

***Speaking the Activism of
Black Feminism***
26th March 2015



Conference Report

About Trafford Rape Crisis

Trafford Rape Crisis is a feminist collective run by women for women. The collective was formed in January 2010 to provide a service for women who have experienced rape, sexual abuse or any other form of unwanted sexual violation, no matter when or where. Since then TRC has run a free helpline, email service and drop-ins. TRC aims to support women survivors of all forms of sexual violation so they may maintain control over their lives. TRC also raises awareness about rape and sexual abuse committed against women and girls, regardless of their background or circumstances. TRC has a dedicated service for Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic (BAME) women, provided by BAME women.

Introduction and context

This was the second black feminist conference organised by Trafford Rape Crisis. The first conference, ***Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory*** in 2012 was a huge success and proved the need for black feminist spaces such as this.

Our aims for the ***Speaking the Activism of Black Feminism*** conference were:

- *To raise awareness of our BAME service*
- *To engage and encourage local black women*
- *To celebrate our 5th birthday and gain strength for the next five years*
- *To explore how theories developed by Black Feminists can be brought into action in the everyday running of a Rape Crisis Centre*
- *To explore questions such as:*
 - ~ *What is the psychological impact of racism and sexism and other forms of oppression?*
 - ~ *Why are specialist services for Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic women important?*
 - ~ *What is the relationship between experience, activism and scholarship? How can we put Black Feminist theory into practice?*
 - ~ *What tools can we find to fight oppression and sexual violence?*

We publicised the event through different media: we sent flyers of the event by post to 60 organisations and followed these up with emails; we used many different mailing lists and promoted the event through social media such as facebook and twitter.

Delegates

150 delegates attended from across the UK including: **Bradford, Cambridge, Coventry, Edinburgh, Leeds, London, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Newcastle, Norwich, Nottingham, Peterborough, Sheffield, Spalding** and **York**. We had students and academics from University of Edinburgh, Queen Mary University, University of Leeds, University of Salford, University of Manchester, Sheffield Hallam University, Open University, Justus-Liebig University (Giessen, Germany), Manchester Metropolitan University, University of York, Lancaster University, University of Central Lancashire. The conference was also attended by representatives of agencies and third sector organisations such as: the **GAP Unit, For Books' Sake, Imkaan, Independent Choices, Lesbian Immigration Support Group (LISG), LGBTYNW, Manchester Childrens' Services, Manchester Rape Crisis, Manchester Women's Aid, Merseycare NHS, Peterborough Rape Crisis, Rape Crisis England and Wales, Saheli, Tabu, TDAS, The Pankhurst Trust, Trafford Housing Trust, Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) and YES Matters.**

Speakers and summaries

Manju Pearce, Volunteer Coordinator at **Trafford Rape Crisis (TRC)**, opened the conference by introducing TRC, the different services it provides, and what it means to work with feminist approaches and as a collective.

Nina Held, Development Worker at **Trafford Rape Crisis**, then moved on to introduce the theme of the conference and why TRC had decided to organise an event such as this one. As the Black Feminist writer Audre Lorde explained: '*Black Feminism is not white feminism in blackface*'. Therefore black feminism should not be seen in relation to white feminism but in its own right. Black Feminist theories are important for *any* feminist and social justice thinking. Nina explained that TRC faced some difficulties during the run up to the conference (such as not getting funding for the conference and not selling many academic tickets). These difficulties illustrate why there was a need for the conference and for letting the activism of Black Feminism speak.

In the first keynote speech of the day 'Mi vex: silencing, anger and institutional pain', **Dr Shirley Anne Tate** (Associate Professor at the University of Leeds) used pain as an analytical frame to explore how Black women cope with an imposed silencing from within white feminism whilst maintaining subjective and Black Feminist community cohesiveness. By drawing on Black Feminist theory and own life experiences she illustrated how psychic institutional pain in UK universities can manifest itself through the grinding of the teeth. There was a lively discussion after Shirley's paper, really kick-starting the conference. As one tweet summarised it: '*Excellent speech on silencing, anger & institutional pain by Dr Shirley Tate to kickstart [#TRCBlackFem](#). Thank you, Shirley.*'

Betty Sio, CEO and founding member of **The Pacific Island Safety and Prevention Project ('The project')** and **Marai Larasi**, Director of **Imkaan**, then had a '*fascinating conversation about space, place and colonisation*' (tweet). '**The project**' is based in New Zealand and delivers a range of support services to Pacific Island families with a focus on the prevention of violence in Pacific families. **Imkaan** is a UK-based, Black Feminist organisation dedicated to addressing violence against women and girls from an intersectional perspective (by looking at how age, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability can affect girls and women's journeys and experiences). Betty and Marai spoke about the ways their organisations work, and how both organisations have come together in a partnership that is perhaps best described as a Black Feminist '*conversation*' over the last 18 months. They shared reflections on connections, sharing strengths, mobilisation, disrupting colonial legacies and [re]claiming notions of 'community'.

Ann Phoenix (Professor at the University of London) explained the concept of Intersectionality, the recognition that social categories never operate in isolation in everyday life and practices, and explained why Intersectionality continues to be crucial to considerations of 'Speaking the Activism of Black Feminism'. One tweeter was '*Excited to hear from Ann Phoenix on Intersectionality*'.

Just before the lunch break, **Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST)** performed '**Still We Rise**', which communicated the stark realities of life and injustices faced by women seeking sanctuary in the UK, through dance, song, drama, poetry and spoken word. The women expressed their resilience and resistance to the ultimate inhumanity experienced within the asylum system at Yarls Wood Detention Centre. It was a '*moving performance*', as tweeted by many attendees, and the chorus of one of the songs will last for long in people's memories: '*We want Yarls Wood to close, not just for today, not just for tomorrow, but forever*'.

After the lunch break three members of **WAST**, **Maryam, Ruth and Jacqueline**, shared their stories, and talked about how organisations such as **WAST** (or the **Lesbian Immigration Support Group**) are life-saving for women asylum seekers in Greater Manchester. The audience was encouraged to support such groups and campaigns, including the current one to 'Shut down Yarls Wood' (www.change.org/p/theresa-may-british-home-secretary-end-the-detention-of-women-who-seek-asylum).

The writer and activist **Amrit Wilson** examined the Black, South Asian, and Minority Ethnic women's movement against violence against women and its relationship with the British state by tracing its changing politics of race and gender. It was an inspiring talk, highlighting the micro and macro politics of Black Feminism, or as an attendee tweeted: '*Thanks so much @AmritWilson for powerful reflections on challenges facing black feminisms in a racist state*'.

The audience was then in for a treat. Award-winning writer of fiction, poetry and plays **Jackie Kay** read from her book **Red Dust Road**. Jackie's account of how she first met her birth father thoroughly amused the audience. As some participants tweeted: *'We've just been taken on a wonderful journey to the Nicon Hotel, Abuja by the even more wonderful Jackie Kay'*, *'Jackie Kay fabulous as ever'*.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Professor at Columbia University/ US) in conversation with **Dr Surya Nayak** (Senior Lecturer at the University of Salford) discussed why *'Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface'* and the question of Black-Women-Only services and spaces. By looking at the micro and macro level, they had a lively discussion about whether the question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' can be re-read as 'Can the activism of Black feminist theory speak?'. Some quotes participants liked and tweeted about were *'literature trains your ethical muscles'* (Spivak) and *'education is liberation, but what we access or don't access is political'* (Nayak). *'We are #privileged to listen to Nayak, Spivak and Tate thank you'*.

Evening fundraiser

After dinner approximately 80 people attended our fundraising evening which was packed with amazing performances by award-winning artists. Poet, playwright and director **Cheryl Martin** opened the stage performing some of her powerful poems and songs. **Shamshad Khan** read some of her poetry, one of which was specifically written for us ('the rape poem'). **Shazia Mirza**, who was touring India, Singapore, Norway and Sweden stopped by in Manchester to perform some of her best comedy to us and really made us laugh. Performance poet, actor, writer and theatre practitioner **Yusra Warsama** read some very powerful poetry, and professional singer, songwriter and vocal coach **Elva Parinaud** sang some beautiful songs at the end of an amazing evening.

'Fantastic evening! Thank you [@TraffordRC](#) [#TRCBlackFem](#)'

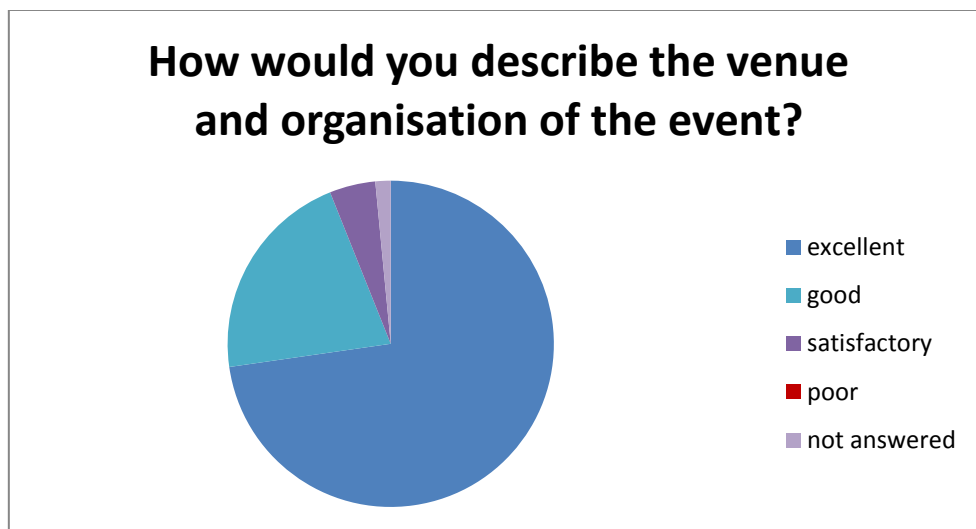
Continuing the Conversation...

The next morning we continued our conversation at a local café, the Nip and Tiddle, over brunch. As a nice surprise Jackie Kay came in and read more of her poetry. It was an emotional morning and a perfect end to a superb event. Jackie tweeted: *'What a lovely bunch of feminists to read poems to over brunch!!'*.

Feedback from delegates

- ~ Today's 'Speaking the Activism of Black Feminism': timely, provoking, a call to act: [@TraffordRC](#) [@wastcampaigning](#) [@AmritWilson](#) [#TRCBlackFem](#)
- ~ [@TraffordRC](#) Thank you for a challenging & inspiring Black Feminist Conference and for providing space Necessary for action
- ~ [@TraffordRC](#) it was a fantastic day yesterday really enjoyed it
- ~ Thanks so much to [@TraffordRC](#) for organising [#TRCBlackFem](#) yesterday - it was brilliant!

The Conference was evaluated mainly through a feedback form that was distributed at the conference and filled in by 66 delegates. We also received emails with feedback after the event. In addition, we looked at what was tweeted about the conference before and after by searching different keywords. At the end of the conference 74% of delegates thought that the organisation of the event had been excellent, 22% thought it was good, 4% that it was satisfactory and none of the delegates thought that it had been poor.



98% of the delegates said that the conference inspired and encouraged them. Many left comments such as; “As a black woman, who came to UK as a refugee, this has been an inspiration and honour to be in a room with amazing Black feminist” and “I have taken away quite a few notes from key speakers and I will be conducting my own research into some areas”.

100% of delegates who responded to the feedback questions confirmed that their knowledge of issues BAME women face had been enhanced, and 98% confirmed that their knowledge of services TRC offers to BAME women had increased. 97%

said they were more likely to signpost to TRC generally after this event and 98% were more likely to signpost to TRC's BAME service specifically. 94% also said that their knowledge of using a feminist approach to working with women was improved. These figures clearly show that the conference was and continues to be well needed and the aims of the conference were reached and even exceeded.

Feedback about the event:

- *Thank you for an important event.*
- ***A fabulous event - totally inspiring.***
- *Fantastic welcoming atmosphere - amazing energy in the room.*
- ***It made me want to follow a path where Feminism will be the centre of my work.***
- *Thank you so much for a fantastically invigorating & indeed nourishing day!*
- *A lovely environment, and communal energy which is the best part of a conference.*
- *Very inspirational speeches and very powerful women.*
- *Great Conference! Very inspiring! Great speakers! Very, very inspiring!*
- ***The day was fantastic and a real rollercoaster of emotions hearing people's stories. A real eye opener and fantastic event to be a part of.***
- *The conversations were fantastic. Could have listened in all night!*
- *Thanks for today all speakers were brilliant especially Amrit and Jackie.*
- *Really fantastic event & variety of speakers. Loved the WAST choir & Jackie Kay's readings.*
- *Thank you for hosting a brilliant event and it has been an absolute pleasure to come along.*
- ***Amazing for the thought processes & for thinking about the need for Black feminist activism.***
- *As a black woman I feel the event gave me more understanding of black feminism.*
- ***I admit that I am fairly new when it comes to labelling myself as a Feminist and it was insightful to listen to people who have been actively involved in women's issues for a longer period of time than I have.***
- *I found that everyone (both the attendees and the speakers) had something vital to bring to the day (regardless of their profession, or what stage they are*

at in their career), in terms of the discussion but also in raising awareness of what Black Feminism is and themes that are tied to it such as intersectionality.

- *It would be amazing if it is possible to carry out events like this every year. I understand that so much planning and thought goes into events like this but at the same time it would be a fantastic opportunity to create more spaces for important discussion.*
- ***It was a brilliant event and I shall do what I can as a student to spread the word.***
- *Pleased there was a critical analysis of capitalist patriarchal restrictions & state authority on practice.*
- *Pacing of the event at both the conference and the fundraiser definitely showed that a lot of thought was put into organising the event and it allowed the attendees to keep up with the wealth of information that was presented.*

Feedback about TRC:

- *A much smaller organisation than I'd expected - amazing that you achieve so much. Shows the power of determination from TRC staff and volunteers.*
- ***I want you to know something wonderful is happening in TRC which cannot be stopped. TRC is a force in motion which cannot but produce the desired result and even more.***
- *Always in awe of the services provided by TRC - looking forward to further development of its services such as an **annual** Black Feminist Conference. Can the MOJ fund this & Trafford Council?*
- *I always respected deeply TRC's work. But now my views are much enriched.*
- ***It is rooted in solid theory.***
- *Always been great organisation with a strong reputation.*
- *I didn't know much about the organisation. On the website there are some information, but what I've seen today was amazing! Touching people's lives with feminist activism is something that goes beyond any information available online!*
- *I think it is doing an amazing work.*
- *You're doing great work.*
- ***I hope TRC and Black Feminism keep going from strength to strength.***

Impact...

What change will you make to your practice after the event?

- ***I am going to practice with more confidence, strength in my convictions - the solidarity of today has given me strength.***
- *Listen.*
- *To keep Black feminism and perspective on the agenda.*
- *Support the 'micro' discussion of Black Feminist Theory - help others discover the magic of Black Feminist Theory.*
- ***I will hear the anger of BAME Women & acknowledge systemic racism that lit it.***
- *Read more Black Feminists' work, and the work of Audre Lorde.*
- *Use understanding of Black Feminism in my activism in more overt way.*
- *A confidence in the issues that affect Black & minority ethnic women.*
- *To think more about enacting oppression/power privilege..*
- *I will seek to analyse global social policy beyond the colonial paradigm.*
- ***Promote intersectionality approach to understanding inequality and valuing diversity.***
- *Consider intersectionality and implications all over again.*
- *To consider multiple identities & be more aware of how very personal this is.*
- *Deeper understanding of needs and seriousness of oppression.*
- *Be more specific of the generalisations I make.*
- ***I'll think about how to deliver information and knowledge on feminism to other people/spaces/other than academic/intellectual.***
- *To encourage discussion.*
- *Look at setting up women's discussion group around faith and secular working.*
- ***To promote the concept from the quote 'Silence does not protect us' - empower service users to use their voice.***
- *Listen more and encourage people to speak out for themselves, to participate in decisions that affect them.*
- *I'll try to find a relevant job to institutes of feminist issues. I will share my notes with my feminist lesbian collective.*
- *To become more aware of groups such as WAST and to look into ways I can either help or volunteer in the future.*