



## **Gender in Catastrophic Times**

A symposium from *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*

September 2021

*Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* is produced on unceded Aboriginal land. The Editorial Collective acknowledges Aboriginal sovereignty of this land, and pay our respects to Elders, past, present, and emerging. This always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

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The 2020s have thus far been defined by catastrophe. The decade began in the midst of widespread environmental devastation, with bushfires across Australia choking entire cities until whole towns fled the flames, followed by fires in the Amazon and across the west coast of the United States as well. 2020 has since been designated one of the hottest years on record. Political crises have been rampant, too. The world has witnessed the continuing blight of white supremacy, epitomised by the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police officers, which fuelled the global Black Lives Matter movement. Australia is beset with the ongoing damage of colonisation, such as the over 400 Indigenous deaths in custody since the 1991 Royal Commission in Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Even 2021 began in political turmoil, with the world watching as the U.S. Capitol building was stormed by right-wing extremists. The beginnings of this decade have been characterized by catastrophe in multiple ways, even before we consider the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that has caused inconceivable loss of life world-wide and exposed many deep-seated social inequalities.

In this symposium, we turn to past instances of difficult times to understand how societies have responded to and survived catastrophe. We specifically seek to understand gender in catastrophic times: how is gender mediated *through* and *by* catastrophe? How has gender contributed to or even caused catastrophe? And how have people reconsidered or reframed gender and gender norms in light of catastrophe? We seek to understand this not for a cynical recirculation of trauma, but in the hopes of searching for a means of emerging from the current disasters through which we are living.

With many thanks from the *Lilith* Editorial Collective:

Dr. Alana Piper

Dr. Brydie Kosmina

Rachel Caines

Lauren Samuelsson

Alex Ciaffaglione

Michelle Staff

Dr. Kate Davison

**All times in the programme are in Australian Central Standard Time (ACST)**

**Day 1 – Thursday 23 September 2021**

**9am – Acknowledgement of country & welcome**

**9.15am – Keynote: Associate Professor Paula Michaels** - “Gender, Power, and Ordinary Violence in Twentieth-Century Obstetrics”

**10.15am – Break**

**10.30am – Feminist activism & historical representation**

Jacquelyn Baker – ‘Was there any activism?’: Finding the splinters of the women’s liberation movement in Melbourne, 1976–1979

Brydie Kosmina –The Rhetoric of Catastrophic Hope and the Witch in 1970s’ Feminist Manifestos

Tess Watterson – Penny’s Path: ‘More than a game, more than history, the magic is real’

**12pm – Lunch break**

**1pm – Poverty, benevolence, and economic crisis**

Anne Casey – ‘[A] miserably constructed shelter’: The Great Irish Famine and girls of the Newcastle Industrial School (NSW)

Karen Filewood – ‘Worthy’ Women: Power, paternalism and process of the National Shipwreck Society of NSW

Joshua Black – “Unemployed Breadwinners” and “Working Mums”: Transformations in Gender and Work During the 1990s Recession in Australia

**2.30pm – Gender, femininity, and the two world wars**

Rachel Caines – ‘Will you go or must I?’ Gender norms in Anglophone First World War propaganda

Lauren Samuelsson – ‘...every cook to do her duty’: the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, femininity, and food in the Second World War

**3.30pm – Break**

**4pm – Peace and anti-nuclear activism**

Michelle Staff – ‘Can we women help the world through this crisis?’: Feminist internationalism during the interwar years

Rose Debenham – ‘Mothers, Daughters, Activists: Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp and the Women’s Anti-Nuclear Movement in 1980s Britain

Jessica Urwin – Irati Wanti (The Poison, Leave It): Gendered and Indigenous responses to nuclear catastrophe in South Australia

**5.30pm – End of day 1**

**Day 2 – Friday 24 September 2021**

**9.30am – Keynote: Professor Sandy O’Sullivan** - “No Cession: rendering the colonial project of gender”

**10.30am – Break**

**10.45am – Gender and marital relations**

Sarah Ailwood – Jane Austen: Rewriting Gender in Catastrophic Times

Marie Cayce – Unfit for Service? Questioning the New Zealand Army Nursing Service’s 1917 Marriage Bar

Emma Carson – Separation, Letters, and Negotiating Gender in World War II

**12.15pm – Lunch break**

**1.15pm – Environmental catastrophe**

Rebecca Ream – Staying with the trouble of catastrophe: A feminist response from Shelley's monster

Rachel Loney-Howes – 'I will come back, but we're creating something completely different': Rebuilding the response to violence against women post Hurricane Katrina

**2.45pm – Global crises**

Celia Roberts, Mary Lou Rasmussen, Rebecca Williamson, Louisa Allen – Reproducing in the Pyrocene: Gender, fire and babies

Petra Brown and Tamara Browne – Relational autonomy and the vulnerabilities of being a woman in a global pandemic

**3.45pm – Break**

**4pm – Gender & militancy**

Jessica McIvor – Neurotic Girls and Bloodthirsty *Rojas*: Negotiating Gendered Militancy in the Aftermath of War

Francesca Baldwin – A Soldier and a Woman: (Re)Negotiating Gender in Female Combatant Narratives of Civil Conflict in Ethiopia, 1974–1991

**5pm – End of day 2**

## Keynotes

**Associate Professor Paula Michaels**, Monash University

*Gender, Power, and Ordinary Violence in Twentieth-Century Obstetrics*

This paper asks us to question the categories of 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary', 'triumph' and 'catastrophe'. I take as a case study the use of violence and coercion in a context that is at once both ordinary and exceptional: childbirth. Drawing on examples from maternity care in Australia, Great Britain, France, the United States, and the USSR, I seek to explain the ubiquity of obstetric violence, our collective blindness to the suffering it causes, and the inability of birth activists and their allies among medical carers to make in-hospital maternity care a meaningfully woman-centred experience. The answers lie in the power dynamics of clinical encounter and in the very ordinariness of violence against women.

Paula Michaels is Associate Professor and Head of History at Monash University. She is the author of two prize-winning books: *Lamaze: An International History* (Oxford University Press, 2014) and *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin's Central Asia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003). Most recently, she is co-editor of *Gender and Trauma since 1900* (with Christina Twomey). Supported by a Boston Medical Library Fellowship (2018) and an American Councils' Academic Fellowship in Russia (2022), her current research examines Soviet medical internationalism in the Global Cold War.

## Keynotes

**Professor Sandy O'Sullivan**, Macquarie University

*No Cession: rendering the colonial project of gender*

The ongoing colonial project to assert gender, sexuality and other containers of coloniality on personhood requires a reckoning around historical exclusions and inclusions that are reinforced in the everyday lives of First Nations peoples. This presentation explores how these have been manifest in managing our bodies and lives, by proposing strategies to understand, challenge and dismantle these structures.

Sandy is a Wiradjuri transgender/non-binary person and Professor of Indigenous Studies in the Centre for Global Indigenous Futures at Macquarie University, where they are a 2020-2024 ARC Future Fellow, with a project titled *Saving Lives: Mapping the influence of Indigenous LGBTIQ+ creative artists*. The project explores the unique contribution of queer artists to understand how modelling complex identities contributes to the wellbeing of all First Nations' peoples.

Since 1991 they have taught and researched across gender and sexuality, museums, the body, performance, design and First Nations' identity. Sandy was the inaugural director of the Centre for Collaborative First Nations' Research at Batchelor Institute. They recently completed an internationally focused ARC program examining the representation and engagement of First Nations' Peoples across 470 museums and Keeping Places. In 2020 they completed an ARC Linkage mapping creative practice across the Barkly Region of the Northern Territory (*Creative Barkly*). Sandy works across both industry and the academy, and recently completed a national review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and theatre makers for the Australia Council for the Arts.

In addition to their academic work, Sandy has been a musician, performer and sound artist since 1982 holding national and international arts residencies.

## **Jane Austen: Rewriting Gender in Catastrophic Times**

Dr Sarah Ailwood, University of Wollongong

Jane Austen lived and wrote her courtship romance novels during catastrophic times that witnessed the French Revolution and its aftermath, the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and beyond, and the Regency crisis within the government of the United Kingdom, among other sources of social, economic and political upheaval. The catastrophe that dominated the late eighteenth-century and Romantic Era is inextricably bound to the reframing of gender across the period. Conflict on a range of fronts, together with drastic social, economic and political transformation, triggered both a crisis in hegemonic masculinity and prevailing notions of the desirable man, as well as the emergence of new forms of feminine gender identities, and progressive, radical and reactionary responses to them. The recalibration of gender, particularly within established patriarchal and heterosexual social and structures, was both a symptom and a cause of catastrophe – as it is with the challenge to gender identity presented by the #MeToo moment and a new wave of feminist activism.

Austen advances the Romantic Era reframing of gender by rewriting both masculine and feminine identities, and dominant conceptions of heterosexuality, through the courtship romance genre. She celebrates a new, internalised, ethical model of masculinity grounded in authenticity and enabled by romantic love; freed from the pressure of social performance, Austen's men are able to form more equal relationships with women who desire agency, autonomy and individual selfhood. While embedded in the Romantic Era, Austen's identification of the flaws in hegemonic masculinity that perpetuate gender inequalities, and her championing of a new masculine identity that complements feminine agency, speaks to the crisis in gender in our own political moment.

Dr Sarah Ailwood is Senior Lecturer in the School of Law at the University of Wollongong. She is the author of *Jane Austen's Men: Rewriting Masculinity in the Romantic Era* (Routledge, 2020) and essays on Austen, masculinity, Romanticism and feminist jurisprudence. Her research expertise encompasses feminist jurisprudence and women's writing, and she has published on women's life writing in response to legal experience and co-edited (with Melinda Harvey) *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Influence* (EUP, 2015). Her current research projects involve recovering eighteenth-century women's legal memoirs, exploring women's speech and the politics and practices of listening within law reform (with a particular focus on violence against women), and the legal resonance of the #MeToo moment in Australia.



## **‘Was there any activism?’: Finding the splinters of the women’s liberation movement in Melbourne, 1976-1979.**

Jacquelyn Baker, Deakin University

Despite the enthusiasm leading up to, and during the early months of, International Women’s Year, 1975 proved to be a catastrophic year for the women’s liberation movement (WLM) in Australia. Amidst a growing backlash against feminism, political upheaval and the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government, Katy Reade noted that the WLM in Melbourne seemed to have regressed. In particular, the Melbourne-based movement was struggling with division and diversity within the movement and were finding it increasingly difficult to organise as a singular feminist identity. In this paper, I follow Reade’s contention that the process of destabilising a single feminist identity was emancipatory for Melbourne women’s liberationists. Drawing on oral history interviews conducted as part of my PhD research, this paper traces the splintered Melbourne WLM from 1976 to 1979 to consider how women’s liberationists responded to the crisis of 1975 and to uncover the different categories under which they organised. I argue that while internal divisions had contributed to the splintering of the WLM in Melbourne in 1975, tension and conflict did have the potential to be constructive as it encouraged women’s liberationists to pursue different methods of organising in the late 1970s.

Jacquelyn Baker is a PhD Candidate at Deakin University. Her thesis examines the women’s liberation movement in Melbourne. She has conducted oral history interviews with women’s liberationists and lesbian feminists and is interested in the role that narrative construction and memory plays in this particular methodology. Her PhD research has been supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship. Jacquelyn has had work published in *Overland* and currently volunteers as a broadcaster on community radio. She tweets at @jacquibtweets

## **A Soldier and a Woman: (Re)Negotiating Gender in Female Combatant Narratives of Civil Conflict in Ethiopia, 1974-1991**

Francesca Baldwin, University of Reading

One-third of active combatants in the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), one of the few populist revolutions to successfully overthrow a ruling regime, were women. As soldiers, activists, technicians, educators and commanders, female combatants broke down barriers to gender differentiation of labour in Ethiopia and complicated narratives of women's participation and experiences of war. This paper explores how combatant women negotiated and experienced gender as they integrated within masculinised, militarised hierarchies. Drawing on original oral history interviews with veteran combatants, it will consider the feminist identity theories of performativity and liminality to examine how female combatants engaged and re-negotiated their competing identities of 'woman' and 'soldier' during the liberation war. It will ask how gender was mediated and designed within the parameters of armed conflict, specifically considering how femininity was reconciled with the demands of soldiering. Finally, it will look back from present day Tigray to consider the legacy of re-negotiating gender norms during the liberation war for civilian and veteran women, unpacking the shifts in gendered expectations which arose from women's critical participation in this conflict.

Francesca Baldwin is a doctoral research student at the University of Reading, United Kingdom. Her research assesses gendered dimensions of civil conflict and genocide through female narratives of war in Ethiopia, unpacking concepts of identity, generation trauma, and conjugal order in the post-conflict Ethiopian state. Through original oral history interviews with veteran and activist women in Tigray and the diaspora, her thesis engages with women's testimonies to interrogate definitions of 'female combatant' and unpacks the relationship between gender, militarism and memory. Francesca has been published in EPOCH magazine and The Conversation, historicising the patterns of conflict in the current war on Tigray. She has spoken on major radio and T.V. stations on the continent, and continues to use her historical research to support awareness of the current crisis in Tigray.

## **“Unemployed Breadwinners” and “Working Mums”: Transformations in Gender and Work During the 1990s Recession in Australia**

Joshua Black, Australian National University

In 2020, Australian commentators described the COVID-19 recession as a “pink recession” due to its disproportionate impact upon working women. This recent experience invites historians to reconsider the gendered impacts and experiences of previous economic shocks and downturns. Indeed, material forces have contributed significantly to the construction and performance of gender in the longer sweep of Australian history. In this paper, I examine the differential impacts of the early 1990s recession on Australian women and men, and situate the rise of women in paid work in the late twentieth century in the broader social, economic, political and geographic context. In particular, and unlike the COVID recession, the 1990s crash saw the continued expansion of female participation in the labour market, and conversely a downturn in male employment. These economic circumstances fed into larger cultural shifts in attitudes toward women, work, marriage, and family life. Though no longer dominant in economic theory and policy, the traditional male breadwinner remained a key cultural marker in popular understandings of Australian society. The 1990s recession and its gendered shifts in the labour market further disrupted conservative perceptions of Australian men as breadwinners and women as domestic actors. This research reminds us that social constructions of gender are shaped not only by social and cultural values, but also by material and economic conditions, and in profound ways.

Joshua Black is a postgraduate student in political history at the National Centre of Biography in the Australian National University. His thesis, provisionally entitled ‘The Political Memoir Phenomenon: Federal Political Life Writing 1994 – 2020’ examines the expansion of political life writing in contemporary Australian politics and the broader social and cultural transformations that have generated it. He is the Australian Historical Association’s Postgraduate Representative, and the Treasurer of the Canberra Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. Joshua has taught undergraduate courses in Australian political and economic history, Soviet history, and Australian literature. He is currently co-editing a special issue of the *Australian Journal of Biography and History* with Dr Stephen Wilks.

## **Relational autonomy and the vulnerabilities of being a woman in a global pandemic**

Dr Petra Brown and Dr Tamara Browne, Deakin University

The impact of COVID-19 have deepened existing social-inequalities, exacerbating already-existing vulnerabilities of women. Scholars considering previous pandemics found that women's needs go unseen, unheard and unmet in a crisis response, because they are not adequately represented in decision-making processes. Including women at higher levels of decision-making around COVID-19 global responses, it is suggested, may ameliorate the destructive impact on women (Wenham et al. 2020).

This paper argues that it is not enough to simply ensure equal representation at decision-making forums. The 2020 global pandemic has exposed a deeper philosophical problem at the heart of the Western liberal democratic system: the methodological individualism that has shaped an account of autonomy and political agency that ignores the importance of interpersonal relationships. Feminist philosophers suggest this so-called neutral model is actually the ideal of the self-sufficient man. The global pandemic has revealed our deep reliance as a society on previously under-recognised contributors: carers, teachers, hospitality and health-care workers. These are the very citizens who are often disempowered in narratives of political agency. This paper considers 'relational autonomy' as an alternative to the traditional liberal account, and considers its capacity to re-empower women's agency during the pandemic recovery process.

Petra Brown is a philosopher in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University. She has research expertise in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century German philosophy and theology, and growing interest in feminist approaches to phenomenology, religion, ethics, and political philosophy. Recent research interests include a feminist reading of Arendt's critique of sovereignty and violence, and alternative vision of political community.

Tamara Kayali Browne is a bioethicist and philosopher of medicine, working as a Lecturer in Health Ethics and Professionalism in the School of Medicine at Deakin University. She has degrees in Biotechnology, History and Philosophy of Science, and Sociology. She completed her PhD at the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge. Her primary research expertise is in the ethics of non-medical sex selection, mental illness and gender.

## **"Will you go or must I?" Gender norms in Anglophone First World War propaganda**

Rachel Caines, University of Adelaide

The First World War disrupted “normal” life in the belligerent countries to an unprecedented extent. In understanding these disruptions, historians have increasingly highlighted the ways gender norms were both modified and reaffirmed throughout the course of the war. While historians have consulted a range of sources for understanding these gender dynamics and ideals, few have analysed the propaganda posters produced during the war. First World War propaganda posters typically drew upon existing cultural ideals, stereotypes, and expectations in their imagery, making them important cultural objects for understanding not only the conflict but the surrounding socio-cultural, political, and economic context. These posters often drew upon contemporary understandings and ideals around gender – the responsibilities of men and women, their roles in the private and public spheres, and expectations around their behaviour, demeanour, and futures. This paper explores the way anglophone First World War propaganda posters depicted women and women’s roles, and how these depictions reflected or contradicted contemporary socio-cultural norms and expectations. In doing so, this paper analyses the way the catastrophe of the First World War impacted gender norms and ideals in the English-speaking world, as well as the longevity of these impacts, particularly in relation to women.

Rachel Caines is a cultural historian of race, gender, and identity in the British Empire, currently working on Kurna land. Her Masters dissertation, which explored the acknowledgement of Indigenous First World War service in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, was awarded a Dean’s Commendation for Research Masters Excellence in May 2020. Rachel currently works as a Research Assistant in the History Department at the University of Adelaide, where she also tutors in Imperial and Australian history. She is currently preparing her PhD proposal, for planned commencement in February 2022.

## **Separation, Letters, and Negotiating Gender in World War II.**

Emma Carson, University of Adelaide

The emergence of gender history in the final three decades of the twentieth century has transformed approaches to studying war and its impact, with the public contributions of women as volunteers and paid workers being more widely and rightly recognised. Nonetheless, the private aspects of women's lives and the impact of modern war and other catastrophic events on how they explored their roles in the family and society during this period is an area that still requires scholarly attention. How men in the armed forces also mediated their identities as husbands and servicemen has been largely neglected in the historiography.

This paper explores how Australian servicemen and their wives used correspondence to negotiate power relations while they were separated during World War II. To achieve this, hundreds of letters that were written in this period were analysed to see how couples updated one another on their lives, shared vivid fantasies, and reinforced or circumvented conventional gender norms. Letters were a vital space during this period for couples to facilitate their relationships, not only by performing intimacy and offering support through extraordinarily uncertain times. Exchanging correspondence also enabled writers to deal with practical concerns such as maintaining a household, family planning and resolving arguments, in addition to presenting identities that were only enabled once they learned to live and love apart.

Emma Carson is a third-year Ph.D. candidate in the History Department at the University of Adelaide. She holds a First-Class Honours degree from the University of Adelaide, for which she was awarded both the Lynda Tapp Honours Prize and the prestigious Tinline Prize in 2018. She was also the 2020 recipient of the Hugh Martin Weir Prize and one of the AHA/Copyright Agency Travel and Writing Bursaries. Her Ph.D. research is looking at the emotional impact of separation and military service on married couples during World War II, with a focus on the letters that were written by separated spouses. She is generally interested in twentieth-century conflict, the history of emotions, gender history, and memory politics. She is currently writing a book chapter for The Routledge *History of Loneliness*, which is edited by Katie Barclay, Elaine Chalus, and Deborah Simonton.

## **‘[A] miserably constructed shelter’: The Great Irish Famine and girls of the Newcastle Industrial School (NSW)**

Anne Casey, University of Technology, Sydney

In September 1868, 12-year-old, Catherine Rudd was arrested for living in a makeshift campsite with a reputed prostitute, her mother. It was described at the time as ‘a miserably constructed shelter composed of rags and boughs’. Catherine and her 14-year-old sister, Eliza were sent to Newcastle Industrial School (NSW); their mother was sentenced to three months’ imprisonment. Like so many of their fellow inmates, Eliza and Catherine’s destitution had been precipitated by a family tragedy, their father’s death. With no other means to support her children, their mother had resorted to selling her body for money. She herself had arrived in Australia alone, aged 15 – a refugee escaping the Great Irish Famine, a humanitarian crisis that halved the country’s population, a human toll from which it has never recovered. This new study of 193 young women institutionalised at the school between 1867-1871 reveals close to one third of all Newcastle inmates were girls born of Irish families fleeing the Famine. This paper examines how their lives tell the story of cyclical poverty, discrimination, legal pitfalls and intergenerational incarceration, encapsulating the precarious position of disadvantaged women in the new world.

Anne Casey is an internationally awarded Sydney-based Irish poet and writer. A journalist, magazine editor, legal author and media communications director for 30 years, her work ranks in leading national daily newspaper, *The Irish Times*’ Most Read, and is widely published internationally. She is currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Technology Sydney, examining *The Second Wave Impact in Australia of the Great Irish Famine*. Focusing on the intergenerational impacts of this catastrophic humanitarian crisis for women and children, Anne’s PhD work is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Scholarship. A frequent headliner at literary events, conferences and universities, Anne has given reading tours in Australia, Ireland and the USA. Author of two critically acclaimed poetry collections, and several legal volumes, she has two new books forthcoming in 2021. She has won writing awards in Ireland, the UK, the USA, Canada, Hong Kong and Australia.

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## **Unfit for Service? Questioning the New Zealand Army Nursing Service's 1917 Marriage Bar**

Marie Cayce, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

In 1917, the fledgling New Zealand Army Nursing Service instituted a marriage bar. The bar's author, Matron-in-Chief of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, Mabel Thurston, wrote a letter stating her reasons for the regulation. She believed married nurses were unable to focus completely on their work due to worry, that they would want to go on leave when their husbands did, and that having pay in addition to their husband's pay would, "engender a too independent spirit." Highly qualified nurses found themselves without the rank or pay that they had held since the start of the war.

I examine the validity of Thurston's concerns as well as the implications of the bar and discuss how the bar promoted the domesticity of women and limited their opportunities at a time where employment opportunities throughout the Commonwealth were opening up. Married men and married women experienced this catastrophic time differently, thanks in part to regulations on how and where women could participate. This paper draws on primary source material including letters, government documents, photographs, and labor statistics. There has been a notable absence of critical investigation into the early years of the NZANS, which this paper seeks to remedy.

Marie is a student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee working on an MA in History and an MLIS in Archival Studies. She holds a BA in History from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Broadly, her research interests all revolve around the dominions of the British Empire during the First World War. This includes combat medicine, Jewish life, mental health, and social and political change on the home front. Marie is particularly interested in how people reacted to the changing situations in life and work as a result of the war, and how the relationship between dominion and Empire exacerbated this. Her current research looks at how gender impacted the experiences of New Zealand's nurses abroad and the impact of the war on Ireland's preparation for the War of Independence.



## **Mothers, Daughters, Activists: Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp and the Women's Anti-Nuclear Movement in 1980s Britain.**

Rose Debenham, University of Birmingham

The identity of 'mother' has a long history within women's peace movement. It acted as a historically specific gendered identity that could be define as inherently peaceable through its relationship to acts of caring. However, maternal activism took on new meanings in the wake of the introduction of nuclear catastrophe. The development of nuclear culture allowed women to visualise the direct impact of warfare on their own, real or imagined, children.

This paper will examine 1980s Britain as a moment where women were consumed by genuine fears about nuclear weapons. Some women recounted endless nightmares plagued by images of their dying children, whilst other women questioned the ethics of giving birth in a world on the brink of nuclear annihilation. This paper will focus on women who attended Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, exploring the particular feminisms and politics of the camp. It will examine how identifying as a 'mother' or 'carer' acted as a motivation for peace work through a need to transform fear into action. It will also investigate how engagement in anti-nuclear activism shifted activist's relationships with their own mothers and daughters by forcing them to confront their shared experiences of womanhood, warfare, and oppression.

I am currently a PhD student at the University of Birmingham within the Centre for Modern British Studies. My doctoral thesis explores the wider life narratives of women who attended Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp by the examination of processes of identity creation and representation. It uses a range of written, visual, and material sources, as well as oral history, to themes of visual presentation and dress, relational identity, internationalism, and conscious historicization. Broadly I am interested in histories of activism, identity, the 1980s, and women's history more generally.

## **'Worthy' Women: Power, paternalism and process of the National Shipwreck Society of NSW**

Karen Filewood, University of New England

Ideals of paternalism, morality, social status, gender and the deserving poor are well known in the Victorian era, yet studies on their manifestation and the practical implications of that for women, in an all-male maritime-based benevolent society, in the aftermath of crisis, is not so familiar. To fully realise the consequences, we must understand the everyday functioning of a society and the lived experience of the women seeking relief. To attain this, the 1877-1883 minute book of the National Shipwreck Relief Society of NSW has been used to discover this.

These records were also used to ascertain who the committee members and charity recipients were for biographical research to establish, as much as possible, their life experience. While the committee proved to be the classic middle to upper class male demographic so characteristic of Victorian times, it revealed the women to be from a wide variety of social classes and backgrounds. This revealed how the women's level of aid was defined in clear trends through their status, morality and respectability and the type and circumstances of crisis, evincing 'selective benevolence'. Overall, this study offers a new depth of insight into the practicalities and impact of crisis mediation through benevolence.

In 2018 I completed the Bachelor of Arts with Honours at UNE, supervised by Dr Matt Allen and Dr Martin Gibbs, examining the responses to a steamship collision which occurred just off the Australian east coast in 1886. While I am preparing to undertake a Doctorate, I write a fortnightly history column for the local paper while looking for work opportunities, my most recent employment being a research assistant for Dr Terry Gibbs for his 2019 publication *Edward David Stewart Ogilvie, Squatter at Yulgilbar* and as a marker for UNE's School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. I also volunteer as a 'wreck spotter' under Dr Brad Duncan for Heritage NSW's Wreck spotter program, researching and documenting maritime archaeology.

## **The Rhetoric of Catastrophic Hope and the Witch in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Feminist Manifestos**

Dr. Brydie Kosmina, University of Adelaide and University of Melbourne

The early modern European and colonial American witch trials were catastrophes that in some senses were *driven* by gender. The public trial and execution of thousands of people, the vast majority of whom were women, over several centuries across Europe and America functions as a historical symbol of gender-based violence in slow-motion; there are countless popular culture texts that represent the systematic hunting down and burning of women over this period of time. In this paper, I want to explore how this popular historical image - the witch as persecuted proto-feminist - stems from 1970s' radical feminist manifestos that included revisionist narratives of the witch trials. As I will demonstrate in this paper, these manifestos cannot be said to be rigorous in their historical veracity; but these inaccurate historical narratives serve a political purpose, underpinning the necessity of a historical past in order to generate a feminist present and future. In this way, these manifestos are characterized by a rhetoric of catastrophic hope: in framing the traumatic past of the witch trials as something to be acknowledged and mourned, these manifestos also fight for this kind of gendered catastrophe to never happen again, and thus reflect a rhetoric of hope.

Dr. Brydie Kosmina is a sessional researcher and lecturer living in Tarndanya/Adelaide. She completed her PhD at the University of Adelaide in 2020, receiving a Dean's Commendation for Doctoral Thesis Excellence. Her first scholarly monograph is currently under contract with Palgrave Macmillan. Brydie's recent publications have theorised feminist temporalities and utopian philosophies, and popular culture responses to climate catastrophe and the Anthropocene. She is an ECR Rep for the Cultural Studies Association of Australasia and is Editorial Collective Member and Social Media Manager for *Lilith*.

## **“I will come back, but we’re creating something completely different”: Rebuilding the response to violence against women post Hurricane-Katrina**

Dr. Rachel Loney-Howes, University of Wollongong

In August 2005, the worst so-called natural disaster in US history, Hurricane Katrina, struck the city of New Orleans and surrounding parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. New Orleans was further devastated by the widespread flooding caused by burst levees controlling the water levels in the Mississippi delta. The catastrophe precipitated numerous structural and interpersonal harms; in particular, women’s exposure to violence was heightened. While the challenges inherent in addressing violence against women during the initial recovery period are well documented, these issues were exacerbated, not caused, by the storm. This paper thus re-examines and reconceptualises the complexities associated with responding to violence against women in New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina against the backdrop of historical racism and misogyny, much of which is codified in law and entrenched in everyday life. These issues have ultimately fostered a sense of collective trauma in the city, compounded by the enduring impacts of the storm. This paper draws on semi-structured interviews undertaken with a range of stakeholders, including academics, SANE nurses, law enforcement, advocacy workers, shelter operators, counsellors, and activists, across different parishes in New Orleans. It demonstrates the nuances and complexities inherent in rebuilding the response to violence against women following catastrophes.

Dr Rachel Loney-Howes is a criminologist at the University of Wollongong. Her research interests are broadly concerned with the politics of voice and listening regarding sexual violence, with a particular interest in the relationship between activism, support services, and criminal legal responses to sexual violence. Dr Loney-Howes has published widely on the topic of digital anti-rape activism and is the author of “Online anti-rape activism: Exploring the politics of the personal in the age of digital media” (2020, Emerald Press). She is also the co-editor of “#MeToo and the politics of social change” (2019, Palgrave MacMillan) with Dr Bianca Fileborn. Together with Associate Professors Georgina Heydon and Nicola Henry, she holds a Criminology Research Council Grant examining the potential of alternative and confidential reporting platforms for survivors of sexual assault. Rachel’s research on Hurricane Katrina was funded by a Seed Grant from La Trobe University, awarded in 2015.

## **Neurotic Girls and Bloodthirsty *Rojas*: Negotiating Gendered Militancy in the Aftermath of War**

Jessica McIvor, University of Southampton

Conflict is a site of transformation, dislocating normative gender roles in the wake of catastrophic violence. The Irish and Spanish Civil War (1922-3 and 1936-9) are both notable for the highly visible participation of militant women in combat and the 'everyday tasks' of war. Condemned as bloodthirsty and unwomanly, militant women hold a contentious position within the landscape of war. Following the conflict, the Irish Free State and the Francoist dictatorship embedded Catholic gendered ideologies into the construction of the state, denying women's militancy a place in the new nation.

In this paper, I interrogate the cultural reconstruction of gender in the aftermath of civil war. Using a material analysis of photography, I examine how women's militant visibility was reproduced in the press to define the boundaries between transgressive, militant femininity and the idealised Catholic woman of the new state. Yet, whilst the press and other organs of the state used the image of militant women to re-impose patriarchal norms, networks of women activists challenged this in clandestine newspapers, reconstructing their militant identity on their own terms. Using a comparative approach, I aim to demonstrate that the reconfiguration of gender roles after conflict was a complex process, and that women actively resisted their erasure.

Jessica McIvor is a PhD student at the University of Southampton and the University of Bristol who is currently writing up her thesis. She is funded by the AHRC South West Wales Doctoral Training Partnership and is supervised by Dr Scott Soo, Dr Erika Hanna and Dr Jane Lavery. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on a comparative study of the production, erasure and recovery of women's militant visibility in twentieth-century Ireland and Spain. Using a material analysis of photography, her work traces of images of women's militancy, exploring both the initial production during and the circulation in the aftermath of war. Her work takes an innovative approach to understanding visibility during war, focusing on the entanglement of visibility and erasure. Her work aims to problematise discourses of rediscovery and draw attention to the importance of networks of women activists in resisting erasure. Her research interests include gender, war, photography and transnationalism.

## **Staying with the trouble of catastrophe: A feminist response from Shelley's monster**

Dr. Rebecca Ream, Victoria University of Wellington

Mary Shelley's (1818) novel *Frankenstein* is centred upon the main character (Frankenstein) creating a monster by sowing together human body parts and then reanimating him into life. The story is — among other things — a cautionary tale about the rapacious ambitions of medical, scientific or modern 'progress' occurring in Western Europe at the time. This paper, firstly, explores how such ambition for 'progress' was, and still is, underpinned by the aspiration to transcend 'nature' and therefore a feminist catastrophe with ecologically devastating results (Haraway, 2016). Secondly, I argue that Shelley's monster fosters a feminist response to this masculinist Western desire for transcendence within the dialogue between him and his creator.

In particular, Shelley invokes in the reader both revolt and care towards Frankenstein's creature. Such creative complexity is a startlingly example of Donna Haraway's (2016) plea to 'stay with the trouble' of what Western human culture has wrought through the compulsion to both believe in, and relieve ourselves of, 'nature'. As such, I also discuss how Shelley's monster is useful for teaching us, presently in the West, how to 'stay with the trouble' with the current ecological catastrophes we have actualised through such transcendence, such as human-induced climate change.

Dr Rebecca Ream is an early career researcher who has recently completed her/their PhD (2020) in the discipline of cultural geography. Her/their research interests include colonial settler histories, feminism, land and belonging, ancient mythologies, human exceptionalism, the queering of 'nature' and romanticism. She/they is/are a shameless devotee of feminist philosopher Donna Haraway and wrote her/their thesis with Haraway's ethico-onto-epistemology, compostism.

## **Reproducing in the Pyrocene: Gender, fire and babies**

Celia Roberts, Mary Lou Rasmussen and Rebecca Williamson (Australian National University) and Louisa Allen (University of Auckland)

In a series of books and articles, environmental historian Stephen Pyne makes an important argument about human's long relationship with fire. Going back to the earliest periods of known history, Pyne describes how human flourishing was dependent on learning to work with fire for cooking, heat and light, farming and ecological management. The human gut and brain, he argues for example, evolved as they have because we learned to cook meat. Earth's environments have also been shaped by human's use of fire. Australia is a key example here: Indigenous fire practices sculpted ecologies, plant and animal, in very particular and deliberate ways. Over millennia, however, some humans' relationship to fire got out of control, Pyne suggests. During the Industrial Age, Europeans and others harnessed the power of fire at scales that continue to produce hugely deleterious effects for human and nonhuman bodies and ecologies. The burning of fossil fuels has raised global temperatures, increased the risks of drought (and flood) and thus increased the likelihood of out-of-control bushfires. Taking this history into account, Pyne suggests that rather than naming our current age the Anthropocene, we might better conceptualise it as the Pyrocene.

Pyne's body of work is history at the grandest of scales: he describes the entire world in its widest time remit. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he pays little or no attention to sex/gender in his stories. Human reproduction, similarly, is not analysed, but rather assumed as a natural part of survival. In this paper we want to explore what difference it might make to think about sex/gender when considering the Pyrocene. We are feminist sociologists working on a project with medical colleagues about people having babies during the 2019-20 bushfires in Australia. Using feminist and queer theory, we want to understand how women and others are thinking about and experiencing having babies in these times. *How are contemporary out of control bushfires and sex, gender and reproduction in Australia interacting?*

Taking this approach recognises that sex, gender, reproduction and climate have always been entangled. But how are they entangled in the present moment in Australia? Is the Pyrocene a helpful concept in developing understanding relations between reproduction and climate and in trying to ameliorate the gendered effects of our current climate situation?

Celia Roberts and Mary Lou Rasmussen are Professors in the School of Sociology, ANU and Rebecca Williamson is a postdoctoral researcher in the same School. Louisa Allen is Professor in Critical Studies of Education at the University of Auckland. Collectively they have expertise in feminist and queer theory, sex education, social studies of health and medicine, theories of embodiment and new materialism and social geographies of care. They are currently writing a book together on reproduction in climate crisis, based on empirical research into the 2019-20 Australian bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

**‘...every cook to do her duty’: the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, femininity, and food in the Second World War.**

Dr. Lauren Samuelsson, University of Wollongong

When the Second World War broke out, the *Australian Women’s Weekly* (the *Weekly*), Australia’s foremost women’s magazine, donned its ‘battle dress’. By 1941, the *Weekly* had drastically reduced its pages, unceremoniously slashing key sections of the magazine. The cookery section remained, printed in extravagant colour, evidence of its importance to the *Weekly*’s readers. Many Australian women had been deployed into wartime employment, while simultaneously shouldering the responsibility of their ‘traditional’ domestic duties, including cookery. Through close analysis of the *Weekly*’s food pages during the years 1939-1945, this paper will explore the ways in which the *Weekly*’s food editors guided their readers in negotiating their new roles, both inside and outside the domestic sphere. In turn, it will consider the ways that these changing gender roles and the pressures of war influenced Australian food culture. In doing so, this paper will reveal the tensions between the notions of ‘ideal’ feminine foodwork behaviours constructed in the magazine and the reality of women’s wartime experiences, highlighting the complex entanglements of food and gender.

Lauren Samuelsson is a history PhD candidate at the University of Wollongong. Her interests include the history of food and drink, popular culture and Australian cultural history. Her PhD thesis focuses on the *Australian Women’s Weekly* and its role in the development of Australian food culture during its first fifty years of publication. Her award-winning work has been published in *History Australia* and *Australian Historical Studies*. She has also been published in *The Conversation*.



## **“Can we women help the world through this crisis?”: Feminist internationalism during the interwar years**

Michelle Staff, Australian National University

During the interwar years many feminists were deeply invested in ideas and practices of internationalism. Facing ongoing exclusion in their home countries, they saw international cooperation and global governance as potentially effective ways of obtaining better rights for women. However, they faced many difficulties because of their gender and often struggled to challenge prevailing global norms. On top of this they also had to contend with the various tensions and crises of these two tumultuous decades: the challenges of postwar reconstruction, international territorial disputes, the rise of anticolonial nationalism, economic depression, the growth of fascism, and the eventual outbreak of a second global conflict. In this context they therefore came to be centrally concerned with the issue of world peace, too. This paper examines how the various crises of the interwar years shaped the contours and priorities of feminist internationalism. It focuses on a group of Australian and British feminists, using the British Empire as an important frame of reference. It shows how the events of this period gave a sense of urgency to the feminist cause and reinforced feminists' convictions, even if they hindered their successes. This story also reveals how gender norms are both challenged and reaffirmed in catastrophic times.

Michelle Staff is a PhD candidate at The Australian National University in Canberra. Her research investigates the lives of several Australian and British feminist internationalists during the interwar period, exploring themes of gender, race, empire, and international cooperation. She has previously studied at the University of Sydney (BA Hons) and the University of Oxford (MSt). Michelle's work has been published in the *Journal of Women's History* and *The Conversation*.

## **Irati Wanti (The Poison, Leave It): Gendered and Indigenous responses to nuclear catastrophe in South Australia**

Jessica Urwin, Australian National University

In 1998, the Howard Government announced their proposal to dump nuclear waste near Coober Pedy. The dump became a major concern of the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta, a council of senior Arabana, Kokatha, Yankunytjatjara and Antikarinya women from across northern South Australia. In response to their worry over the 'poison' that would be dumped on their country, they began a campaign – *Irati Wanti* (The Poison, Leave It) – that implored the Australian Government and people to heed Aboriginal warnings about the potentially catastrophic consequences of dumping nuclear waste on traditional lands. In support of the campaign, a group of young environmentalist women moved from Melbourne to Coober Pedy to join the fight (the Melbourne Kungkas). By examining the *Irati Wanti* campaign and its attempt to intervene in potential environmental catastrophe, this paper considers how both Indigeneity and gender were mediated throughout this episode. Fighting the government's proposed waste dump required the Kungka Tjuta to consider their cultural obligations to country, their roles as senior Aboriginal women, and their place within settler Australia.

Jessica is a PhD candidate in the ANU's School of History. Her thesis seeks to chart a history of nuclear colonialism in South Australia by considering the various ways that nuclear processes have interacted with and/or impacted upon Aboriginal communities.

***Penny's Path*: “More than a game, more than history, the magic is real.”**

Tess Watterson, University of Adelaide

Witchcraft histories have often been utilised as a space to express or work through contemporary gender troubles. During the catastrophic and isolating events of 2020, a group of indie game developers produced the game *Penny's Path*, a visual novel featuring a female protagonist, Penny, magically sent back in time from 2020 to the New England witch hunts of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century by the discovery that she has contracted Covid-19. The game's advertising specifically notes that Penny meets “strong female characters who challenge past and present stereotypes” and that through this she “discovers her own special role in the changing seasons of fortune.” This paper will explore *Penny's Path* as a case study to examine how contemporary crises around social roles often prompt historically themed quests for identity. The gameplay trailer featured the phrase “What is the point of men's politics, and wars, and riches, if women already are keepers of what the people need?” Amidst the trauma of Covid-19, these creators looked to the past trauma of witch hunts, wherein gendered roles are often cast with a historically harsh distinction, in order to envision a differently gendered future. *Penny's Path* demonstrates the ways in which both the Covid-19 and witch hunting catastrophes are spaces for reflection on gender and power.

Tess Watterson is a PhD candidate from Adelaide, Australia, researching the representation of witches and witchcraft in medievalist fantasy role-play video games, with a particular focus on discourses of gender and persecution. She completed her Masters of Research in Modern History at Macquarie University, in Sydney, Australia, with a thesis focused on the 1991 *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* video game adaptation of the blockbuster film, and a historical interpretation of the differences between the game and film in the technological and socio-political context of Gulf War America. Though currently researching existing representations of witchcraft, the real passion behind her work is considering the different ways we might be able to challenge the constraints evident in these traditions going forwards and the potential opportunities that digital and virtual mediums offer for historical engagement.