

FROM WHERE WE STAND: WAR, WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND FEMINIST ANALYSIS

Cynthia Cockburn
London: Zed Books, 2007

REVIEWED BY TARAH BROOKFIELD

Two arms are stretched out, hands reaching outward, fingers splayed wide in protest, the words "NO WAR" and "JUSTICE YES!" written across each palm. After reading Cynthia Cockburn's *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis* one can imagine that there are rows of hands like these lined up behind the two featured on the book's cover. And there are, but they are not necessarily raised at the same time or in the same manner or in the same location. Also, the appearance of the hands would vary, reflecting their owner's age, size, skin colour, exposure to manual labour and potentially, war wounds. Despite these differences, the message would remain the same, and the hands would all belong to women who used their bodies and minds to demonstrate their opposition to war.

In *From Where We Stand*, Cockburn, an academic and an activist, reports on the international network of women engaged in peace work and the gendered nature of their ideologies, actions, and existence. Her research is drawn from hundreds of oral histories with members and leaders of women-only peace organizations. Many of her interviewees are survivors of wars; other activists live far away from the war zones but are drawn to the cause out a sense of injustice, empathy, and responsibility. Cockburn is particularly interested in understanding why women are compelled to organize in same-sex groups. She argues it is not enough that patriarchal societies

assign women the role of nurturers. Men and women experience war in a particularly gendered way, one that goes beyond the simple dichotomy of soldier and victim. Sometimes women are the only ones left to speak out and rebuild their communities, sometimes their experience as widows, refugees or victims of rape create a preference for homosocial environments. Cockburn's activists also acknowledge that organizing as women is an effective strategy to gain public attention.

Using case studies of recent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Colombia, India, Sierra Leone, Palestine and Israel and the war on terror, Cockburn identifies the historic context and key issues of this violence and its effects on women's daily lives. In each setting, Cockburn outlines the trajectory of women's peace work and its successes and failures in building a culture of peace. Her definition of activism is broad and incorporates humanitarian work, educational programs, and lobbying for legislative changes. She pays considerable attention to the women's effective use of public spaces to protest war and display solidarity such as the mass mobilization of 3,500 Colombian women to the war-ravaged region of Putumayo or the five American activists who hold a weekly silent vigil on the steps of the New York Public Library.

Despite the focus on gender unity, Cockburn takes great care never to assume that just because her subjects are all women they share the same motivations or opportunities for activism. She frequently reminds her readers of the significant social differences between her activists and the multiple identities they juggle in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, and class, a concept she calls intersectionality. It is also common for activists even within the same organization to hold mixed opinions on nationalism, pacifism, and feminism. This is best illustrated in the chapter on Arab and Jewish groups active in Jerusalem, who find it a challenge to

reconcile their conflicting views of Zionism with their shared dreams for peace. Cockburn hints at another more complicated division, women who support militarized states or who consider women's acceptance into the military as a feminist accomplishment. It would have been interesting to know if any of the organizations she studied tried to engage with women on the right.

Intertwined in the case studies are bigger questions about peace as a feminist project, for example why humans continually resort to war. Cockburn's response is that "gender relations are a significant part of the big picture of militarism and war is grounded in the foundations of patriarchal societies." This suggests women's peace activism is working to eliminate war on two levels. Not only are demonstrations, lobbying, and education vital to navigating a road to lasting peace but also women's insistence in having a voice in peacemaking works toward an equally important kind of liberation. *From Where We Stand* not only documents this movement, it acts as a call for action.

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WOMEN, SOCIABILITY AND THEATRE IN GEORGIAN LONDON

Gillian Russell
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007

REVIEWED BY KYM BIRD

Gillian Russell's monograph *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London* is the latest contribution

to an ambitious and impressive list of seventy titles in the "Cambridge Studies in Romanticism." It is the third dedicated to theatre. Russell undertakes a compelling and pleasingly illustrated history of narratives that are peripheral to those which dominate late eighteenth-century theatre and involve women, extravagant fashion, calumny and scandal, sumptuous masquerade, and the palaces of the *bon ton* of London. To this end, she recovers a lost history of women's participation in culture and theatre. She examines the expansion of kinds of entertainments in London after 1760, which consisted of theatre, opera, music, and masquerade, but also debates, public lectures, exhibitions, auctions, shopping, and the promenade.

Russell argues that to understand the political turmoil of the 1790s, including the revolutionary discourses of Romanticism like those of Mary Wollstonecraft, one must understand "developments in sociability and print culture" particularly as they relate to women and gender and the fashionable world of commercializing culture. In doing so, she feminizes Habermas's understanding of the public sphere, and proposes the idea of a "fashionable sociability," by which she means "a highly theatricalized and thoroughly feminized arena of social interaction" that was associated, in the main, with the female aristocracy and upper gentry. Among the new sites of assembly discussed by Russell are Carlisle House, Almack's, the Coterie, and the "pleasure dome" of the Pantheon; these member-only venues fostered novel types of social interaction that she calls "models of sociability" and "modes of theatricality" in which the sartorial splendour and masquerade of the patrons became the evening's entertainment.

Russell's study is fascinating because it refuses the public/private, domestic/professional dichotomies, associated with men and women respectively, which underpin so many conceptualizations of the period

and offer a much more nuanced understanding of something she calls "domiciliary sociability." It elaborates an emerging, feminized, upper-class, associational culture that lies somewhere between these dichotomies. Based on epicurean and hedonistic pleasures—music, food, drink, and dance—she describes places in which political information and critique were circulated in semi-public locales that were usually organized by some form of private subscription. Her discussion moves from the periphery to the centre, from theatricality to theatre proper, and resolves in a few dramatic works of the period. These include Richard Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777); the less canonical *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780) by dramatist and poet Hannah Cowley; and *Bon Ton or High Life Above Stairs* (1775), a two act after piece by actor-manager, playwright and producer David Garrick: all vehicles for the comedic acting ability of Frances Abington. Russell's analysis of these plays makes concrete a distinction that courses throughout the cultural entertainments she studies: that nascent forms of feminized urban sociability threatened institutionalized theatre, which saw itself as a more "legitimate," "manly," and "socially useful" art form. Not surprisingly, she reads Sheridan's play as a critique of fashionable sociability and female sexuality and a reassertion of "the model of male homosocial talk." The plays by women, on the other hand, she asserts, use domiciliary sociability, spectacular hairstyles, and divine decoration to symbolized female power. *The Belle's Stratagem*, in her treatment, is a response to *School for Scandal* and concerned with the same social phenomena, but in it Cowley treats the public women who control the play "not in the pejorative terms of disorderly whores, but as legitimate consumers of entertainment, print culture, the delights of scandal and, implicitly, theatre itself." *Bon Ton* goes one step further, using comedy and masquerade to "regulate social and moral excess" as well as to cri-

tique male efforts to appropriate and defend institutional theatre as more masculine, authentic, and socially valuable.

Ultimately, Russell's work is a careful and captivating study that reinvigorates the discussion of eighteenth-century British theatre and reinvests in it women's energy, their efforts, and their theatrical and cultural contributions.

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WORKING-CLASS STUDENTS AT RADCLIFFE COLLEGE, 1940-1970: THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, SOCIAL CLASS, AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jennifer O'Connor Duffy
Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008

REVIEWED BY MARLENE CLAPP

In her text, *Working Class Students at Radcliffe College*, Dr. O'Connor Duffy examines the intersection of social class and gender in elite higher education. There has been a lack of research on how social class and gender intersect not only in the field of higher education but in the social sciences in general, according to O'Connor Duffy. The text also provides an in-depth look into a period of women's higher education history, 1940-1970, that the author's research indicates has been previously little studied.