CFP: Women’s Spring: Feminism, Nationalism and Civil Disobedience

Upcoming conference organised by IBAR in partnership with: openDemocracy 50.50, the Cornelia Goethe Center (Goethe University, Frankfurt); International Development and Inclusive Innovation, Strategic Research Area (The Open University), De Gruyter Open

21-23 June 2018, University of Central Lancashire, Preston,

Keynote speakers (confirmed):

- **Dr Umut Erel**, International Development and Inclusive Innovation, Sociology Department and International Development and Inclusive Innovation (The Open University);
- **Prof. Dr. Helma Lutz**, the Cornelia Goethe Center at Goethe University, Frankfurt;
- **Prof. Ewa Mazierska**, University of Central Lancashire;
- **Prof. Toby Miller**, University of California, Riverside; Loughborough University London
- **Pragna Patel**, Southall Black Sisters;
- **Prof. Nira Yuval-Davis**, Research Centre on Migration, Refugees and Belonging (CMRB) at the University of East London.

In a recent interview for BBC Radio 3, Paul Gilroy, rather provocatively contended that nationalism is embedded a “fascistic” wish for “a magical identity that will somehow dissolve every little bit of otherness.” In the era that witnessed the success of the Brexit campaign, the election of Donald Trump, the rise in anti-immigrant resentment and religious fundamentalism, nationalism is more and more often associated with militant extremism that threatens the very existence of the secular and culturally diverse public sphere.

As Tamar Mayer has observed, nationalism is an exercise in internal hegemony that aims at dissolution of ethnic, religious and sexual differences, in which “the empowerment of one gender or one nation or one sexuality virtually always comes at the expense and disempowerment of another” (Mayer 1). Women represent a notable point of similarity and difference vis-a-vis ethnic, religious or sexual others. Like minorities, women are often marginalised in the public sphere; unlike them, due to their sheer numbers, women can have a considerable political leverage. Often glorified for their roles of biological reproducers of a nation and signifiers of national/ethnic/religious singularity, women, more often than not, constitute a “silent majority,” to misquote Richard Nixon. Occasionally, however, women stand up *en masse* not only to attempts to limit their agency but also to nationalist excesses. Ukrainian Femen, the Black Lives Matter movement spearheaded by black women, Argentinian 2016 #NiUnaMenos protest against femicides, the Women’s March on Washington against Trump’s populism, and Polish feminist “black” marches against patriarchal and Catholic conservatism, are just a few examples of women showing tremendous courage and determination in defending “the culture of Human Rights” (Pramod Nayar) and “conviviality” (Paul Gilroy). With these movements, women have aroused hope of creating what Nancy Fraser called multiple “subaltern counterpublics” – that is discursive arenas which develop in opposition to the official (un?)public sphere. These arenas are bases for revolutionary politics that defies the exclusions of the national body politic and promotes
the ideal of equal civic participation. Roger Sue called these alternative feminist social hubs “a counter society” (*La Contresociété* 2016). Alain Tourain saw in their emergence a transformative political force with far-reaching consequences for the neo-liberal world (*Le monde des femmes* 2006).

The aim of this conference is to explore the ways in which female activists and artists responded the resurgence of the far-right nationalism and the twin evil of religious fundamentalism. We want to take a closer look at grassroots emancipatory movements, women-led voluntary associations, as well as cultural texts by women – performances, installations, artworks, films and novels – in which authors take a stance against religious bigotry, xenophobia, homophobia, racism and misogyny. But we also invite contributions that focus on women’s endorsement of and participation in ultra-conservative national and orthodox religious campaigns. More specifically, the conference will provide an opportunity to consider:

- feminist discourses and activism that shed light on current threats to human rights, reproductive rights, rights of freedom of movement and speech, LGBTQ rights;
- analyses/case studies on social/political movements initiated and/or run by women activists, e.g. Black Lives Matter;
- militant or transgressive feminisms as conflictual and antagonistic counterpublics; their potential to revitalise the civil society and its institutions (feminist discourses, representations and activism that dispute anti-immigrant, fundamentalist, racist, sexist and homophobic abuse to promote solidarity, secularism, empathy and resistance),
- stories, real and fictional, about women’s struggles against the resurgence of nationalism, populism and religious fundamentalism;
- social media as parallel counterpublics for feminist activism and the struggle for preservation and expansion of human rights;
- political discourses and cultural texts by women that challenge “androcentric nationalism” (Elleke Boehmer 7) and imagine different scenarios for female agency in the public sphere;
- political discourses and cultural texts by women that endorse nationalism and women’s activism on behalf of right-wing and rigidly doctrinal campaigning platforms.

We are aware of the fact the Arab Spring to which the title of this conference alludes ended in a disappointing disaster. Therefore, we also welcome submissions that imaginatively tackle

- dystopian visions of a world which rejects women’s subjectivity and agency,
- failure of feminist movements to live up to expectations (expressed among others by Alain Touraine after the publications of *Le monde des femmes*).

Please send your 250-word abstracts for 20-minute papers or article proposals and 100-word bio notes to: ipenier@uclan.ac.uk by 01 April 2018. Selected papers will be published as a special issue in *Open Cultural Studies* [https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/culture](https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/culture).

References:


Gilroy, Paul. Interview by Philip Dodd in BBC Radio 3, Free Thinking <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08chbpf>
