



## Remembering Jackie, Ten Years On – Guest Editors’ Introduction

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It was with some astonishment that the three of us began the conversation last year about ways in which to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jackie Kirk’s untimely death in Afghanistan: where had the time gone? And where had her work taken us since we lost her? And how fresh and insightful Jackie’s work still feels to us, a decade after her brilliant mind was lost! As we talked about these things – what has changed since 2008; what, regrettably, has stayed the same, or worsened – we realised that revisiting Jackie’s work in an issue specifically devoted to exploring the strong social justice thrust in all she did would offer several opportunities for reflection, both on the theories she developed and the praxis she modelled up to the time of her death.

The first and most obvious of our reasons for inviting this Special Issue of *Studies in Social Justice* is that we still miss Jackie so much: not only her formidable mind, but her humour, her cheer, her energy. We miss what she brought to our collective feminist work with some of the most marginalised people in the world – girls, including displaced and refugee girls, and their female teachers. Jackie modelled, for us and all who met her, what a social justice activist can do. She was a dedicated mover, not only in her wide geographical outreach, but of emphasis and focus: out from the centres of power into the peripheries, where she delved carefully into the challenges facing young women’s educational access and illuminated how teachers manage in emergency situations, including some that drag on for years. For her, feminism was praxis; policy was for the humblest and least-represented

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people in a community; and academia was a site from which to give politically-informed recommendations for action by governments and the international community. Ten years on, we find ourselves indelibly shaped by her example; her capacity to position herself in the work she did, to focus creatively and innovatively on producing praxis-based research theories as a means to contribute to an anti-oppression activist agenda (Potts & Brown, 2005). She continues to show us how to be the feminist-in-the-field.

Secondly, we wanted to honour Jackie's devotion to putting her feet on the ground – a commitment so great it put her in mortal danger – and to her commitment to working critically with institutions that both shape and replicate practices that result in social exclusion. Jackie was an academic “of a committed practical sort, eyes always on the material conditions of real women, writing always in a way that acknowledges those real bodies and those real struggles” (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 37). Her contribution to social justice research came from her commitment to working out how research methods themselves shape the world. To do this, Jackie immersed herself in parts of the world – and ideas about this world – that were hardly visible at the time. Her feminist impetus was to see the girl behind the woman in the refugee classroom; to explore the political and social motivations of teachers in emergencies, including in situations where women are tightly constrained, their values and responses so highly-policed they disappear from view. Her recognition that such teachers would be burdened not only with the public gender expectations of their society and a generalised lack of interest in the education of girls, but also with the additional, private stresses of loss, war trauma, displacement, poor and precarious living conditions, and other micro-traumas, led her directly to the innovative method of the “healing classroom,” still in use today, which is founded on her observation that a well-supported teacher has a greater ability not only to sustain herself in difficult circumstances, but to support and nurture the girls in her care.<sup>1</sup>

Jackie's practical social justice impetus also led to her embeddedness in under-resourced classrooms where she formed the intimate bonds that are crucial for anyone working below the radar, especially to amplify the most marginal voices. She excelled at finding ways to reveal the unseeable. In the intimate spaces she inhabited alongside students and learners, Jackie's eyes were opened to the parlous state of girls' reproductive health and knowledge, an insight which led her, along with Marni, to pioneer new thinking about adolescence and the challenges girls face in managing their menstruation. She made the important links between girls' menstrual hygiene management and their ability to stay in school, and she also thought about how women teachers could be supported not to miss precious teaching days; and now, there is a global campaign in more than seventy countries to destigmatize menstruation and free girls to learn, and to be taught by women teachers who

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<sup>1</sup> This resource continues to be used in emergency situations and is available at <http://healingclassrooms.org/1/4/1.html>

understand their needs.<sup>2</sup> From being a justification for attitudes that girls are not fit to learn in a classroom, the fact of their normal bodily function and their need for specific material support, including suitable toilets, is now so established as to be unremarkable in most places. Even in Afghanistan, a country with a century-old history of hostility to girls' education, slow progress is being made to teach girls about their bodies, self-care, sexual and reproductive health, and the Ministries of Education and Public Health are gradually accepting girls' right to know themselves. We can think of few finer examples of social justice in action than this trajectory. We also want to honour her commitment to academic activism through scholarship. Jackie, with Claudia (and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh), co-founded the journal *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, as a way to advance work in the field of girls and young women. Jackie never saw the first issue, which was "in press" at the time of her death, but clearly it is part of her legacy. This special issue of *Studies in Social Justice* is a further recognition of her dedication to nurturing scholarly networks. *Girlhood Studies* continues to recognize Jackie's contributions through, for example, a special issue devoted to Jackie's work (Volume 3, Issue 2) guest edited by Fiona Leach (with Claudia), and a commemorative essay on her work on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death (Khan, Mitchell, & Sommer, 2018).

Finally, there is the lingering pain of Afghanistan and other seemingly intractable military-political crises behind this special issue. When we heard the news of the attack that killed Jackie and her colleagues, we remember trying to console ourselves with arguments that their murder at the hands of the Taliban – a political organisation that not only forbade any form of education for girls or women, but violently enforced this ban – might prove, one day, not to be in vain. Someday we might make sense of it as contributing to an impetus to challenge and overcome the legacies of this ban, and perhaps to usher in a new era of peace in this ravaged country. The link between the education of females and the probability of social peace is well established (Davies & True, 2019; Farr, 2009), and feminist peace activists working in a world of declining peace and security for women hold steadily onto the belief that the continued struggle for girls' education is a cornerstone of peacebuilding, and must be diligently pursued even in the direst circumstances. For us, as for Jackie, the pursuit of social justice is not an abstraction but a daily commitment to hold fast even under fire, to build community, praxis, theory and effective social policy as the cornerstones of women's resilience to the attritions of patriarchal militarisation – even as the bombs and suicide vests explode around us. How do Jackie's words weigh in the place that took her life, a decade later? This question was often in Vanessa's mind when she spent close to a year in Afghanistan (2017-18), and indeed, Jackie is well-remembered in Kabul. The faces of Afghan women educators still light up at the mention of her name: but they soon close again,

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://menstrualhygieneday.org/>

and it was a wrench to discover that their fear of being recognised as commentators on her legacy was still too great for anyone to agree to write – or even be interviewed for this special issue – about what her life and work continues to mean for Afghan women educators. It is a particularly bitter pill that Afghanistan is once more considered officially to be at war, that the Taliban is on the ascent again, and that small gains made in girls' enrolment in formal education are once more reversing (Duncanson & Farr, 2019) while the political appetite for girls' education declines.

### **Overview of the Special Issue**

To honour the many aspects of her large legacy, this special issue includes two regular sections of an issue of *Studies in Social Justice*, with the first edited by Marni and Claudia focusing on peer-reviewed academic articles. The second section is more strongly shaped than usual by dispatches, of which Vanessa is the editor. Jackie's life testifies to the power of social justice in action, and our decision to invite a larger-than-usual number of reports from the field, from practitioners who agreed to reflect on the continuing helpfulness of Jackie's academic writing to their field praxis, is testimony to our commitment to amplifying this aspect of her approach.

### *Articles*

Jackie was committed to the rigorous conduct of research that could lead to policy change. She was also committed to research that engaged with participants at the centre, as evidenced by articles included in this special issue that make use of participatory methodologies.

The section starts with Karen Monkman's article, which tells the story of a girls' education program in Southeast Asia, highlighting how the research team started with the views of villagers on *educating girls* and the ways in which these perspectives ultimately shaped local policy and practice. Jackie's deep interest in teachers and curriculum is highlighted in Emily Anderson and Kelly Grace's work in Cambodia. In their article, they examine the historical text of *Chbab Srey* as a cultural artifact to deepen an understanding of the cultural and contextual conditions of teachers' lives and girls' schooling experiences.

Jackie carried out fieldwork in South Africa early in 2000. Her passion for "doing" is well-represented in Relebohile Moletsane's article "'Stop the War on Women's Bodies': Facilitating a Girl-Led March Against Sexual Violence in a Rural Community in South Africa." Moletsane's piece draws attention to the complexity of the work on girls' activism and what it means to be an adult ally in this work.

The intersection of menstruation and girls' education was a particular focus of Jackie's pioneering work, and Morrison and colleagues build on this foundation by examining girls' experiences with menstruation and schooling, along with community life, in Nepal, highlighting how community-focused interventions along with school-based approaches are needed to truly impact on the range of social, physical and mental barriers facing menstruating girls in Nepal. Also in line with Jackie's focus on the factors impacting girls' education, Landis and colleagues explore the relationship between child marriage, schooling and experiences of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their findings indicate the substantial negative impact of child marriage on a girl's participation in education, and increased vulnerability to sexual violence. Similarly, Jackie was very committed to engaging with girls' education in Pakistan, and the article by Ann Emerson explores girls' notions of citizenship as learned within the Pakistan education system, using participatory and qualitative methodologies. The methodologies highlight the problematic nature of citizen education in reinforcing gender inequalities in the larger society.

We end this section with an article that expands on Jackie's strong interest in the visual, and ways that girls and young women can participate at the centre of policy change. The article by Milka Nyariro, a doctoral candidate from the same department at McGill University from which Jackie graduated, explores a photovoice project with girls and young women who were forced to leave school when they became pregnant. Nyariro highlights the critical role played by the photographs in facilitating dialogue with community and stakeholders.

### *Dispatches*

One of Jackie's strong commitments was to doing what she called "over there and over here" work with girls in families that had recently immigrated to Quebec. The local focus of her work is echoed in three of the dispatches in this special issue, all of which look at a Canada that has slowly moved forward in the long process of reconciling harms committed against the Indigenous population since the arrival of European settlers. We find strong echoes of her activist-academic work in "Planting a Healing Forest: Community Engagement," in which Lee Anne Block offers an account of efforts in her local community to design and execute an appropriate response to the call to action in the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which finished its first stage of work in December 2015.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Brulé's intervention, "The REDress Project: Casting an Indigenous Feminist Worldview on Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Programs in Ontario's Universities," discusses a national feminist-led artistic intervention

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=905>

to commemorate the more than one thousand aboriginal women who are murdered and missing across the nation.<sup>4</sup> Sheryl Smith-Gilman, the 2010 recipient of The Jackie Kirk Fieldwork Fellowship Award, offers a reflection on “Developing a Pedagogy of Listening: Experiences in an Indigenous Preschool,” in which she describes how Jackie’s focus on marginalised communities became a cornerstone of her own doctoral fieldwork in a First Nations community in Kahnawake, Mohawk Territory.

Three of this issue’s dispatches reflect on how Jackie’s work inside classrooms continues to be helpful today. In her discussion, “Teachers for Teachers: Advocating for Stronger Programs and Policies for and with Refugee Teachers in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya,” Mary Mendenhall reflects on the kinds of “spontaneous” and “tentative” teachers first observed by Jackie Kirk and her colleague Rebecca Winthrop in situations of upheaval, when adults come to the aid of displaced and refugee children in camps. S. M. Hani Sadati offers an account of his steep fieldwork learning curve in “Cellphilmaking in Four ATVET Colleges; A Mirror, Reflecting Gender Issues in Ethiopia.” The pioneering work done by Jackie and Marni Sommer to highlight some of the hidden reasons that prevent girls from succeeding at school are brought up to date in a field reflection on “New Directions for Assessing Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in Schools: A Bottom-Up Approach to Measuring Program Success,” by Jacquelyn Haver and colleagues.

The final of this issue’s dispatches offers a dialogue between Heather Switzer and Kim Foulds, who commemorate Jackie as the spark for their “Feminist Friendship” in a reflection on how their own friendship was formed as they discovered the sub-field of girlhood studies through engagement with her work in the months after her death.

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We dedicate this special issue to all who continue on the path trod by Jackie, in her courageous pursuit of a world in which each girl would have her eyes and her mind opened by learning, and the fellowship that comes from learning in a safe community led, devised and protected by capable and confident women.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.thedressproject.org/>

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