

Feminist Library 35th Birthday Benefit

On 19th February 2011, London's feminist community came out in force to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Feminist Library and 35 years of feminist archiving and activism. Over 400 people attended the fundraising event at the Round Chapel in Hackney, East London, and it was a truly amazing, enjoyable and inspirational night. The event was compered by Julie McNamara, with Women Sing East and Laka D, Viv Albertine, Berta's Troupe, Lorraine Jordan, Martha and Eve, Girl Germs and Trash Kit providing outstanding entertainment. Groups such as Million Women Rise, Lambeth Women's Project, Women's History Month, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, London Profeminist Men's Group, Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development, Newham Bookstore and Feminism in London had stalls, lots of lovely donated cakes were consumed, and lots of lovely feminist prizes were won in the raffle. The event raised almost £1500, so big thanks to everyone who came.

The Feminist Library management group would like to thank all those who helped make the event a success, and in particular all the women who volunteered their time and skills in the run up to the event and on the night itself. Big thanks is also due to Debbie Dickinson, without whose expertise, time and commitment, the event would not have been possible. Here's to another 35 years of the Feminist Library.



The amazing Trash Kit finishing the night off.



Gail Chester and compere Julie MacNamara,

Manifesta for the next 35 years.....

'There is no door-to-door education that takes feminist thinking out of elite colleges and off the history page to tell folks, especially women, what it's all about, how and where they can join, learn and transform their lives.' bell hooks.

However, since 1975, there has been the Feminist Library, which was set up by a group of women concerned about preserving the writings and the knowledge of the Women's Liberation Movement. The library was set up during the height of the Second Wave, at a time when there was a clear political imperative to provide a space for women to organise, agitate, network and share ideas in a

clearly feminist space. That political imperative remains to this day.

Despite the dominant media message that there is no need for autonomous radical feminist spaces, we know differently. Although feminism has achieved much, there is still much to fight for. The Feminist Library can and will provide that necessary space.

The library is controlled by the people who use it. We intend to support today's feminist movement by providing a space to meet, research and organise --not only to read the words of women who have gone before, who will always have the power to inspire us, but to continue collecting the output of today's radical feminists. The library's continued existence is indicative of a strong contemporary movement, a movement proud of its history, which recognises the commitment, passion and diversity of us all, and the power of our words to inspire action and bring true and lasting social change. The Feminist Library wants to be a force for good, a living breathing space with a growing collection of work that reflects the diversity of the movement we serve. We want feminists to support the library, and use it, thereby contributing to a movement as determined as ever to bring about total liberation from the forces of oppression, exploitation and hierarchy. We want feminists to send us their work so that ideas can be shared freely with the whole movement; and to use our space. We need feminists to rally behind the library and actively support us, so that together we can ensure that the Feminist Library continues to thrive, and so preserve a vibrant network of feminist publishing and activism, long into the future.

Calling all feminist writers and readers!

The 'Writers Space' at the Feminist Library is for feminist writers, poets, students and all others who would like to come and write in company of like minded people and be inspired by the feminist books surrounding us. It will run the first Saturday of each month between 1.30-5pm. The Feminist fiction and poetry reading group shall also be running between 4pm – 5pm on the same day.

If you have a favourite book or poem that you would like to share something about, and/or an idea for a novel or poetry for a group read, please bring it with you. Please come to write, come to attend the reading group, or both!

For more info email feministwritersspace@yahoo.co.uk

Recently received titles

Kira Cochrane (ed), *Women of the Revolution: Forty Years of Feminism*. Guardian Books, London: 2010

Catherine Eschle & Bice Maiguashca, *Making Feminist Sense of the Global Justice Movement*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Maryland: 2011

Hecate: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation, "Focus on Mothering", 36. 1 & 2, Queensland, Australia: 2010

Diana Souhami, *Edith Cavell*. Quercus, London: 2010

Anthony Quinn, *Half of the Human Race*. Jonathan Cape, London: 2011 (Hardback).

Book Reviews

WE HAD IT SO GOOD by Linda Grant (Virago)

Reviewed by Zoë Fairbairns, zoe@zoefairbairns.co.uk

It's open season on baby boomers. Born in the aftermath of World War Two, we are now in our 60s, living it up – allegedly - on our huge pensions, clogging up the transport system with our Freedom Passes and steering clear of bookshops for fear that someone will have published yet another new volume with a title like *The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Took Their Children's Future*, or *What Did The Baby Boomers Ever Do For Us?*

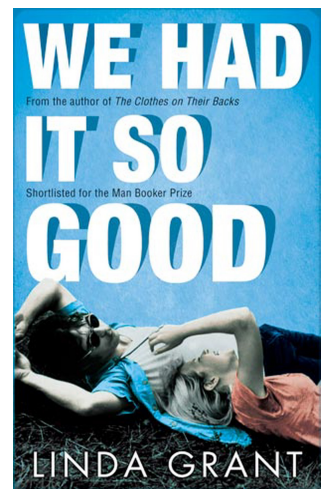
So when I heard that Booker-shortlisted novelist Linda Grant had written a novel about university students of the late 1960s, and what happened to them afterwards, I sought it out. Perhaps Grant (born 1951) was going to polish up our image.

But the baby-boomer characters in *We Had It So Good* (Virago) are a lacklustre bunch. They include Stephen, a young Californian who arrives in Oxford in 1968 on a Rhodes scholarship, gets sent down for vandalising a library book, and marries fellow-student Andrea to avoid being sent home and drafted. Andrea's friend Grace is a poor little rich girl ("one of the ways my father went on controlling me was by putting money into my bank account"); another friend is a man called Ivan who sets up an austere anarchist squat in Islington, but escapes its discomforts to pop home to Mum and Dad's place for proper food and a hot bath.

They are all recognizable types from that era, as would be some genuine idealists, some real poverty, some people who didn't go to Oxford, and some serious political thought and effective activism, particularly in the realm of sexual politics. But women's liberation, gay rights, the big industrial conflicts of the 70s and 80s, and solidarity with the put-upon peoples of Chile, southern Africa, Vietnam and Northern Ireland, are only nodded at on the pages of *We Had It So Good*. Stephen and Andrea evolve from anarchist squatters to Islington homeowners, he working as a BBC producer, she as a psychotherapist. Either or both of these career moves could have provided insights into what happens when idealists grow old, but because they are reported on rather than shown or examined, it's hard to avoid a yawn at the sheer obviousness of it all.

The discomforts of reading *We Had It So Good* come not just from its content but also from its style. Tenses change arbitrarily, as does the point of view. A non-participating narrator tosses in remarks such as "Stephen Newman was likeable" (to whom is not clear), and clairvoyant commentary about what will one day appear on Google (once it has been invented), and what Stephen and Andrea's children (once they have been conceived and borne, and have learned to talk) will say about their parents' hippie past. Important "facts" about Stephen's father's background, presented from an apparently reliable authorial point of view, turn out to be lies.

Perhaps I deserved to be disappointed with *We Had It So Good*. I ought to have known that it's not the job of novelists to make readers feel good about themselves. There are moments which sparkle: I enjoyed reading about Stephen's secret addiction to imported American candy bars, and the careers that his and Andrea's children follow: son Max becomes a magician, daughter Marianne a war photographer. Meanwhile, Stephen and ageing pal Ivan (soon to set off for a sun-soaked retirement on the Caribbean) bemoan the fact that their generation is so much less interesting and heroic than either the one that went before or the one that came after. And they're right, they are less interesting, but only because that is how Linda Grant has chosen to portray them.



Women, Higher Education and the Cuts.

On Wednesday 26th of May over 30 feminists came to a meeting entitled "Women, Higher Education and the Cuts" at the Feminist Library. The meeting was called by the Feminist Library management group because of concerns we share over the disproportionate effect the cuts will have on women students, academics and support staff. The meeting was well attended, with representatives from many groups, such as Women Against the Cuts, Solidarity Federation, Arts Against the Cuts, UK UnCut, Feminist Fightback, the Women's Library, Women's Budget Group, as well as female student activists, female lecturers and support staff, and women from the main education trade

and student unions. Speakers told of the current situation for women in universities, about campaigns and ways of organising against the cuts, and was followed by a very interesting discussion on the roles of unions in this struggle, practical ways forward and the necessity of feminist perspectives being central to the struggle against the cuts.

We are hoping to facilitate further discussions at the Feminist Library around the cuts, their impact on women and ways that we can fight them. Do please get in touch if you would be interested in contributing to these meetings.

SLUTWALK London will take place on June 11, meeting 1pm at Trafalgar Square. The march, which originated in Canada, has spread around the world and has provoked much debate among feminists. In the interest of healthy debate, Sophie Jones, of the Feminist Library, outlines some of the contentious issues and arguments that SLUTWALK has provoked.

SlutWalk: Some aspects of the debate

SlutWalk London will take place on 11 June 2011. The London march occurs just months after the first SlutWalk took place in Toronto in response to a local police officer's claim that 'women should avoid dressing like sluts' if they want to minimise the chance of being raped. A number of solidarity marches in North America inspired action further afield, with the Toronto website listing 'Satellite SlutWalks' in countries including Holland, Scotland, Wales, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and England. The movement has attracted a rare degree of mainstream press coverage and provoked much debate within the feminist movement. What follows is by no means an exhaustive summary of the conversation, the nuances of which are continually proliferating. Rather, it is an attempt to draw out a few strands of the debate in the hope of inspiring further discussion. The Feminist Library has no collective position on SlutWalk and this article reflects the views of its individual author alone.

Do we want to use the word 'slut'? Laura Woodhouse voices her doubts on The F-Word: 'I have no interest whatsoever in reclaiming or reinventing a word that is used to attack and label women, let alone use it in reference to myself.' Writing in the Guardian, Gail Dines and Wendy J Murphy condemn the reclamation of 'slut' even while they use the term themselves, somewhat hypocritically attacking the SlutWalk organisers for 'promoting sluttishness'. Do these marches have to be about reclaiming the word 'slut'? Can they simply be a protest against the language and practice of victim blaming? http://www.thefword.org.uk/blog/2011/04/slutwalk_london

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/may/08/slutwalk-not-sexual-liberation>

Has SlutWalk learned the lessons of Riot Grrl? Ray Filar reminds us in the Guardian that when Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna performed with the word 'slut' scrawled across her stomach, her message was "by reclaiming the derogatory terms that you use to silence my sexual expression, I dilute your power". But, as Filar points out, riot grrl was eventually commodified as girl power in the form of the Spice Girls. The riot grrls tried to enforce a media blackout when their message was misinterpreted, which was a tough task even before the internet swallowed everyone. How can SlutWalk ensure its message isn't diluted by the mainstream media into just another saleable image of young women in revealing clothing? <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/may/09/slutwalk-feminist-activism>

Does SlutWalk reflect white privilege? A number of North American critics have raised concerns about SlutWalk and race. As this post from the selftravels2010 Live Journal points out, the boundary between 'good women' and 'bad women' is raced and classed: 'Some middle-class white women can play with this boundary because they may have the ability to re-enter white middle-class respectability as soon as they change their clothes. This is not true for most women. The stain of 'slut' sticks on some bodies more than others.' How does this issue play out in the UK, where former Home Secretary Jack Straw recently used the sexual abuse of white girls to reinforce racist stereotypes about Pakistani men? <http://selftravels2010.livejournal.com/2497.html> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/uk-england-derbyshire-12141603>

Is SlutWalk just Feminism™? Some women think SlutWalk has a lot in common with what Nina Power calls Feminism™ - the capitalist appropriation of feminist language in order to sell chocolate, vibrators, burlesque dancing classes, low self-esteem, you name it. Harsha Walia writes on rabble.ca: 'Slutwalk - in its slick branding - runs the risk of facilitating the dominant discourse of "liberated" women as only those women wearing mini-skirts and high heels in/on their way to professional jobs.' Is this a valid critique, or does it embed feminist resistance within a capitalist system of meaning in which every gesture is commodified by default?

<http://rabble.ca/news/2011/05/slutwalk-march-or-not-march>

An energetic wave of feminist activism against rape, victim-blaming and police sexism is happening, and getting a lot of media attention. This has to be a good thing – right?

More book reviews

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF STELLA BROWNE by Lesley A. Hall (I B Tauris, 2011).

Reviewed by Fran Bigman

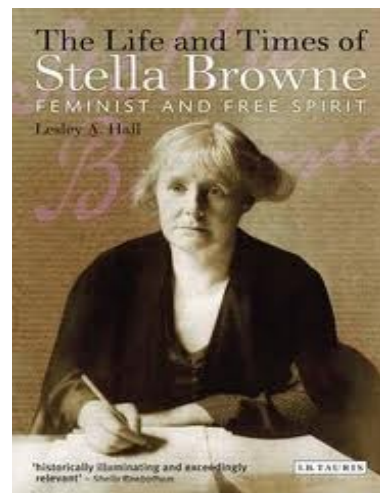
In 1938, at a time when activists for legal abortion were middle-class reformers who based their argument on the alarming numbers of working-class mothers harmed or killed by illegal abortions, Frances Worsely Stella Browne stood up before a parliamentary committee on abortion and assured it, 'I have...the knowledge in my own person that, if abortion were necessarily fatal or injurious, I should not now be here before you.' Stella's admission that she, an unmarried, childless, educated middle-class woman, had had an abortion—three, in fact—at a time when the topic was barely discussed was in keeping with a life so devoted to massive change that even her own colleagues thought her radical.

In this impeccably researched biography, enriched by its sympathy for its subject, Wellcome Library archivist Lesley A. Hall illuminates a long-neglected figure and her determined campaigns for a range of issues—the vote for women, birth control, divorce reform, socialism, pacifism, and a more enlightened attitude toward sexuality among them—while establishing the importance of her work to the pro-choice cause in the UK. Hall also suggests ways in which Stella's own life, as difficult as it is to reconstruct, may have helped shape her thought; her commitment to free love and her own experiences influenced her opinions on human sexual diversity as well as her translations of sexological works, lectures, and published work.

Born in Canada in 1880, Stella most likely had personal experience of abortion by 1915, and in 1922 she made what is likely the first argument on a public platform in Britain for legalization. This was at a time when birth control activists like Marie Stopes were distancing themselves from abortion, and even talking about contraception could get health workers fired and publishers tried for obscenity. Stella was a lone voice; said colleague Dora Russell of the 1920s, 'We were trying to get birth control on the way and we didn't want a disturbance to our work.'

Even when Stella's colleagues, including Dora Russell, joined her to form the Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) in 1936, Stella's belief that a woman had an 'absolute right to decide whether or not she would bear a child' kept her on the radical fringe. While most ALRA activists employed the more pragmatic argument that the abortion ban was 'a law for the rich' that led to the death and ill health of overburdened, married, working-class mothers, Stella argued in her contribution to the 1935 book *Abortion* for 'the (as yet still rather unpopular) assumption that women are really human beings, and that freedom of choice and deliberate intention are necessary for them in their sexual relations and their maternity' and that some women were 'not primarily maternal.' In a 1936 speech, she argued that the 'ban on abortion' was 'a sexual taboo...a survival of the veiled face, of the barred window and the locked door, of burning, branding, mutilation and stoning; of all the pain and fear inflicted ever since the grip of ownership and superstition came down on women.'

Stella did not live to see the change to abortion law in 1967—she died 12 years before—and would have no doubt been dismayed at the law's failure to ensure a woman's absolute right to abortion, but her activism certainly helped make change of any kind possible. In a chronology of the movement, a younger ALRA member had 'Stella Campaigns Alone' as the only entry between the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act (the basis for the illegality of abortion in England and Wales) and the foundation of the ALRA. At a time when anti-abortion campaigners like Nadine Dorries are attempting to roll back reproductive rights, claiming that 'a woman seeking an abortion in this country is the victim of a well-organised industry,' it is all the more important for the pro-choice movement to recognize the radical contributions of Stella Browne and celebrate the legacy of her work on behalf of an woman's absolute right—let alone competence—to choose for herself.



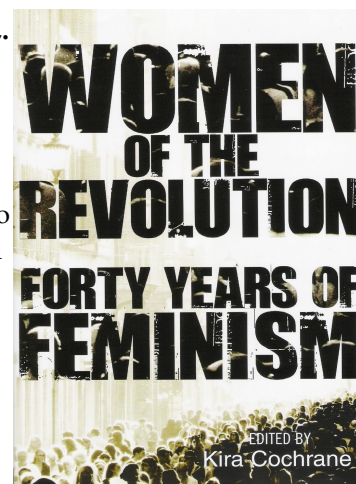
WOMEN OF THE REVOLUTION: FORTY YEARS OF FEMINISM, Kira Cochrane (ed),

Guardian Books, London: 2010

Reviewed by Becky Aizen

In 1970 the first conference of the National Women's Liberation Movement was held in Oxford. Forty years later, many of the ideas promoted at the meeting have been absorbed into the mainstream, while other demands, sadly, have yet to be met. In the meantime, debates on rape, abortion, motherhood, war, pornography, gender roles, race, discrimination, and equal pay have marked a movement whose history has been richly and vividly portrayed in Kira Cochrane's vast, far-reaching anthology *Women of the Revolution: Forty Years of Feminism*, sourced from the Guardian archive.

From Mary Stott's 1971 article on the Women's Liberation movement's recognition of their treatment as "the second sex" to Homa Khaleeli's 2010 interview with Nawal El Saadawi, the history of feminist thought and activity has been faithfully represented in the Guardian's



pages. We are treated to provocative illustrations of public figures - Mary Stott on Margaret Thatcher and Beatrix Campbell on Princess Diana - and interviews with Camille Paglia, Oprah Winfrey, Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison, alongside leading figures of the movement – Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Sheila Rowbotham, and Susan Brownmiller. Local concerns are equally reflected. There are pieces on the Southall Black Sisters' campaign in defence of women accused of killing violent men, a visit to the Spare Rib office, and, particularly poignant, Polly Toynbee's 1971 account of the first Reclaiming the Night, where her questioning of fellow Guardian staffers about their experiences of abuse revealed just how common and unchallenged harassment was only decades ago in the UK. Chinyelu Onwurah's 1985 piece on "the double struggle" faced by black women and disunity in the movement recalls an obstacle to the notion of sisterhood, the repercussions of which are still felt today.

The articles are accessible and often entertaining. Of note is Andrea Dworkin's "modest proposal" in her piece about the Monica Lewinsky scandal which she acknowledged "will probably bring the FBI to my door. But I think that Hillary should shoot Bill and then President Gore should pardon her"! There is righteous anger and acerbic wit throughout the anthology, igniting or reigniting in the reader a passion for feminism and should, for this reason alone, be on every school syllabus.

From bell hooks to Beth Ditto, the period reflected in *Women of the Revolution* mirrors the timeline of the bulk of the library's collection – from the Second Wave until the present day - and as such will be a useful tool for researchers here, providing a general overview of a rich and fascinating period of feminist history.

The Feminist Library needs you

Help us to boost the collections team.

Are you a library/archives student looking for experience, or a part-time or retired librarian who could use your skills to help with lots of exciting projects?

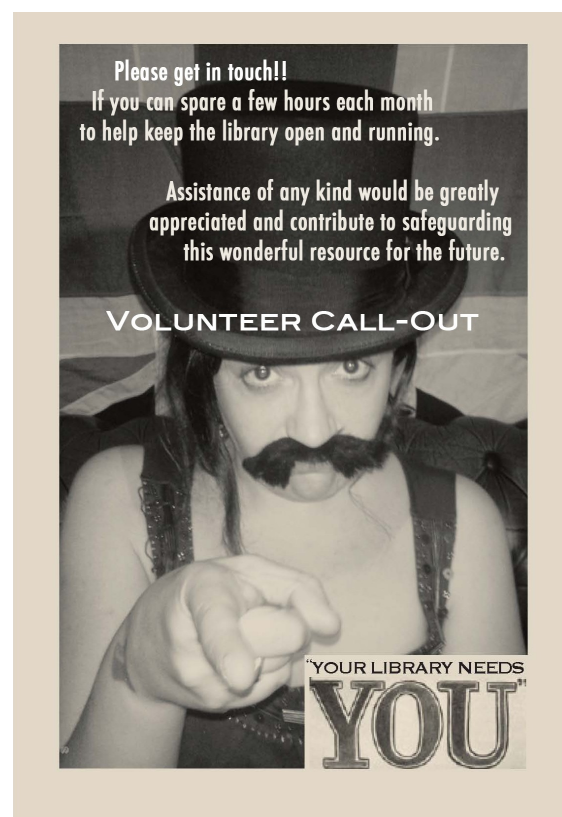
The Feminist Library has survived for most of its 35 years due to committed volunteers. We house an amazing collection of second wave material which we want to preserve, while continuing to collect contemporary material, as part of our activist standing in today's feminist community.

We need help with completing our online catalogue, and with sorting duplicates and donations, including a recent large bequest from a leading academic in the gender and education field.

We are particularly looking for people with experience of the following, but all levels of interest are most welcome:

- Classification schemes and cataloguing
- Archive experience
- Knowledge of secondhand/rare books
- Stock management
- IT website/blog archiving skills

Please contact us at collections@feministlibrary.co.uk with a brief outline of your experience and interest.



THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MUSIC ARCHIVE - Feminist music-making from the 1970s and 80s

An exciting new online resource has recently been launched: the Women's Liberation Movement Music Archive, at <http://womensliberationmusicarchive.wordpress.com>. This project documents the bands, musicians and musical projects that were part of, or influenced by, the great burgeoning of cultural creativity generated by the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) of the 1970s and 80s.

Concerned that this part of women's history is at risk of being lost, Archive Co-ordinators Dr Deborah Withers and Frankie Green believe the achievements of these music-makers should be mapped and celebrated. This work-in-progress collection comprises testimonies and interviews, discographies, gigographies and memorabilia including photographs, videos, recordings, flyers, press clippings and posters, plus links to ongoing women's music-making and feminist activism. The project is an independent, voluntary and (as yet) unfunded venture. Funding possibilities and a safe eventual home for the physical archive are being investigated.

All women who were involved in women's music – as solo artists, in bands, as DJs, MCs, in distribution networks, recording studios, photographers, journalists, events organisers, etc – are invited to contact and contribute to the project.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT wlmusicarchive@gmail.com

Listings

26 May 2011 onwards - Autres Mer (other seas)

The Women's Library
25 Old Castle Street
London, E1 7NT.

French-born, London-based artist Françoise Dupré makes work that celebrates women's creativity, and re-contextualises knitting and stitching activities traditionally associated with the domestic space. This exhibition brings together a series of her installations that use many craft forms and a wide range of everyday, disposable objects and materials including yarn, wire and plastic bottle tops. For more information visit londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary, email moreinfo@thewomenslibrary.ac.uk or ring 020 7320 7777

8 June 2011, 7pm: Celebrating the 200th Anniversary of the Luddite Uprisings: Technology Politics Then and Now

Feminist Library meeting room, 5a Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7XW

What can the Luddites teach us about the ongoing use of technology to replace workers' jobs, as well as issues like GM food, nuclear power, reproductive technology and surveillance? Can we escape the myth that technology always brings progress? On the anniversary of the first action against a GM crop site in Britain, come and discuss the issues with speakers from the Luddites200 Organising Forum, Stop GM, a trade union activist, and the Stop Nuclear Network. PLUS! Luddite entertainment and CAKE.

For more information visit www.luddites200.org.uk or email luddites200@yahoo.co.uk

7, 16, 28 June 2011: Fundraising training for women's organisations

Women's Resource Centre
33-41 Dallington St
London, EC1V 0BB

Free training open to all women's organisations in London, to book a place or for further information please visit www.wrc.org.uk/training or contact Samantha at development@wrc.org.uk or alternatively call 0207 3243031

Wednesday 15 June 2-4 pm – ICA/n.paradoxa : Feminist Art Seminars - Genealogies or cartographies of feminist art , Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London SW1Y 5AH

Feminist art practices have a 40 year history. How we speak about this history will define how we understand these practices and feminisms' contributions to art. What frameworks do we routinely use to describe the multiplicity of strategies, the shifts in emphasis over time, the variety of art forms and the global dimensions of this history and how do these constrain or liberate how we think about feminisms today? This seminar will look at some key examples of these frameworks, as well as into new critiques of the glosses/citation practices feminists themselves have used to describe progress, loss and return in the narratives of feminism. Tickets for these events are £5 and can be booked online at www.ica.org.uk or through the ICA Box Office +44 (0)20 7930 3647

22 June 2011: A Conducive Context? Misogyny, inequality, violence

London South Bank University

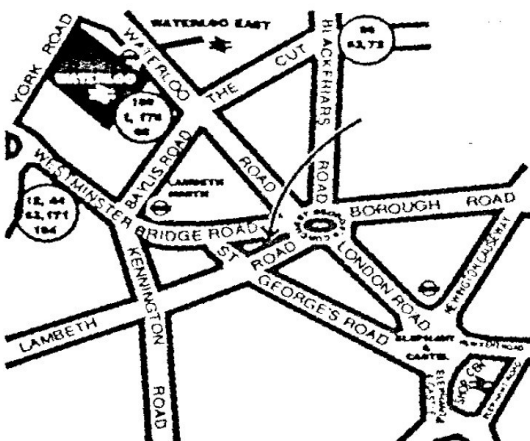
Conference exploring relationships between violence against women and the broader cultural, social and economic context. Opened by author and journalist Joan Smith reflecting on cultural misogyny twenty years after her feminist classic 'Misogynies' was first published, the conference will ask: How have things changed? What are the challenges that activists, academics, policy makers and service providers face, and where do we go next? Organised jointly by London Feminist Network and London South Bank University.

For further information, programme and booking go to www.lsbu.ac.uk/business/training.shtml#ConduciveContext
Sliding scale, low rates for students and activists.

11- 14 August 2011 - Women in Tune

Women-only music festival in lovely Lampeter, Wales.

For tickets and more information visit www.womenintune.co.uk, email witinfo@womenintune.co.uk or ring 07778142643



The Feminist Library , 5a Westminster Bridge Rd, London SE1 7XW.
Phone 020 7261 08799, email admin@feministlibrary.co.uk or visit www.feministlibrary.co.uk.

Opening hours for June and July

Tuesdays 1:30-9pm, Wednesdays 6-9pm, Fridays 10:30-6pm, first and last Saturdays of the month 1:30-5pm. Opening hours are subject to change so do please check our website before visiting.

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Contributors: Una Byrne, Sophie Jones, Becky Aizen, Serena Sardi, Gail Chester, Fran Bigman and Zoe Fairbairns. Photos Eva Megias.