009 and 2019, particularly in Western culture. Clothing and hair styles popularised through the programme have been reproduced in general society

and the television show has created numerous cultural reference points. Such impacts are not neutral; they are also implicated in the (re)production of gendered norms and have the potential of challenging or reinforcing patriarchal gender norms and structures.

Trejo Morales investigates the reproduction of femininity through the male gaze by focusing on non-gender-conforming characters, Brienne of Tarth and Arya Stark. Despite the inclusion of such characters, on the surface, challenging patriarchal gender norms, Trejo Morales instead finds that these characters act as a warning of the negative consequences of gender non-conformity. The author identifies that while such characters enjoy some liberties associated with masculinity due to their refusal to identify fully with the gender construction of femininity, such as increased personal freedoms compared to gender-conforming female characters, they are nevertheless subject to the discipline of the male gaze. Both characters are forced to choose between expressing their femininity (for instance to be in a romantic relationship) and wielding power, which is solely associated with their masculine attributes.

Ruf's article similarly identifies a punitive gender apparatus at work within *Game of Thrones*. While Trejo Morales focused analysis on gender-non-conforming characters, Ruf instead examined one of the strongest gender tropes – the Mother. Using the character Cersei as the unit of analysis, Ruf deploys radical feminist works by Rich (1976) and Oakley (1984) to examine the ideological function of motherhood within the television programme. Ruf's assessment of Cersei identifies complexity within the construction of motherhood, recognising that power may be granted to such female characters, but also demonstrating that such power comes with constraints. Where mothers do not meet the ideal of motherhood, they are subject to sanctions and punishments. Consequently, the character of Cersei, as a woman and mother, reinforces patriarchal constructions of good and bad mothers that are founded on gender norms and serve to promote male power as they constrain the possibilities of 'acceptable' women's behaviour.

Gender, Representation, Agency, and Gaze: Dis/Empowerment Online

The feminist analysis that three authors bring to bear on the uses of Instagram proves unexpectedly prescient in this time of lockdown, when so much social interaction has shifted to the digital space. Classic concerns of feminist thought, such as the male gaze (Mulvey, 197) and fat and body image (eg Orbach 1978), have taken on a new relevance in our digital – and more recently hyper-online – age. In particular, Mulvey's insights into the power and effects of the male gaze in mainstream Hollywood cinema inspired reflection across many separate domains examined by authors in this volume, including the tourist gaze (Urry 2011) which Geoghegan cites; the imperial gaze (hooks 1992) cited by Parris; and the girlfriend gaze (Winch 2013) cited by O'Shea. An emerging field of study, interpreting female representation in social media, thus draws the attention of three of our authors, from rather different perspectives.

In Parris' visual content analysis of the uses of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag on Instagram, the author celebrates the potential of the platform for the reclaiming of Black women's representation in the public sphere. Yet she notes the ongoing existence of a digital divide, rendering Instagram an available tool for empowerment only to those with ready access to internet-enabled devices. Parris' analysis demonstrates the ways in which some users appropriate the Instagram platform and subvert its normalisation of Western beauty standards. In this manner, Instagram is presented as a potential platform for social change.

For the individually motivated leisure travellers who form the subject of Geoghegan's research, Instagram is both a blessing and a curse. The platform enables the development of a like-minded and supportive community for women in new and potentially threatening locations; but it places the influential Instagrammer at the mercy of that community and its desire for content. Geoghegan describes, from interviews with four diverse female Instagrammer travellers, the ways in which they

bring an intersectional perspective to their travel and influencing through Instagram. Similar to the users of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, there is a sense of empowerment in appropriating the platform to actively reset the discourse related to minority women's leisure travel. Through deliberate acts such as photographing their own West African dress, or providing political context in their Instagram posts, Geoghegan's participants strive to engage in a literal mapping of the margins (Crenshaw, 1990).

The three articles demonstrate that while Instagram is ripe for visual analysis, the perspectives of its users are also important and revealing: both Geoghegan and O'Shea interviewed Instagrammers and revealed nuanced understandings of how the platform is positioned within contemporary capitalism. There is a telling contrast between the messages of empowerment found in Parris' visual analysis, juxtaposed against the harms of Instagram use described by O'Shea's research participants. The eight women interviewed for O'Shea's study on diet culture and Instagram expressed ambivalence about supposedly empowering concepts such as body positivity, and noted that the uses of Instagram for the sale of dieting products undermined their trust in the accounts they encountered there. She shows that diet culture is a staple of contemporary governmentality which long precedes the Instagram platform, but which is 'embedded into the very fabric of Instagram'.

O'Shea notes another divide, that found in the high cost of dieting products which exclude many women from participating in the diet culture promoted on Instagram. Indeed, ambiguity is a dominant theme of the research here on Instagram, with the potentialities of the platform often placed in direct contrast to the risks. Where social media is often conceived as the ultimate panopticon, is true agency or empowerment possible? Our authors engage with this question and come to very different conclusions.

Care and the Lifecourse: Gender Roles and Policy Gaps

Addressing the subject of care at different points in the life course, Sheridan and Mutariswa's articles share key concerns. Both authors make use of their own positionality in relation to their research topics: in Sheridan's case, of transition to post-caregiving in Ireland; in Mutariswa's, of work-life balance in the lives of professional NGO staff in Harare, Zimbabwe. From these positions, they each identify gaps in public policy, and provide new information to improve policy. In the Irish case, Sheridan describes what happens when an individual transitions out of eligibility for the official Carer's Allowance, outlining how the experience of care-giving over a number of years inflects the possibilities that come after. In the absence of support to engage in work or education while in receipt of the allowance, it becomes extremely difficult to establish an independent income even when eligibility got the allowance has ended, and ex-carers may subsequently struggle to access the state pension owing to their years outside of the contributory pension system. In Zimbabwe, Mutariswa finds that in the NGO sector, the demands of motherhood are recognised by employers only insofar as leave is permitted for birth and breastfeeding (up to one year of age). She outlines the challenges of staying in work when the requirements of home life are absent from either national or corporate policy. For the women interviewed by Mutariswa, this gap is addressed in the creation of a care chain (Hochschild 2000): poorer women working as maids in the households of NGO staff. This arrangement may resolve the overwhelming demands of domestic labour and paid work, but it fails to bring about any change in gender or class relations, a situation documented in other contexts (eg Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002), but not previously in Zimbabwe.

Gender and Women's Studies: Contributions towards an uncertain future

When the Centre for Women's Studies was founded at NUI Galway in 1990, critical concerns were the representation of women in historical, social, cultural, economic and political spaces, substantive equality, and freedom from violence. Gender-focused research and feminist theorising were key activities of the Centre and the Discipline. Despite the many changes to academic women's studies at NUI Galway in the intervening years, these issues remain among the key foci of the work of graduates of the MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights. Demands on women to conform to gender roles as women,

Editorial

mothers, wives and carers are identified and confronted in the works in this volume, be they presented in the form of cultural or ideological products as in Game of Thrones (Trejo Morales, Ruf), within the structures and policies for care-work allowance and pensions in Ireland (Sheridan), or within maternity policies in the NGO sector in Zimbabwe (Mutariswa). Articles interrogate the pressures to conform to representations of woman that are reinforced through new technologies, such as Instagram (Geoghegan, O'Shea, Parris). The works, however, also find reason for optimism: they identify that even within these technologies, policies and cultural products, there are spaces to challenge inequitable gender roles and norms and find new opportunities for justice and freedom.

These articles form the inaugural volume of *Dearcadh: Graduate Journal of Gender, Globalisation and Rights*. They represent the outstanding work of students of the MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights and exemplify the necessity and possibilities for continued engagement by graduates of women's and gender studies students in the academic sphere. While we currently confront an uncertain future and labour through personally, socially and economically challenging times, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, this volume is a hopeful one. Reinvigorating the publishing tradition of Women's Studies at NUI Galway and highlighting the capacity for important contributions to the field of knowledge by MA students, *Dearcadh* acts as a point from which to view and understand the reproduction of gender inequality, engage with academic debate through the production of feminist and gendered research and analysis, and contribute to the shaping of a more equitable future.

References:

Byrne, A. (1992) Academic Women's Studies in the Republic of Ireland. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 20:3/4, pp. 15-27.

Clancy, M. (2009) 'Historical Dossier - Ireland National Report: A Commentary on the Work and Scope of Women's Studies in Ireland' *in,* Waaldijk, B. and van der Tuin, E. (Eds.) *The Making of European Women's Studies.* ATHENA, Advanced Thematic Network in Activities in Women's Studies in Europe, Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Crenshaw, K. (1991) Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review,* 43(6), pp. 1241-1299.

Dayton, C.H. and Levensteing, L. (2012) The Big Tent of U.S. Women's and Gender History: A State of the Field. *The Journal of American History,* 99(3): pp. 793-817

Ehrenreich, B. and Hochschild, A.R. (2003) *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy.* New York: Metropolitan Books.

Garijo, B. (2020) COVID-19 highlights how caregiving fuels gender inequality. *World Economic Forum*, April 24. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid-19-highlights-how-caregiving-fuels-gender-inequality/

Hochschild, A. (2000). "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value." In *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, edited by A. Giddens and W. Hutton, 130–146. London: Jonathan Cape.

hooks, b., (1992) *Black Looks: race and representation.* Boston: South End Press.

Marchbank, J. (2009). "Ding, Dong, the Witch Is Dead, the Wicked Witch Is Dead": The Reported Demise of Women's Studies in the United Kingdom. *Feminist Studies, 35*(1): pp.194-203.

Mulvey, L., (1999) Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. In: L. Braudy & M. Cohen, eds. *Film Theory and Criticism Introductory.* New York: Oxford UP, pp. 833-44.

Newcomb, H.M and Hirsch, P.M. (1983). Television as a Cultural Forum: Implications for Research. *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 8(3): pp.45-55.

Oakley, A. (1974) *Woman's Work: The Housewife, Past and Present*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Orbach, S. (1978) *Fat is a feminist issue.* London: Hamlyn.

Rich, A. (1986) *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.* 2nd ed. New York City: W.W. Norton.

Taub, A. 2020. A New COVID-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide. *The New York Times*, April 14(6). Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html

Schnall, M. (2020) Putting a Gender Lens on COVID-19: Thought Leaders Weigh In. *Forbes*, April 17. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/marianneschnall/2020/04/17/putting-a-gender-lens-on-covid-19-thought-leaders-weigh-in/

Urry, J. (2011) *The Tourist Gaze 3.0.* Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Winch, A. (2013) *Girlfriends and postfeminism Sisterhood.* UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

About the editors:

Stacey Scriver, PhD, is a Lecturer in the School of Political Science and Sociology and Director of the MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights at NUI Galway. She is committed to feminist and gender-focused research and teaching. Her recent work has focussed on the Social and Economic Costs of Violence against Women and Girls.

Carol Ballantine completed her PhD in the Centre for Global Women's Studies in NUI Galway in April 2020. Her research explored narratives of violence in the lives of African migrant women in Ireland, and the impacts of stigma and shame. She continues to research, teach and write on the topics of gender, migration and violence in Ireland and internationally.