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Gender, race, class, ecology and peace

Vron Ware talks to Jo Littler

Abstract

In this interview Vron Ware discusses how her work has intertwined themes of 'gender, race, class, ecology and peace', as she put it in her classic 1992 book *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*. This was published a time when 'talking about whiteness [...] was usually met by stony silence', and she relates this and her early work on gender and the National Front to more recent incarnations of gendered racism. The discussion moves over a wide range of subjects, including whiteness and the environmental movement, feminist statues and military monuments, the role of painting and photography in teaching and learning and how we might see futures beyond militarism. She reflects on ways in which the politics of 'gender, race, class, ecology and peace' formed part of her background in NGOs and campaigning organisations - including Searchlight, Friends of the Earth and the Women's Design Service. The same themes also run through her current project on re-thinking the category of the rural, which, she says, involves 'trying to think ecologically, in a way that sees interconnections between social, economic and cultural changes' and like her other activity works to join the dots between anti-racism, feminism, anti-militarism and eco-socialism.

JL: In the first chapter of Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History [1992] you list different strands of politics: 'gender, race, class, ecology and peace'. I thought that it was interesting and quite unusual to see them listed like that. They're also all themes that run throughout your work. Can you talk about how?

VW: It's funny you should start with that. I had forgotten, until recently, that the opening of *Beyond the Pale* is a critique of the Tory Party Political broadcast in which a man's voice reassures viewers that the Conservatives (led by Margaret Thatcher) would be the ones to save us from environmental catastrophe. The point was that the 'us' being saved was represented by a very white baby being clutched by its very white parents. It's tempting to assume that environmental politics was not on the agenda back in the 1980s. But it was, of course, and well before that too.

In 1982 I was part of a new magazine called *Emergency* started by a number of us involved in different social movements, operating outside the Labour Party. So, for example, we published a number of very interesting critiques of ecological thought, writers like Robin Jenkins, Rosalie Bertell, Joel Kovel, Andre Gorz, Murray Bookchin and Rudolf Bahro. So that was really important, but before that, I had lived in Birmingham for a few years, working for *Searchlight*, the anti-racist, anti-fascist magazine. There was a wonderful place called the Peace Centre, a bookshop where all kinds of protest and solidarity groups would meet, including anti-racists and anti-fascists. It was normal for those things to be happening in the same place and you'd see the same people involved in many things at once. But as the 1980s went on, politics became more fragmented, and there wasn't such a coherent movement against racism, for example.

In the late 1980s, early 1990s, I had a job in a feminist resource centre specialising in the *built* environment, picking up on the work that a new generation of feminist architects and planners were doing. We wrote guidelines about changing measurements of doorways or thinking more holistically (I suppose you would say ‘intersectionally’ now) about how different categories of people used public space, transport and buildings. But among some of my co-workers, there was resistance to the idea that there was any connection between gender issues (i.e. women’s lives) and anything to do with either peace or the living environment. In fact there was a real aversion to the idea that feminism had a particular role to play in anti-militarist or environmentalist politics. I suspect this was largely a reaction against people saying things like: ‘As a mother, I care about my children’s future’. Which of course, many did say, and still do.

That was the Women’s Design Service, wasn’t it? [an organisation originally set up with local authority funding to improve the built environment for women, which involved, for example, lobbying for gender neutral baby-changing facilities in public toilets].ⁱ

Yes. It was a dream job for a while, especially with two small kids. Just before that, I had worked briefly at Friends of the Earth, in 1986, and was delighted to be moving into environmental campaigning after being unemployed/freelance for a while. I had effectively been fired as editor of *Searchlight* - which had also been a dream job but for very different reasons - when I was eight months pregnant, and it took me a while to figure out what to do next. FoE was an overnight education in the state of environmental politics at the campaigning end, and it was pretty dire. Here the presiding method was Science, Authority and Rational Argument, mostly delivered by the white, male proponents who jealously guarded their domains. As Information Officer, my job was to herd volunteers, cut out relevant articles in the newspapers (with scissors) and file them, and deal with media inquiries. I was expected to work a 60-hour week, new baby or not, and to fit meekly into the office hierarchy as I learned the ropes. I made some good friends but also learned that being a serious environmentalist with a science background gave you the right to sneer at anything that called itself ‘green’ or which tried to integrate a political analysis of capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy or militarism. Looking back, I understand now why it was that way because their aim was to influence government policy but in the 1980s I didn’t find it a congenial place to work.

I was lucky to move to WDS after that because at least it was a feminist workspace, and at that time I was also just finishing off *Beyond the Pale*. I learned an enormous amount about urban planning and architecture. I also have fond memories because, during the *Emergency* years, we had had many discussions about the end of work, and the possibility of sabotage as a form of workers’ resistance. WDS was very free and easy when I started, in the sense that there was no one standing over us and we just got on with it, but at some point in the early 1990s we were forced to employ an office manager and fill out timesheets, which was very unwelcome. Counting the hours I spent at work made me realise how much time I spent thinking about the job when I was not officially working. Sometimes I would include thinking time, or even commuting time, when I was filling out my timesheets. As long as you did what you were supposed to do, and took it seriously, that was what mattered.

There was one moment when I was writing about white women and imperialism in the late nineteenth century for *Beyond the Pale*, while at WDS I was researching ideas about social hygiene in the Victorian era as I was trying to trace the origins of public toilets for women. I managed to write something for our handbook on designing toilets (*At Women's Convenience*) that combined all or at least most of those themes. I found out, for example, that there was an organisation called the Ladies Association for the Diffusion of Sanitary Knowledge, which was the foundation of what became Social Work. It was supported by Charles Kingsley, who was a complicated figure: an advocate of Christian socialism but also a believer in the superiority of 'Anglo-Saxons'.

Around that time - this was the early 1990s - I was writing about the idea of green consumerism too - there's a section in the last chapter of *BTP* where I critique the Body Shop, which was one of the first businesses to promote the idea of 'green capitalism'.

And then you went to work in academia ...

Yes, I got a job at the University of Greenwich in the School of Humanities, which at that time was developing links with the planning department. It was exciting to bring ideas about society and culture into an urban planning degree. Humanities was coming to an end as a popular multi-disciplinary degree so we were renaming all the individual components. I was working with the Environmental Studies strand so I said, 'why don't we call it Cultural Geography?' So we called it Cultural Geography, which turned out to be a great idea. As a traditional discipline with roots in colonial expansion, geography was under attack so there was a lot of scope for creating a new curriculum, promoted by interventions like David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* [1989]. I learned a lot from starting to teach at this point; it was the education I felt I had been lacking. It was really quite intense having to write weekly lectures on the history of urban design, for example, but completely fascinating too. The best things were the field trips to other cities, including Lille in northern France as the channel tunnel was opening around that time. I learned so much from my colleagues about how to think about cities historically by looking at planning and architecture.

The first course I had to teach was called 'Landscape and Society'. I found myself in an area that I hadn't given too much thought to in the past, or had taken for granted. The previous person gave me her course outline, which began with the political economy of Anglo-Saxon landownership – not something I knew anything about. But I remember the first class where I got the students to divide into landowners and ramblers. And then to switch. That was really fun. I'd never taught in a university before so I was terribly nervous. I wore a very short pink skirt for some reason.

Interesting choice. And what did they have to do?

Well the landowners were supposed to be angry about the fact that ramblers were walking on their land. The ramblers had to explain why they had the right to be there. It was a topical subject at the time so there was quite a lot of media discussion about it.

This is when I first read Carolyn Merchant's work, and came across the idea that Nature was thought of as intrinsically female and therefore needing to be controlled. I had to learn Enlightenment thought in terms of defining Nature. So that was really useful. And then during that time I became interested in the road protest movement and interviewed people in Walthamstow where they were campaigning against the M11 extension. The Newbury Bypass was running very near to where my parents lived so I got involved in some of those protests too in 1995.

You wrote about that in Who Cares About Britishness? [2007] didn't you?

Yes, briefly. I always wondered about the extent to which people thought about race and gender in their organising, or in the ways they represented their political demands.

How do those dynamics of environmentalism and racialisation work now? It's often said in the UK that 'the environmental movement is so white', or that XR is too white.

Yes, I have been following that discussion very closely for a long time. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the champions of rural Britain were definitely Conservative, up in arms about the right to hunt foxes and that sort of thing. That lobby is still very much there, but it's been overtaken by climate activists and conservationists who have very different politics and priorities. Last September [2018] Chris Packham organised a walk through central London to protest against the fact that British wildlife is seriously threatened. It was a horrible rainy day and everyone gathered in Hyde Park. I was partly there out of curiosity to see how many people came; and partly out of sympathy.

There were a few hundred, many from outside London, and lots of umbrellas. Chris Packham came on to the stage and the first thing he said was, 'I look out here and I see you're all white, basically, and that's not good enough for us. The environmental movement has failed to engage with a more diverse range of people and we have to do better'. Later on he introduced Billy Bragg by talking about how he first saw him at the Anti-Nazi Carnival in 1978. I felt like hugging him because he was saying, bottom line, 'we are anti-racist/anti-fascist and that's how it's going to be'. He had assembled a ministry of experts who had previously compiled a draft manifesto, so everyone was introduced as the Minister for This, Minister for That - and one of the first ones was the Minister for Diversity in Nature and Conservation. This was a young woman called Mya-Rose Craig, who spoke quite explicitly about the fact that many young visibly minority ethnic [VME] people feel they don't belong in the countryside and are worried that if they go there they will face hostility and hate crime.

Things have moved on quite a bit since then. Shortly after that, there were the first school strikes and then the first mass Extinction Rebellion event in London. As I said, I try to follow all these discussions about race but also monitor the connections between peace and anti-militarism campaigning too. There has been a rapid convergence between anti-militarists and climate change activists, and I think that's one of the most exciting things.

You've written a lot about gender and as you've already said you were editor of the anti-fascist magazine Searchlight in the early 1980s. How is the way the right is gendered in the UK different now? What's changed?

I've often fantasised about rewriting a pamphlet I wrote in 1978 called *Women and the National Front*, which analysed not just how fascist publications and propaganda tried to *appeal* to women, but how they used ideas about whiteness, and particularly white femininity, to play on people's fears. It was how their racism was *expressed*: the idea, for example, that white women were particularly under threat from immigrants - something they were reworking from Powell. The difference between then and now is that I was mainly looking at the National Front and British Movement in Britain. Most of the literature on gender and fascism at that time, such as there was, came from studies of Nazi Germany. Now you'd have to address the alt-right as well as the far right, and look at the spectrum on a global or at least transnational scale.

So just to take one example, things that were true in 1978, like 'there are no women in any positions of authority' in far-right organisations, are simply not the case today. Some of the successful far-right parties across Europe and elsewhere are actually led by white women, some of whom are openly lesbian. It might *seem* that their politics are more sophisticated in terms of gender and equality, but you'd have to look at specific issues, like attitudes to abortion or the question of rape and sexual violence, where the overt racist or white supremacist message is more or less the same.

There's one section of my original pamphlet that analysed the NF's views on 'womanhood' and the obsession with what they saw as the natural order of a white supremacist society. All the classic themes are there: a profound hatred of feminism - which they saw as the proof of how decadent western civilisation had become; an emphasis on militaristic versions of masculinity; an endorsement of eugenics as the rationale for who should be allowed to 'breed'.

One of the National Front's favourite slogans in the 1970s and 1980s was 'Race-mixing is treason', which represented the classic yearning for purity fundamental to all forms of racial nationalism. At that time, they were stoking fears against immigrants and settlers from the New Commonwealth ... Now it's the idea that the growth of Muslim communities will lead to the extinction of the white race.

Of course there's a really big literature to draw on now too. I would want to connect the ways in which feminism itself can be instrumentalised by the far right, which Sara Farris has analysed as femonationalism. Then do you remember Femen and their naked protests in 2013? I found some of that imagery incredibly powerful: a woman half-naked, with 'Fascism rest in Hell' scrawled across her breasts in red paint, being hauled away by loads of armed police. I was really moved by scenes like that. Yet there are elements of a very female voice against certain forms of patriarchy, fascism and fundamentalism, which can spill over into a critique of religion in a way that can fit with an Islamophobic agenda (without any sign that Femen themselves were being pulled into that).

How are you developing these threads of 'gender, race, class, ecology and peace' now?

I find I'm doing lots of different things at once, thinking more and more about the connections between anti-racism, anti-militarism and eco-socialism. My priority is to rewrite a manuscript I finished in 2004, based on the area where I grew up in northwest Hampshire. The original plan was to look at this small place in its wider historical, social, cultural context; and to draw out the ways in which it's been transformed by globalisation. I was also trying to write against that strand of English nationalism that depicts rural England as the victim of endless injuries, manifested particularly by immigration and cultural changes happening in the big cities. I finished the first version of the book in the early 2000s but it was hard to find a publisher; it was before the genre of nature and place writing had really opened up.

I wrote the first version while we were based in the US, and living through 9/11 and the Iraq War. By that time I had become a lot more involved in anti-war politics, and was engaging with Cynthia Enloe's work on militarisation. So I put that project to one side and turned my attention to militarism and military institutions for a while. Now I realise that the topic of war and the impact of war had been there in a lot of my writing and thinking from quite early on. So in response to your first question about how themes come in and out, sometimes we are not even aware of them. When particular situations or political shifts provide the impetus to understand the intersections better, then they suddenly come into focus.

In 2018-19 I got a Leverhulme fellowship to go back to this body of material about the English countryside. The first version of the project was confined to the second half of the twentieth century - broadly 1939-2000 - but what I've realised since then is that I'm looking at a process that goes back much, much further. It involves colonial expansion, the opening of new markets; the industrial revolution, the way in which agriculture was changed by capitalism, and of course the expulsion of the rural population from the land, both because of urbanisation and also because so much of the common land was enclosed and it became impossible to make a living. So in this version, although I use examples from a particular area, it's absolutely not a 'local history'.

I think what I'm really trying to do is argue for a kind of literacy about how we understand words like 'rural' or 'countryside. Or to put it another way, I am trying to think ecologically, in a way that sees interconnections between social, economic and cultural changes registered in this particular area, but which are emblematic of deeper transformations. I've been influenced a lot by Patrick Wright's work, and his suggestion that you need to get to know a locality over a number of years before it starts to reveal the layers of power and history that have shaped it.

After a while I realised that there was a crossroads that I kept coming back to in my head. So instead of taking a village - the place where I was born - as the unit of transformation, I decided to stand there at the crossroads as a point of orientation. So now there are no distractions about who lives in the village or what kind of village it is, but I can still draw on my local knowledge and connections. I would add that it's quite difficult to write about a place you know very well, especially if it's connected to your own past. I don't want this new book to be a social history of that particular place, but thinking from one spot does help to anchor the underlying arguments and narrative.

So, just to take one example, there's an old fashioned signpost at this intersection, which points in four directions to two towns, four tiny villages and two larger ones. There's a lot to say about how these places are connected, whether through being in the same parish, county or any other administrative unit. Then there are particular stories about the smallest of places which actually tell you an enormous amount about what's been going on in the countryside. In 2009, one of the small villages named on the signpost was bought by the Swedish owners of the H&M fast fashion empire. This made me think about the connections - or continuities - between the landowners of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who made their money through commerce and styled themselves as country squires, and the billionaires who have been investing in British farmland since the 1990s.

To give another example - there's a massive new mansion within half a mile of the crossroads which is fairly typical of many developments round there. It's designed to look like an eighteenth-century country house - even calls itself a manor, which is historically inaccurate - and was bought for £5.5 million just the other day. The developers got permission to build it in an Area of Outstanding National Beauty because it was on the site of an old farmstead.

Does this book have a title?

Well, the title was originally *Where Was I?*, because when you are talking about historical processes and the ways they are registered in everyday life, you can start to digress. And I do like digressions. I think they can be very productive, but you have to control them. This is an attempt to hold it together, because otherwise it could really ramble off, like a country lane in fact. But at the moment, the title has been changed to *Return of a Native* because I also play with ideas of alienation and belonging. This is not just in relation to my own connection to the area but it's also a way of addressing the exclusivity and impenetrability of the English countryside, and its place in the discourse of English nationalism. I borrow quite a lot of Thomas Hardy's descriptions as well because I love the way he makes the landscape into a historical character with moods and feelings.

So it's partly about the legibility of the landscape, which is the product of human activity - influenced by geology, ecology and climate - and relations of power that you can trace back over many centuries. This crossroads is quite a lonely spot - there's just one house there. I happened to have interviewed someone twenty years ago who had her first job as a domestic worker there when she was about fourteen or fifteen. That opens up the issue of women's work and the shift from domestic labour to secretarial work and so forth - but also the fact that electricity and running water only came there in the second half of the twentieth century, which is later than you might think.

It's amazing what you can find out from one vantage point when you start digging. I discovered that two of the fields bordering the crossroads were once part of a huge area of common land where people had the right to forage and graze their cattle. Today they are just fields as they were ploughed up during WW2 for food production, and then sold off. But in 1818 a rich Scottish family, who owned several manors nearby, enclosed most of this common area for their own use. Then I discovered that

this particular family had made their money from owning a sugar plantation in St Kitts and received over £2000 compensation in 1835.

The fact that I had never heard of them growing up in the area was useful, as I thought I knew something about local history. It helped me understand the way that parish boundaries work. I had to look at books about ancient church history, and the history of poor law relief, where I discovered that parish boundaries operated like an internal border system, with rights and obligations attached to your birthplace that could not easily be transferred. The weird thing is that I have been trying to meet people who live nearby – farmers particularly – some of whom have been in the area all their lives, and I came to realise that we hadn't come across each other's families before simply because we lived in different parishes, separated by an invisible line. As a child, your whole orientation to the community was governed by the church, the village hall, who organised the village fete, that sort of thing. It wasn't just me – I met someone who had grown up a couple of miles from us, who had no idea that my father had planted a wood in the 1980s, which now belongs to the Woodland Trust. As a professional agricultural conservation consultant, she seemed quite offended not to know about it as it rather undermined her expertise. She literally lives in the next village, but in a different parish.

Since then I've had some fascinating conversations with friends who grew up in the Caribbean. In Barbados, apparently, you can tell which parish someone comes from by their accent. The parish system was just transplanted as a form of local administration.

But underlying all these issues is the question of what's going to happen next. It's clear that the introduction of decent broadband has already made a big difference to people in rural areas. It makes it easier to run a business from home, for example, which then means that more people are 'escaping to the country', which has an effect on property prices, not to mention traffic and social life. The book is taking longer than I'd hoped as there is a lot to learn, not least about what's happening to farming at the moment. Then there's the question of how to make it readable.

I wanted to ask you about your writing style. I've noticed that you write about mistakes you have made, which I really like and which is actually quite unusual. You write about when people have attacked you, and when you've changed your mind on things. And you mix together different writing styles. Was this difficult in an academic, sociological context, for example – or was it something that you've always found enough space for, by working across different disciplines and areas?

I began writing as a journalist, and that teaches you to write concisely, and I also learned how to edit other people's work as well, quite ruthlessly. *Beyond the Pale* was difficult to write because it combined a lot of different kinds of material. I never thought about it in terms of a particular discipline as I didn't have an academic job at that point. It took me ten years to write, with two kids and different kinds of jobs that I was lucky to get and unlucky to lose, and a lot of time to reflect on things I'd already written and time to try things out. And then there was the deep engagement with feminists of my generation or a bit older, you know, like bell hooks, June Jordan, Adrienne Rich, essayists who wrote from the heart about difficult political things and who moved seamlessly between more abstract, theoretical issues and personal

experience without needlessly putting themselves at the centre. I think I learned to write from listening and talking to them and reading their work and it was this that helped me to develop my own voice. But academic writing was something else.

When I finished *Beyond the Pale*, a feminist history journal in the States asked me to write an article summarising the argument. I had no idea how to go about it and felt very intimidated at first - as if I had to use a different voice simply because it was an academic publication. So I wrote a short version and it was fine apparently, and I realised that it's more important to have something to say than dress it up in a particular kind of language. But also I was giving talks in universities long before I worked for one - that could also be quite intimidating, especially in places like UC Santa Cruz with people like Donna Haraway in the audience. It's the grilling afterwards where people try to catch you out. Mind you, talking about whiteness in those days was usually met by stony silence. I got used to that after a while too.

So did you do your PhD after working at Searchlight?

I got my PhD through publication in 1999, after submitting my book and two or three essays to Cambridge, where I had been an undergraduate. I had to have a viva, which, considering the book had been out for several years, was a bit strange. It was so rigorous that I was in quite a rage afterwards. Academic writing has become quite stifling now, I think - probably because of the insane pressure to publish journal articles. I haven't written that many to be honest. I once had a review where they said: 'this is not an article, it's an essay', and they needed 'a greater sense of what research the author has actually done'. It was a thinking piece about the politics of resentment that has turned out to be rather prescient.

What about the visual and your own visual production, how does that fit in?

I became a photographer while I was working at Searchlight and it quickly became something that was inseparable from my writing... I find I often describe photographs: not necessarily my own, but ones I've come across that say something specific. I've taken so many pictures of the wretched crossroads as well. I don't know what it is I am trying to capture. It just looks like a signpost against the backdrop of fields. But I did paint one of the fields the other day and I think that's going to be the cover. It's a way of connecting to the project: a way of expressing something about that spot, reminding myself that I was there. In the old days when I used to teach geography, I used to show my students a slide of a ploughed field and say 'you think that's just a field don't you? But really it's a factory for producing a crop for profit, not food for eating'. I seem to be still stuck on the same image - I'm obsessed by the history of fertiliser at the moment.

And I think an image makes a subject more interesting. For *Military Migrants*, I took some amazing pictures of people I met, just to remember what they look like - but I wasn't allowed to publish them. The kind of photography I do is in a way quite personal, so I can go somewhere like Lee Valley and take the same picture every time, but what's important for me is the moment of taking it, or feeling joy at seeing the light on water, or naked branches against the sky. It's being there, at that time, and then holding onto it as a visual memory, or record.

And you've been doing some Brexit paintings?

Yes. Art's been very important on and off, for a very long time. Photography is a way of doing something visual that I can do quite easily along with other things. Painting is more demanding I find, and it can really interrupt my writing. Recently I've been painting quite intensely and moving more towards abstraction, which I've not done before. I had a very creative aunt who gave me an empty book to write down my ideas and poems. It was such a lovely thing for a kid! Because it made you feel that what you write is worthwhile, that it's a natural thing to do. I can still remember what it looked like. I was thinking the other day how important that was at the time and it probably contributed to my wanting to be a writer in fact.

Going back to my earlier question about combining different threads, have you found ways to integrate your visual work with your writing?

One of the things I've worked on fairly consistently for the last few years is the politics of memorialisation and the cultural heritage of war, especially World War 1. In 2013 I was invited by some Swedish feminists to collaborate on a project looking at how military deaths in Afghanistan were treated in several different European countries. I chose to do the chapter on new monuments, and that got me thinking about war memorials, for the first time. I learned from my daughter, who is an art historian, that it's really important to ask: how did it come to be in that location, who paid for it, who designed it?

I was just starting to put together a feminist walking tour of war-related monuments in central London when the Millicent Fawcett memorial was installed in Parliament Square. What a wasted opportunity! When you look at the way that she was complicit with the policy of holding civilians in concentration camps in the Anglo-Boer/South African war, you have to ask: what kind of feminism is this? We're all supposed to worship at the feet of Millicent Fawcett as the most amazing suffragist campaigner, whose success was not only registered in 1918 (with the vote), but also subsequently in equal rights for girls and women, to this day. But stories are always more complicated than that - people's lives are more complicated.

I mean this was an opportunity to say 'Fawcett led a complex life too, she was a liberal and she was also an imperialist'. When you go back and look at her role as head of the Ladies Commission in 1899-1901, it's clear she wanted to be in with the war planners, saying 'the camps are ok in principle - you just need to organise them better'. Whereas there were many other amazing women who said 'no, war is barbaric, it's not going to solve anything and we are not going to be part of it'.

So what kind of progressive intersectional memorial would you like to see?

Well that's the thing isn't it, it would have to be more abstract, not figurative, and not based around a person, for one thing. Statues of single individuals are bound to be problematic when they are expected to represent a movement. There are other aspects of the relationship between militarism and the struggle for women's suffrage that complicate things too. For example, by 1918 governments were afraid because of what was happening in Russia, and in Germany too, and they thought if they gave the suffragists a few crumbs, they would be quiet and settle down, as many of them weren't particularly radical, and were patriots, like Fawcett, who had given their

support to the war effort in 1914. I mean, feminist historians have written about these dynamics for years, it's nothing new. But the memorial to Fawcett, and the tokenistic pictures of assorted activists around the plinth - this was a missed opportunity. To be honest I found it astonishing that there wasn't more criticism at the time.

For a while this made me want to go back and update *Beyond the Pale* for the twenty-first century - there's so much about war and militarism in there that I hadn't made anything of, but of course there's a lot that could be added. I ended up writing something about the politics of war and peace in relation to feminism in the context of imperialism. Actually what I'd really like to do at some point is a project around the idea of peace and security, asking the question: how might we see our futures differently? Trying to think more towards that horizon, *for* that horizon, rather than always being against.

There's an initiative called *Rethinking Security*, which came out of the thinking of a number of key peace activists and analysts and writers: people like Paul Rogers, who often writes for Open Democracy about emerging technologies of violence as well as the causes and interconnections. In 2014 they produced this document called the Ammerdown Manifesto, which sets out an alternative paradigm of global security. Building on the UN definition of security meaning freedom from want, freedom from fear and hunger, their vision encompassed a much wider set of issues that produced insecurity: resource scarcity, climate change, different kinds of violence, political repression and so on. Military force is relegated to being only one tool to use in particular, well-defined circumstances, as a last resort. I've used the document in teaching as it helps to provide an alternative vision of a world beyond war, and it has a sort of magical effect on students. I remember a moment at the end of a course about war and militarisation, when one of the students said 'But why don't they teach us this in primary school?' I found that very compelling.

'Peace' is often evoked as quite a blank category.

Yes, the word peace is quite bland; it can sometimes simply mean the absence of fighting. The post-war period that our generation grew up in was one of peace or so we thought, not being aware of all the small wars that were going on in the background, let alone the Cold War.

When I was at the Women's Design Service, the first thing I did was write a report on women's safety on housing estates. It connected with my work on the racist media discourse around the spectre of white women being threatened by young black men. It was quite an interesting move to go from an anti-racist, feminist political analysis to a more practical argument around design and safety. I interviewed a number of women residents about what was making them feel safe or unsafe; and of course it was everything from street lighting to whether the entrance to a tower block was locked, whether there was a concierge, whether that made a difference or not, whether they wore a uniform, whether the council came to do repairs or not. And I was telling someone about this just the other day, and then realised that, actually, that was a microcosm of thinking with people about how they understood the idea of security: asking what might make you feel safe about where you live, or thinking about the environment your kids were growing up in. I'd like to do a more interactive thing, where people could reflect on these questions, both alone and together with others.

That would be a really fantastic thing to do. Because then you could see how these questions can be approached from multiple perspectives and political priorities, and it's a question of working together so they don't conflict; what might make you feel more safe might make me feel more threatened. Or, if you took something for granted, you might realise that you haven't really thought this through from a different point of view.

And finally, how do you position your work in relation to the waves of feminism?

When *Beyond the Pale* was re-issued in 2015, a young woman said to me 'but how did you find out about all these historical women?!' and I was like 'Well we went to libraries, we spent a lot of time looking for them!'. Then I remember when the 'third wave' happened, and my students at Yale at the time said 'we don't want Adrienne Rich, we want third wave writers', and at first I thought, what do they do, who are they, and why do we have to have waves? But now I do think that generational shifts are really important. I'm always interested to know how people synthesise things and what younger writers are bringing that's new, and I do believe it's important to anchor your political analysis in shared formative moments. I think these things really do shape you, and your perspective. And there's enormous value in hearing from people who were politicised at different phases of a movement. But it has to be two-way. There seems to be more interest in the early days of the women's movement now, but the danger is that individuals who made significant interventions get left out of the narrative as it shrinks over time. It's inevitable that this happens, but you have to remember that the process of writing a movement's history is also deeply political.

Stuart Hall used to say 'imagine how the world looked to this person, whoever it is you are reading, when they were 21' - which would be the age of most undergraduates now - 'and then think about what the world looks like to you, what are your priorities, what are you scared of, what do you think are the dominant issues at the moment?' That seemed to me a very creative way of thinking about age difference, as well as locating ourselves - and the authors and theorists who we like - in particular historical circumstances. If you mix people from different generations, it can be really generative. Let's be upfront about where we are coming from, and not write people off because of the generation they are supposed to belong to. We all have to work to try and understand the conditions that we face today.

This interview took place in May 2019

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ⁱ See <https://www.wds.org.uk/> and Women's Design Service, *At Women's Convenience: Handbook on the Design of Women's Public Toilets*, 1990.