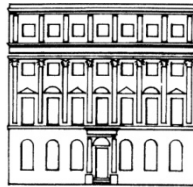


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Katharina Rietzler:

*Languages of the Global: Women and International Political Thought*  
Conference Report

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## CONFERENCE REPORTS

*Languages of the Global: Women and International Political Thought.* Workshop funded by the Consortium of the Humanities and the Arts South-East England (CHASE) and held at the German Historical Institute London, 16 July 2015. Convener: Valeska Huber (GHIL).

This one-day workshop focused on the contribution of women to international political thought in the long twentieth century. Bringing together scholars working across a range of disciplines, including international relations, feminist theory, imperial and global history, international history, modern British social and political history, and the history of science, it drew on strengths in the history of internationalism and international thought and beyond.

Valeska Huber (GHIL), Katharina Rietzler (Sussex), and Tamson Pietsch (Brunel/Sydney) presented an introductory session on the current state of the field and the methodological challenges to writing a history of women and 'thinking the global'. While some fields, not least diplomatic and international history, have in recent years become much more receptive to addressing questions of gender in international politics broadly defined, others seem less committed to systematically writing women into their narratives. This is the case with historical international relations, which has poured tremendous energy into re-writing the history of IR as a discipline. Scholars have analysed the discipline's deep roots in race theory and Eurocentrism and rediscovered forgotten non-white theorists of international relations, but they have not done the same for women and gender. Therefore, a systematic analysis of the international political thought of women seems long overdue, especially as there is a substantial body of work to build on in feminist international relations theory, the history of women's activist networks, and intellectual history. Future work might be oriented along three questions: where did women gather to argue about 'the international'? What will we find

The full programme can be found under 'Events and Conferences' on the GHIL's website <[www.ghil.ac.uk](http://www.ghil.ac.uk)>.

beyond institutional history? What is international political thought and how does it have to be redefined to include women?

The second part of the workshop further explored how to build on existing approaches through a discussion of a classic essay in intellectual history by Linda Kerber, ‘“Why should Girls be Learn’d and Wise?”: The Unfinished Work of Alice Mary Baldwin’,<sup>1</sup> and an ensuing discussion of theoretical and methodological approaches. Helen McCarthy (QMUL) and Jessica Reinisch (Birkbeck) debated the tensions between writing a history of women’s intellectual life and a history of their intellectual contributions, while Christine von Oertzen (MPI Berlin) reflected on whether the ‘activist turn’ in women’s history with its focus on women’s agency and the building and functioning of activist networks may not have sidelined a systematic exploration of the ideas that mattered to women internationalists. In the ensuing discussion, Patricia Owens (Sussex) cautioned against defining ‘the international’ and ‘the global’ too loosely and argued that new approaches needed to focus on building a useable history for critical IR scholars.

The next two sessions focused on women thinkers and the concepts that they used to theorize international relations. Workshop participants presented short case studies from their own research, including, for instance, female UNRRA workers (Jessica Reinisch), women humanitarians (Francesca Piana, Birkbeck / Swiss National Science Foundation), international civil servants (Helen McCarthy and Valeska Huber), foundation officers (Katharina Rietzler), but also artists committed to a ‘pax cultura’ (Tamson Pietsch). The final session on ‘languages of the global’ analysed and problematized concepts that mattered to internationalist women, for example, maternalism, friendship, cultural relativism, and global citizenship. Natalia Cecire (Sussex) argued that fictive scenarios and counterfactuals were also a powerful tool for women intellectuals and should be included in an exploration of women’s international thought. The workshop concluded with a discussion on how to expand the network, funding, and future events, ideally, a follow-up conference in 2016.

KATHARINA RIETZLER (Sussex)

<sup>1</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays by Linda K. Kerber* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997), 224–58.