Reckonings With The Past: A Cultural Geography Of (Re)Narrating Women's Histories Through Popular Culture

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This thesis presents results of original research undertaken by the author. The work has been conducted in accordance with the University of Nottingham's Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics and in accordance with the School of Geography's risk assessment procedures.

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ABSTRACT

Pivoting on the creation of a feminist revisionist history, this project establishes a cultural geography of the narration or re-narration of the histories, lives and achievements of female historical figures through different forms of popular culture. To achieve this, this project explores the *We Are Bess* photography exhibition, the children's non-fiction book *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls,* and the film *Hidden Figures.* Focusing its attention on the present-day engagement with history, this project explores the successes, complexities and critiques of creating a feminist revisionist history; illustrates how individual histories can be used to discuss broader theoretical ideas in feminist geography; and reveals the interconnected nature of women's experiences past and present.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A Cultural Geography of Creating a Feminist Revisionist History

This project establishes a cultural geography of the narration or re-narration of the histories, lives and experiences of female historical figures in the present day through different forms of popular culture. To achieve this, this project explores the *We Are Bess* photography exhibition, the children's non-fiction book *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls,* and the film *Hidden Figures.* In this way, this project pivots on the key concept of a feminist revisionist history which will be defined in this thesis as the rewriting of history from a feminist perspective. The three aforementioned cultural products approach a feminist revisionist history in slightly differing ways: [1] re-framing the way a well-known woman's history has already been told; [2] narrating women's lives centring on the idea of empowerment; and [3] rewriting women into a history in which they were previously absent.

This project is situated within the subdiscipline of cultural and historical geography. Framing the project geographically enables a move away from solely historical approaches, to a more dynamic and multifaceted approach which embeds and positions time in different spaces, and entangles it with concerns of representation, identity and meaning. This project also illustrates what this means for the writing of women's biographies, the production and politics of representation, and the consequences this has for its audience engagement. This project demonstrates the way in which the lives and experiences of female historical figures, told through popular culture, can be mobilised as a tool to address contemporary concerns, thus revealing the changing, or prevailing, gender inequality through time. In this way, this project contributes to the gaps in feminist approaches to cultural and historical geography highlighted by Moore (2018) in her call for an urgent engagement with public culture, specifically the gender politics of the present. This project engages with public culture through popular culture, acknowledging its role in shaping particular shared beliefs and values, and its potential to disrupt and challenges others. This will provide an alternative approach to uncovering women's histories within feminist historical geography, shifting the focus to the present day.

The main objectives of this project are threefold. First, a critical analysis of creating a feminist revisionist history through popular culture is carried out, highlighting the complexities, successes and critiques of these interventions. Second, this project demonstrates the way in which creating a feminist revisionist history through individual products and stories acts as a tool to address broader scale issues associated with contemporary feminist geography, most notably the idea of womanhood and multiple identities; the situated nature of knowledge; issues of inclusion and exclusion; and intersectionality. This is explored both through looking at the stories of female

historical figures as told through these products, but also through the production of, and public engagement with these interventions. Third and finally, this project highlights the interconnected nature of women's experiences in the past and the present, using historical women as a lens to study women today.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Chapter two presents a literature review, drawing on literature on feminist geographies, biography and representation, setting out the theoretical lens for this project. Chapter three outlines the methodology, emphasising the centrality of a feminist framework to this project and its research methods, as well as introducing biographical research and the interpretation of visual materials. This will be followed by three empirical chapters.

Chapter four is centred on the idea of womanhood and uses the example of the *We Are Bess* exhibition at Hardwick Hall exploring the life of Bess of Hardwick, Countess of Shrewsbury and a notable figure in Elizabethan society. This example encompasses the first approach to a feminist revisionist history, changing the way in which the well-known history of Bess of Hardwick has previously been told, moving away from the narratives dominated by male historians, which reflect the prevailing opinions of her husbands. The chapter argues that in creating a feminist revisionist history of the life of Bess of Hardwick, the exhibition demonstrates how the biography of one historical figure can illustrate the diverse, multifaceted nature of womanhood. It also acknowledges that a woman's identity is made up of multiple selves, meaning that there is no universal experience of being a woman. Underlying this argument, the chapter illustrates the way in which the experience of women in the past and in the present are interconnected, and the life of a historical figure such as Bess of Hardwick can be used to address many of the issues experienced by modern women today, issues that underpin the work of feminist geographers.

Chapter five addresses multiple key themes that are central to feminist geography through the case study of the children's non-fiction book *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls (2016)* by Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo, an illustrated collection of short stories detailing the lives and achievements of one hundred historical and contemporary women. This example demonstrates the second approach to a feminist revisionist history, narrating women's lives and experiences centred on the idea of empowerment. The chapter argues that in creating a feminist revisionist history, this book can challenge imaginative geographies of gender through inspiring and educating its audience. Secondly, it addresses the situated, partial nature of all knowledge and the consequences this has on its contents and the messages conveyed. The chapter also addresses the complexities of celebrating female historical figures, highlighting complicated issues of role models, controversial figures and questions of inclusion in a feminist revisionist history. Finally, the chapter addresses the book's approach to

feminism, exploring its increased accessibility, its target audience of young girls and its individualistic approach.

Chapter six centres on the key theme of intersectionality which is explored through the 2016 film *Hidden Figures*, which tells the story of three female African American mathematicians at NASA: Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson and Dorothy Vaughan. Using the third approach to a feminist revisionist history, the film writes the stories of these women into a history in which they were previously invisible, the history of NASA dominated by white, male astronauts and engineers. The chapter addresses the importance of employing an intersectional approach to studying the lives and experiences of women, particularly centring on the intersection of race and gender. The chapter explores the techniques used to address the intersectional experience of black women working at NASA, highlighting the role of clothing, lighting and colour in its discussions of racism and sexism. Finally, the chapter more broadly discusses the successes and fallbacks of the film industry in addressing gender and race issues by discussing the white saviour trope, and its problematic aim of inspiring the next generation.

The creation of a feminist revisionist history through popular culture in the present day reveals how the lives and experiences of female historical figures can be mobilised as a tool to address contemporary feminist concerns, thus showing the entangled nature of the past and the present. Exploring the complexities, successes and critiques of these interventions through a feminist geographical lens demonstrates the important and useful work that cultural and historical geography can contribute to critically analysing the agenda of feminism in reviving and (re)narrating women's histories in the present day.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminism, Gender and Geography

Feminism is defined as 'a diffuse political movement, which has varied over time and space' (Pratt, 2009a: 243) and it is therefore a heavily contested term, whose meaning can be disputed (WGSG, 1997). This often leads to references to feminisms in the plural rather than a singular feminism (McDowell, 1999b). As a political movement feminism fights for women's rights and equal opportunities both educationally and professionally; challenges gender stereotypes including social roles, dress, activities and associated characteristics of femininity and masculinity; fights for reproductive rights; and addresses sexual harassment, sexual violence and rape culture. Feminism utilises physical activism in the form of protests and marches; popular culture such as film, TV, literature, art and music; feminist businesses; and in recent years there has been a rise in the use of social media, most notably the #MeToo movement.

Feminism is also defined as aiming to 'identify and dismantle systematic gender inequality, and the myriad ways in which gender differentiation, heteronormativity, masculinism, and phallocentricism naturalise, anchor and relay all kinds of social exclusion, and physical and symbolic violence' (Pratt, 2009a: 243). This identifies broad theories and ideas that control how people live their lives, contributing to the marginalisation and oppression that women experience. This project explores how a feminist approach can be employed which focuses on how cultural products and the messages they convey are shaped by these systematic gender inequalities, and the attitudes and values that are engrained into society, and how these products can be utilised to challenge them.

Feminism has a long history which can be traced through a number of different waves. As feminism is both a political and a theoretical movement, at times these waves fed into academia, thus influencing geography as a discipline. First wave feminism occurred in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, confined to Europe and North America, focusing on issues including education, employment and marriage but with the main focus to achieve women's suffrage (Pratt, 2009a; McDowell, 1999e). Next, second wave feminism began in the 1960s until the 1980s, beginning to extend globally and taking place during the civil rights and anti-war movements (McDowell, 1999d). This wave saw a focus on the powerful structures of sexism and the patriarchy, sexual liberation and reproductive rights, a concern for minority and marginalised groups, and the mobilisation of the idea that 'the personal is political' (ibid.). Here, feminism started to emerge in academia and therefore geography, correlating to the emergence of counter positivist approaches to human geography in response to the quantitative revolution which had centred on explaining, scientifically proving, and abstractly theorizing spatial phenomena and relations, appealing to a larger philosophical project of positivism (Barnes, 2009).

Third wave feminism began in the 1980s through to the 1990s and focused on the challenging and destabilisation of constructs and norms of gender, sexuality and sex with an awareness of the diversity in the experiences of different women (Pratt, 2009a; McDowell, 1999a). During this time, feminism was established firmly and became embedded in academia, addressing concerns of meaning, identity, representation and the multiple dimensions of difference that were attracting attention in geography as the cultural turn gathered momentum (Barnett, 2009). Meanwhile, the idea of post-feminism emerged, claiming that there had been the death of feminism, and a belief that feminism wasn't necessary anymore due to its success in shifting terrains of cultural politics meaning women had achieved the social and legal protections that they required to be equal (Sharp, 1999). Finally, fourth wave feminism is the most recent development in feminist thinking and action since the mid 2000s, associated with solidarity with other social injustice movements and a transition towards intersectional thinking, facilitated by social media and the use of hashtags with a global reach.

Despite the common use of these waves in tracking the transition and development of feminism as a political movement, it is noted that the use of such periods can be problematic, leading to the simplification of a very complex and diverse movement (Pratt, 2009a). It also leads to a narrative of progress or development which can lead to feminist movements in parts of the world being labelled as advanced or backwards (ibid.).

The call for an engagement with feminism in geography was made by Monk and Hanson (1982) who noted the degree to which geography was untouched by feminism, arguing that the scarcity of attention to women's issues 'plagues all branches of human geography', therefore encouraging a feminist perspective in all areas of human geography. Here, the absence of women in geography is identified in two ways: the absence of geographical work written about women; and the exclusion of geographical work written by women. These two themes are explored within much work in feminist geography. Additionally, in 1984, the Women and Geography Study Group (WGSG) wrote the first undergraduate text on feminist geography, in which they echoed the absence of women in geographical literature and in historical accounts of human activities more generally. They therefore introduce the idea of a feminist geography, arguing for an entirely different approach to geography as a whole. One result of this is the critique of geographical and scientific knowledge production, and the challenging of claims to objectivity, which will be addressed in a subsequent section.

As well as addressing the sexism in geographical institutions and the subsequent absence of work written about and by women, feminist geographers address a number of common tendencies. Critiques of heteronormativity, the recognition of specificity, and the intersection of different identities is a key concern, as Pratt (2009b: 244) addresses the focus of feminist geographies on how 'gender differentiation and heteronormativity permeates social life and are interwoven with and naturalise other

categorical distinctions'. Supporting this, and reflecting the cultural turn, McDowell (1999c) also notes how within feminist geography there has been a shift from a dominant interest in material inequalities to a focus on language, symbolism, representation and meaning. The intertwined and mutually constituted nature of space and gender is key within feminist geographies, demonstrating how both shape each other. For example, embedding feminism within geography tends to 'amplify the gendered and spatialised dimensions of social, political and economic activities' (Moss and Al-Hindi, 2008). Meanwhile, the complex political and social structures that act on spatial patterns are also explored, structures that were previously ignored by the mathematical methodologies and positivist assumptions that dominated geography during the quantitative revolution (Marshall, 2006; Smith, 2001).

Whilst feminist geographies began to address a multitude of new theoretical ideas and began to challenge the previous gender imbalances within academia, much of this early work focused on women in the academy, and in the global north, thus subjecting the subdiscipline to many critiques.

Non-Western Feminism and Intersectionality

Feminist movements inside and outside of academia have been heavily criticised for making illegitimate claims to universality, and have been exposed as only representing the voices of white, western, heterosexual and middle class women, thus excluding the experiences and oppressions of non-white, working class or homosexual women (Bowlby and Tivers, 2009; Johnson, 2009). This critique comes from minority women of colour within the UK and the US and from those writing from the third world (Johnson, 2009). Narayan (2004) notes that feminism must take into account cultural differences, attitudes and values present in non-western countries, as a western framework cannot be universally valid for all feminists. She also argues that the presumption by western feminists that this is the case means that they tend to participate in the dominance that the western culture has exercised over non-western cultures (ibid).

This exclusion not only addresses who is being written about in feminist work but also who research is being written by and from where. In an evaluation piece marking the tenth anniversary of *Gender, Place and Culture,* Maria Dolores Garcia Ramon, Kirsten Simonsen and Dina Vaiou noted that between 1994 and 2005, out of 242 authors, only 19% were not based in Anglo-American universities or research centres, and authors based in the UK or the US constituted 64% of writers (Johnson, 2009). Furthermore, looking at book reviews, out of 320, only 7 were not written in English and only 5 reviewers were non Anglo-American (ibid.). These critiques lead to the emergence of non-western feminisms such as black feminism and intersectional feminism, also known as intersectionality.

Intersectionality has been described simply as the 'interaction between social structures such as race, class and gender' (Weldon, 2008), however Davis (2008: 68) expands on this, defining intersectionality as 'the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies, and the outcomes of these in terms of power'. The origin of intersectionality is often cited as the work of law scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1989. Crenshaw (1989) explores how within the law, black women are erased as the focus of sexism is only on white women whilst the focus of racism is on black men, therefore marginalising anyone who is multiply burdened. However, the intersectional experience of black women is greater than the sum of racism and sexism therefore these problems of exclusion cannot simply be solved by including black women within an already established analytical structure, thus leading to the development of intersectionality.

Phoenix and Pattynama (2006) note that whilst the term was coined in 1989, the concept it denotes was not new and had been employed in feminist work prior to this, simultaneously positioning women as women and, for example, as black, working class or lesbian. The origins of intersectional thought can be found within black feminist activism in the US, namely the Combahee River Collective, a black feminist lesbian organisation active in Boston from 1974 to 1980 who published The Combahee River Collective Statement in 1977, using these ideas to theorise their experiences and social position. The statement reads 'we are a collective of black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974…we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking' (Combahee River Collective, 1977: n.p.). The paper continues to discuss how black activists have had a shared awareness of how their 'sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and their focus of their political struggles unique' (ibid.).

Intersectionality emerged as a key concept in feminism in response to critiques of western feminism for making universal claims about the experience of women and assuming that globally all women faced the same forms of oppression, whilst only actually focusing on the experiences of privileged white, western, heterosexual, middle class women (McEwan, 2003; Johnson, 2009). In response to these critiques, there has been a rethink and re-orientation of feminist geography and feminism as a whole (Johnson, 2009). Here, aspects of women's identities such as their nationality, race, religion, class, sexuality, age, and ability are significantly more diverse within and across nations than previously acknowledged by western theorists (McEwan, 2003). Weldon (2008) notes how ignoring the intersectional nature of these different hierarchical systems means systematically overlooking the experience of many groups of marginalised women, and by default focusing on the most privileged. This complexity of identity is demonstrated as Phoenix and Pattynama (2006: 187) note how intersectionality 'foregrounds a richer and more complex ontology than

approaches that attempt to reduce people to one category at a time', whilst Lewis (2009) notes how intersectionality is 'capable of capturing the complexity and multiplicity of axes of oppression'. In this way, a woman can never be studied or understood as solely just a woman but as a subject with multiple intertwined identities.

Intersectionality has captured the attention of feminist scholars, with a substantial number of special issues, conferences and articles on the topic. However, McCall (2005) argues that feminists are perhaps alone in the academy in the extent to which they have embraced intersectionality. Davis (2008) argues that it is the ambiguity and open-endedness of the concept, which are often seen as its alleged weaknesses, that have made the concept so successful and popular. Similarly, addressing its popularity, Carbin and Edenheim (2013: 1) note how intersectionality 'promises everything: to provide complexity, overcome divisions and to serve as a critical tool'.

Emphasis has been placed on the way in which an intersectional approach is carried out. A repeated concern amongst feminist scholars is the need to move beyond an additive or multiplication analogy which produces notions of double or triple oppression (Lewis, 2009). Here Valentine (2007) notes that identities cannot be separated out and added on top of one another to work out who is most marginalised or subordinated, instead identities are enmeshed in one another. Finally, whilst the emphasis on much intersectionality literature and the definitions presented are on oppression and marginalisation, Weldon (2008) notes the way in which intersectionality is not just a concept used to explore oppression; an individual can be intersectionally privileged as well as intersectionally oppressed or marginalised.

Valentine (2007: 10) explores the use of intersectional approaches in geography, concluding that whilst progress has been made to acknowledge the interconnections between different categorical distinctions within individual pieces of research, intersectionality as a theoretical concept has not been addressed within feminist geography. However, within geography there has been a recognition of the decentralising of privileged women and a pluralising of feminism in order to increase awareness of all different categories of identity and inequality.

Hopkins (2017) argues that geographers have tended to overlook the contributions of black and anti-racist feminists in shaping the field of intersectionality, arguing that it has a much more complex, diverse and early history than represented in geographical scholarship. Therefore, Hopkins (2017) is critical of Valentine's (2007) situation of intersectionality within feminist social science which frames it as centred on gender and not race, therefore contributing to the whitening of intersectionality. Instead Hopkins (2017) argues for intersectionality to be used ethically and with care, rather than in a way that reproduces a white, colonialist, racist, masculinist discipline.

Since Valentine's (2007) piece, there has been much development in intersectional approaches to research within the discipline of geography for example the work on

LGBTQ youth of colour and planning and policy making in New York City (Irazábel and Huerta, 2016); work on the intersection of youth geographies and feminist geographies (O'Neill Gutierrez and Hopkins, 2015); and the examination of Vietnamese young men's performances of 'oriental' masculinities (Barber, 2014). Brown (2012) notes that there has been much progress made with most attention focusing on sexuality, race and gender but less attention made to class, age, (dis)ability and religion. There has also been progress made in developing a methodology for studying intersectionality including the development of relief maps to show the relationships between power structures, lived experience and places (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2014). Research has even been carried out that goes beyond the social aspects of intersectionality, looking at how the physical world might be incorporated for example differential water access, use and control (Thompson, 2016). This project adds to the ongoing engagement with intersectionality in geography, using a geographical framework to explore the ways in which an intersectional approach is used when re-narrating women's histories through the space of popular culture. Therefore, it addresses how issues of intersectionality are tied up in representation, including in biography, and what this means for issues of identity and meaning.

The Critique of Knowledge Production

One key focus within feminist geography is the critique of knowledge production, as 'geographical knowledges, both everyday and scholarly, are gendered, traditionally as masculine' (Pratt and Kraft, 2014: 82). This critique was explored by Rose (1993), noting how historically the discipline of geography has been dominated by men, leading to the gendered production of geographical knowledge as masculine. This draws on Haraway's (1991) theory of situated knowledge, which exposes the social production of scientific knowledge (Holloway, 2011).

Haraway (1991) argues that 'all knowledge is marked by its origins, and to deny this marking is to make false claims to universally applicable knowledge which subjugate other knowledges and their producers' (Rose, 1997: 307). In this way science claims to present objective, scientific, detached, universal knowledge but in fact perpetuates a distinctively masculinist and exploitative understanding of the world (Haraway, 1991; Holloway, 2011). Instead Haraway (1991) argues that knowledge cannot be universal or objective but must come from somewhere and therefore be located, resulting in a subjective, embodied, partial, situated knowledge.

This concept addresses both spatiality and visuality as Haraway (1991) also uses visual metaphors. She argues that knowledges that present themselves as being universal, claim to see 'everything from nowhere', an illusion known as the 'god trick'. This gaze overlooks the way in which science is actually power-laden, embedded in geographical and historical contexts, and can never be value free (Holloway, 2011). In contrast, subjugated and critical knowledges work from their situatedness to produced partial

perspectives on the world from specific locations. Rose (1997: 308) notes therefore that 'siting is intimately involved in sighting'.

Additionally, Haraway (1991) identifies a 'master subject', a white bourgeois heterosexual man who produces a form of rational, objective knowledge associated with masculinity (Rose, 1993). Holoway (2004) notes how in contrast to this, the idea of situated knowledge can include knowledge perspectives of subjugated marginalised groups, a vital voice that feminist geography aims to vocalise. This project addresses the idea of situated knowledge by acknowledging that dominant accounts of history, presumed to be impartial and objective, have traditionally been written by the 'master subject' and are thus masculinist knowledges. However, in creating a feminist revisionist history, the situated nature of knowledge is highlighted and alternative accounts of history that favour other voices are written.

The critique of knowledge production has significant consequences for undertaking geographical work, feeding into the development of a feminist methodology and highlighting the importance of reflexivity and positionality when carrying out research using a feminist framework. This will be explored in the methodology.

Feminist Historical Geography

Historical geography has notably lacked engagement with feminism and gender, thus resulting in the exclusion of women from the histories which are created and taught by historical geographers (Rose and Ogborn, 1988), and therefore producing incomplete and incorrect understandings of historical geography (Rothenberg et al, 2016). This exclusion has resulted in continuous calls for historical geographers to engage with feminism, develop a feminist historical geography, and challenge geography's masculinist record through writing women into historical and geographical narratives (Rose and Ogborn, 1988; Morin and Berg; Domosh and Morin, 2003; Rothenberg et al., 2016).

Progress has been slow and complex but the development of three key areas of study by anglophone feminist historical geographers is evident (Morin and Berg, 1999). The first is associated to new historical geographies of North America, the second is centred around critiques of the history of geography and European empire-building, and the third includes feminist interventions in cultural politics of space and place, reflecting the turn to postmodernism, cultural studies and diversity (ibid.). It is the second area of study that is significantly embedded in this research, taking a similar approach to uncovering the role of women in the history of geography and European empire building but taking a broader approach to history, and entangling it with issues of diversity, identity and representation.

Reflecting this approach, Domosh (1991) proposes the creation of a feminist historiography of geography, which broadens the definitions of geography beyond

exclusionary histories of white, male, aristocratic heroes, and shows an awareness that gender relations and representations are vital in the social construction of knowledge. Using the writings of Victorian and post-Victorian women travellers such as Mary Kingsley, Mary Gaunt, Isabella Bird, and Marian North, Domosh (1991) reveals the important role of women in the creation of geographical knowledge. This work also presents an explanation of women's exclusion from geography, noting how as geography became professionalised and more rigorously defined, codified and regulated, advanced scientific learning became limited to a few, elite males in the Royal Geographical Society (RGS). Demonstrating the embodied nature of scientific knowledge, this is due to the longstanding understanding that the female body corporeality rendered women unsuitable for intellectual pursuits, particularly in science, due to their inferior body (Livingstone, 2003). These speculations were also made about the non-western population, therefore maintaining scientific knowledge as male and white (ibid.).

Whilst it cannot be denied that women, in this case, Victorian women travellers, have been marginalised from geography as a discipline and from the history of geography, these women should not be presented only in a positive light, leading to critiques of such accounts for not paying attention to the other privileged parts of their identity (WGSG, 1997). The women travellers explored in these accounts are white and were born into upper-middle class families with enough funds to expense their own exploration. This means that whilst being marginalised due to their gender, their race privileged them and upon visiting regions under colonial power they became powerful representatives of the white race, contributing to the racist histories of empire. This is one example that illustrates the importance of an intersectional approach to feminism, and one that addresses the role of intersectional privilege.

This idea of privileged identities is illustrated in this project by a number of women whose biographies are used in different cultural products to create a feminist revisionist history. This is particularly evident in chapter four exploring the *We Are Bess* exhibition and the life of Bess of Hardwick, a white, middle class, and incredibly wealthy woman. Furthermore, this is also evident in the intersectional privilege of particular figures featured in *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* and what these parts of their identities mean for their positioning as role models and figures to be celebrated.

Moore (2018) traces the aforementioned developments in feminist historical geography literature, concluding that there has been significant advances and major interventions in the subdiscipline however progression was not straightforward and has been a complex endeavour. Here she draws on the work of Driver (2014a: 92), noting that he provides a plausible explanation for the slow progress in the development of a feminist historical geography, suggesting that more attention has been paid to the 'genealogy of our intellectual concerns' rather than public culture. Moore (2018) therefore looks to the next thirty years in historical geography, exploring ways to connect historical geography to the gender politics of the present and an

engagement with public culture in order to retain and develop the critical edge feminist historical geography has developed for itself in recent years. Moore (2018) proposes a new feminist historical geography of the present which recuperates the experiences and advances the cause of women across history through an engagement with the politics of the present and public culture. In this way, feminist historical geography will be brought into the mainstream and travel under its own name (Domosh and Morin, 2003).

Drawing on Moore's (2018) call for an urgent engagement with public culture and the gender politics of the present in feminist historical geography, provides a space in which this project is situated. This project looks at the way in which history is rewritten or presented in the present day, looking at popular culture and cultural interventions and the ways in which people engage with these. It reveals how history is being rewritten from women's perspectives and efforts to rewrite important and powerful women into history in places that they have previously been absent, hidden or ignored. This builds on the work of other feminist historical geographers that have identified the important role of various historical figures, for example in the history of geography, but has a more direct focus on the present day and the ways in which history can be remade or retold.

Biography

Biography is a difficult term to define with a single, neat definition (Lee, 2009), however it is defined in the Oxford Dictionary (2019) as 'an account of someone's life written by someone else' with the word originating from the Medieval Greek for 'life writing'. Despite the emphasis on writing, biography is not always in written form, but can also be in the form of biographical film, oral histories, anecdotes and witness testimony. Lee (2009) provides a brief introduction to biography as a genre, noting how biography is often described as something else for example life history, life writing, a memoir, or a profile.

The writing of biography requires a careful balance to narrate both the life events and experiences of a subject, and to convey a subject's character or personality. This is demonstrated by Lee (2009) who provides two contrasting metaphors for biography: the autopsy and the portrait. Firstly, highlighting the possibility of missing out important elements of a subject's character such as emotions, talents and belief, Lee (2009: 2) uses the metaphor of an autopsy, describing biography as a 'clinical investigation' and a 'process of post humous scrutiny'. In contrast to this, Lee (2009) also uses a more positive metaphor of a portrait, bringing a subject to life and capturing their character, warmth, energy and personality. However, this metaphor also highlights problems of biography including flattery, idealisation and inaccuracy. It is the metaphor of biography as a portrait that is most evident throughout this project.

Narrating the life events of a subject from the start to the end of their life is most commonly found in traditional biography as Parke (2002: xiii) highlights the centrality of temporality to biography, writing that biography 'narrates life, plotting the circle of existence from birth to death'. However, this chronological narration of a subject's life is one that has been challenged in different ways, as explored throughout this piece. Parke (2002) also notes how biography is not a monolithic term, identifying five different types of biography: popular, historical, literary, collective and fictional, with this project focusing primarily on historical biography.

Biography continues to develop and change, meaning the traditions of biography have been challenged and there has been a shift away from the dominant stories of men to stories of unheard voices such as that of women, the non-elite and other marginalised figures. Banner (2009: 581) notes how the development of a 'new biography' first appeared in the 1990s, when biography began to be tied up with issues of feminism, postmodernism and associated issues of gender, race and sexuality in response to the 'shifting and multifaceted nature of individual identity'. Additionally, Roberts (2002) notes how feminist research has had a very significant impact on biographical study, giving empowerment and a voice to women. These more recent developments in biography are central to this project, focusing on the ways in which women's histories have been told in the past and are being retold today with the crucial recognition that women have multiple identities beyond their gender, and these must be included in such studies.

The Politics of Biography

Such introductory pieces to biography as a genre also highlight key issues, challenges and controversies associated to biography. Firstly, biography can never be objective as it is always written from a certain position and therefore constructed by the authors life including their history, nationality, race, gender, class, education, beliefs and social politics (Lee, 2009). Furthermore, there are a number of other challenges raised in writing biography for example the role of the author and their relationship to the subject, as this can control the perspective taken in a biography. Traditionally biography was written by someone who personally knew the subject or their family, thus potentially impacting the information included in the biography as stories may be protected or controlled by a family member, meaning the biographer is reliant on stories handed down and repeated (Lee, 2005).

This is also demonstrated by Tiernan (2011) in her biographical case study on Eva Gore-Booth, an Irish poet and political activist, whose relationship with her partner Esther Roper has been 'wilfully ignored or vehemently denied' in her biographies, leading to the erasure of them both from history. Here, it is thought that the denial of her lesbian sexuality is purposeful due to requests from her family in order to avoid embarrassment due to lesbianism being deemed a 'perverted sexuality' by society at the time (Tiernan, 2011). This also illustrates wider issues, currently being addressed

in feminist scholarship, of challenging heterosexuality in history and in debating and changing the ways in which history about women is written (Morgan, 2009). It highlights the importance of intersectionality as aspects of a subject's identity such as their race and sexuality cannot be ignored as this plays a vital role in their life and as illustrated in this example can be the reason for the histories being inaccurate or their stories forgotten.

Problems of uncertainty and missing information are also paramount in studying the politics of biography as Lee (2005: 6) notes that 'biographies are also full of things that aren't there', illustrating that biography is shaped by missing evidence, gaps in knowledge, and information that has been passed between different people, therefore losing credibility and leading to competing and contested versions of the same life story. Furthermore, 'biography is a process of making up or making over' (ibid.) illustrating how someone's life is broken up, rearranged, altered and edited to make a new version of them, often resulting in untruthful narratives of a subject. Throughout this project, these questions will be vital in exploring the ways in which the stories and histories of women are being told. Questions of authorship, certainty, inclusion, motivation and the decisions that are made during the creation of different representations are explored.

This also highlights issues associated to responsibility and ethics in writing biography. Firstly, there are questions of obligation such as whether the biographer is obligated to the family and friends of a subject who are left behind, as this requires an element of respect and a duty of care. Furthermore, there is a moral obligation to tell the truth about someone's life (Eakin, 2004), meaning the biographer should present a factually or historically accurate representation of a person and tell the whole truth, not missing out aspects of their lives or adapting them for entertainment purposes. However, Eakin (2004: 3) also notes that 'life writers are criticised not only for not telling the truth – personal and historical – but also for telling too much truth'. Here, there are issues associated to the violation of a person's right to privacy and the public airing of private matters. However, it is also important to note that the concept of truth used here can be critiqued, as the truth about a person's life cannot exist beyond the truth that is held only by the subject themselves. Similarly, there are questions of responsibility when using personal documents left behind after someone's death as these documents have been produced in private and are often not intended for use in biographical accounts.

Biography in Geography

Recent engagements with biography within the discipline of geography have led to a number of developments in geographical approaches to biography and a variety of literature has been published. The connections between biography and geography are explored by Daniels and Nash (2004) in which they argue that the arts of biography and geography are historically interconnected, with intersecting ideas of self and place, positionality and identity, spatiality and subjectivity. They note that lifepaths are

increasingly plotted in explicitly geographical ways using metaphors of mapping and therefore state that 'life histories are, to coin a phrase, life geographies', thus calling for further engagement with such life geographies.

Similarly, Thomas (2004: 498) notes the need to 'cast biography in geographical terms' and move away from the unease with the term biography felt amongst geographers and the subsequent reluctance to use it in their work. Key developments in the use of biography in historical geography are summarised by McGeachan (2016) who notes how biography and life writing are becoming increasingly popular amongst geographers due to a 'resurgent interest in lives, afterlives and their geographies' (ibid: 136). McGeachan (2016: 137) notes that recent biographical work in historical geography 'demonstrates how lives can be deployed in spatially complex ways, often using biography strategically to force open new connections between places, people and experiences'.

McGeachan et al. (2012) explore the ways in which postmodernism has influenced biography since the cultural turn, resulting in a shift away from traditional biography to increasing focus on plurality, previously unheard voices and the performance or collaboration between the biographer and the subject. Contributing to this shift, they note how geographers have identified a new way of framing biography through the spatiality of life, rather than the temporality of life which traces the chronology from life to death. Here, McGeachen et al (2012: 179) argue that 'lives are spatial, so their telling should reflect and embrace this. The lives of subjects are also thoroughly entwined with the lives and biographies of other things, and this too, should where appropriate, be a feature of life writing'. In this way, the lives of subjects are engaged with geographically, through the use of key spaces and places in which the subject lived their life.

Hodder (2017) builds on this, looking at the way in which biography can be used as a method in historical geography to overcome the challenges presented by abundance in the archive. Hodder (2017) notes how the dominant way of looking at archival research in geography is through the lens of absence, with archives often seen as a site of loss and forgetting. Instead, Hodder (2017: 452) uses his own work on the life of the civil rights and peace activist Bayard Rustin to illustrate the challenges of abundance in the archives and argues that biography is one way to navigate this abundance and 'tell stories that are wider, deeper and more revealingly complex'. He also notes how biography helps to 'focus on how the life of an individual is interconnected with the institutions, ideas, networks, places and objects with which they came into contact' (Hodder, 2017: 456). This point is vital for this project, as the lives of the subjects in the *We Are Bess* exhibition and *Hidden Figures* are intertwined with the historical and geographical contexts in which they lived.

Biographical engagement in geography is also demonstrated by a call for more work by historical geographers into small stories as a way to investigate bigger questions and

broader contexts (Naylor, 2008). The practice of telling small stories and the focus on particularity and mundanity is highlighted in Lorimer's (2003) study of the interactions between Margaret Jack and her field studies instructor Robin Murray at Glenmore Lodge, Scotland in 1951. Here, Lorimer (2003) argues that within specific everyday sites and events, broader debates on the spaces of knowledge and the practice of geography can be illustrated. Further engagement with smaller individual stories in historical geography are also demonstrated in Keighren's (2007) study of geographer and geomorphologist William Morris Davies and Richards' (2006) study of Sophia De Morgan's memoir of her husband Augustus De Morgan, the first Professor of Mathematics at University College London. Here, Keighren (2007) illustrates the ways in which uncovering the personal can enrich professional stories whilst Richards (2006: 303) contrasts this, addressing the 'ultimate impossibility of bringing another person to life' due to the complexities associated to tensions between the public and the private.

The use of biography as a method in geography can be seen in a myriad of ways, including the use of biographies to write alternative histories (Thomas, 2004); the use of individual biographies to explore wider issues (Terrall, 2006; Barnes and Abrahamsson, 2015; Barnes, 2001); and the use of biography to address the absence of writing on women's lives, particularly the role of women in the history of geography (Domosh, 1991; Bell and Ewan, 1996; Maddrell, 2009). This geographical engagement is central to this project and will be explored in more depth in the methodology.

Geography and the Politics of Representation

Representation is a profoundly geographical act (Crang, 2014) and is conventionally defined as 'a symbol or image, or as the process of rendering something (an object, event, idea or perception) intelligible and identifiable' (Dubow, 2009: 645). In this way representation is both an object and a process resulting in many different forms of representation including texts, pictures and landscapes (Kobayashi, 2009a). This project will explore representation in the form of an exhibition, children's non-fiction literature and film.

Representation has its origins in philosophy, however, the emergence of representation as a theory in geography can be seen as a response to the quantitative revolution. Here, geography was dominated by mathematical theory, knowledge was seen to be objective, and it was believed that unbiased and transparent representations of the world could be produced (Scott, 2009). In the 1970s, geography shifted to be dominated by humanistic approaches with increasing emphasis on the subjectivity and presence of the researcher in the production of knowledge (ibid.). In the 1980s, the discipline experienced a cultural turn and a move towards a post-structuralist approach, which saw the destabilisation of old certainties and the politics of representation began to receive attention as a focus of debate (Scott, 2009; Kobayashi, 2009). Post-structuralism also saw a rethinking of the relationship between

representation and the production of space through landscape and other sites of text such as literature, film, the media and music as well as new concepts of power, its locations and how it operates (Woodward and Jones III, 2009).

Within geography and in the social sciences more broadly many scholars point to a 'crisis of representation' in which questions on the accuracy and reality of representations have been brought to the forefront of debate. Issues of power are highlighted as the knowledge produced is 'inescapably partial and power-laden' and representations are 'never innocent, unbiased or divorced from the realm of power and politics' (Scott, 2009: 351). Instead representations work to promote a particular way of knowing and seeing the world, which reflects the power relations that shape them and the diverse and shifting historical and cultural contexts in which they are formed (Scott, 2009). This means that representations can never be seen to reflect reality (Scott, 2009; Crang, 2014).

These ideas are developed from the work of Michel Foucault who argued that there is no absolute truth, only the creation of 'regimes of truth' that act as the norm in a particular context and it is these regimes of truth which are reflected in different representations (Kobayashi, 2009; Duncan and Sharp, 1993). It is also noted how representations have tangible effects in the real world for example through shaping people's actions and behaviours (Crang, 2014) or through marginalising certain groups and their knowledges (Scott, 2009). This project looks at the way in which history is being rewritten from a woman's perspective and how female historical figures who have previously been absent are being rewritten into history. It addresses questions on the way in which history has traditionally been told and what types of figures are included and excluded. By looking at different forms of representation, it will explore how knowledge is presented to the viewer, whose knowledge is conveyed and the way in which dominant knowledge is disrupted.

Feminism and Representation

The most prominent influences of feminist geography on the study of representation is the focus on the depictions of women's bodies in visual and textual representations in western societies including art and advertising and the way in which women's bodies are represented as 'sexualised objects of the heterosexual male desire' (Scott, 2009: 354). However, the relevance of studies of representation to feminist geography is also evident by looking at the production of knowledge through different representations.

As representations can never be objective, work on representation often draws on the aforementioned ideas developed by Haraway (1991) on situated knowledges, noting how knowledges portrayed through different representations are partial, embodied and located in the people and places from which they are produced. Feminist scholars also note how visual practices and representations are gendered in ways that facilitate the rise of masculinist knowledge production which expresses the power of the

privileged (Pavlovskaya, 2009). This project will explore visual practices and representations that aim to disrupt this type of knowledge production, producing new narratives which support, celebrate and favour the work of historical women.

Furthermore, within feminist geography, anxieties have emerged over the ways in which geographers claim to represent the views and experiences of other groups or individuals with cultural or social differences (Scott, 2009). This results in important debates regarding the representation of the 'other' and the differences between representations 'speaking of' or 'speaking for' a subject (Duncan and Sharp, 1993). This is reflected in broader critiques of western feminist geography and the ways in which differences between different groups of women have been overlooked, with feminist approaches critiqued for presenting universal claims about women's experience. This is an important point which will be taken into consideration as whilst the emphasis of this project is on gender and the way in which women's stories are being told, other aspects of women's identity cannot be ignored. The subjects of the different representations are not just women but women with different cultural and social identities beyond their gender which must be recognised.

Imaginative Geographies

Imaginative geographies are 'representations of place, space and landscape that structure people's understandings of the world, and in turn help shape their actions' (Driver, 2014b: 246). Moreover, Gregory (1995; 2009) notes the importance of understanding the ways in which the anxieties, desires and fantasies of the author are reflected in the production of imaginative geographies. The phrase imaginative geographies was first presented by Edward Said in 1978 in his book titled *Orientalism* in which he discusses the ways in which the identities of the western world and the non-western world, particularly the orient, are created. The western world is represented as dynamic, powerful and progressive, whilst the image of the orient is constructed as static, defeated and backwards: 'a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences' (Said, 2003 [1978]: 1).

In this way, the orient can be extended to all non-western cultures and imaginative geographies of the 'self' and the 'other' are created. This binary plays an important role in the history of global power relationships (Driver, 2014b) as Orientalism can be seen as 'a western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the orient' (Said, 2003 [1978]: 3). Derek Gregory, can be seen to have introduced the concept of Orientalism into the discipline of Geography, intertwining the ideas of Said into studies of the European conquest of non-western spaces, exploring how colonialism was as much a cultural and ideological project as an economic and political one (Warf, 2011).

The imaginative geographies of the world and the people and places within it come to be regarded as real, not because they accurately reproduce the world but because they reflect, sustain and legitimise people's imagination of that world, becoming the dominant understanding (Driver, 2014b; Gregory, 2009). Here particular paradigms, reflecting particular scopic regimes, appear natural and are therefore thought to be the truth, becoming a person's reality (Warf, 2011). Building on this, Morrisey (2014: 82) notes that 'the circulation of imaginative geographies has served to collectively legitimise a vocabulary of difference in which specific tropes of identity in the form of representative figures have come to stand for whole nations'.

This addresses the importance of imaginative geographies on people's understandings and perceptions of spaces and places on a larger scale for example whole cultures, countries, nations and global politics. However, Driver (2014b) notes that imaginative geographies also shape our most intimate selves and personal identities such as an individual's gender, race and sexuality. It is these aspects of difference that are focused on in this project, looking at the way in which gender is understood, with implications both on a wider societal scale and the most intimate, personal scale.

Imaginative geographies are produced and disseminated at multiple sites including television news, radio, newspapers, public marches, press conferences, state documents, school textbooks, advertising and the internet (Morrisey, 2014; Driver, 2014b). Furthermore, we must address the role of popular culture in circulating imaginative geographies for example television, film, literature, music, and art (ibid.). These sources have been labelled 'imaginative sources' by Cloke et al. (2004) referring to sources of information which are overtly products of the human imagination, products with the primary purpose to entertain, evoke, inspire or move the consumer, not to make factual statements about the world.

In contrast, the interest in the imaginative realm amongst geographers has raised questions regarding our capacity to intervene in the world as well as interpret, therefore imaginative sources can be used to disrupt and challenge imaginative geographies, perhaps producing 'counter-imaginative geographies'. Driver (2014b) notes how there is potential in the production of visual media to challenge taken for granted assumptions, demonstrated in a public exhibition held at the RGS (with IBG) in 2009 titled *Hidden Histories of Exploration.* This demonstrates the way in which exhibitions can be used in order to disrupt dominant narratives and tell traditional stories from a different perspective (Driver, 2013; 2014). It aimed to challenge taken for granted assumptions and look beyond the tradition of celebrating male heroic explorers, to reveal the role of indigenous people and intermediaries such as carriers, cooks, soldiers, guides and interpreters (ibid.). This exhibition questions what is made visible and what is obscured in standard narratives of exploration as these figures played an imperative role in the histories of exploration and geography but are often overlooked. This example also reflects broader trends of the increasing popularity of creative collaborations with visual artists and demonstrates the potential uses of visual

media as a means to 'empower voices and peoples, and to make tangible many 'others' in the academy' (Tolia-Kelly, 2012: 138).

It is here that this project can be situated, looking at the use of different visual media to challenge taken for granted assumptions on the role of women in history, re-writing history from a female perspective and telling the stories of female historical figures, thus disrupting the narratives of history dominated by men. This can be seen as producing new imaginative geographies of gender, changing people's understanding of the role of women. This is achieved through the examples of three different cultural interventions: the *We Are Bess* exhibition, the children's non-fiction book *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls,* and the film *Hidden Figures.*

Visuality, Visual Culture and Audiencing

Geography has long been concerned with the visual, and the study of representation is one that concerns issues of visual culture and visuality. Rose (2009a: 801) notes the difference between vision and visuality, describing vision as a 'biologically determined structure of seeing' and visuality as a 'culturally constructed way of seeing'. Furthermore, Rose (2012: 4) defines visual culture as 'the plethora of ways in which the visual is part of social life' whilst Mirzoeff (1999: 3) argues that visual culture is concerned with the ways in which 'information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology'. Visuality also refers to the way in which an image is a site for the 'construction and depiction of social difference' (Fyfe and Law, 1988: 1) and 'constitutes and reconstitutes social identities and social relations' (Rose, 2009a: 801). Visuality, therefore, draws attention to how an image's meaning is underlined and shaped by its historical, cultural and geographical context and embedded in a particular discourse (MacDonald, 2009). This saturation of everyday life by visual media and the importance of the visual in society indicates the importance of studying visual representations as a mode of knowledge production and as a way of studying contemporary ways of telling history.

The site of the audience also plays a substantial role in the study of representation, imaginative geographies and the visual. Berger (1972: 9) argues that 'we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves' thus highlighting the role of positionality as different characteristics of the viewer can change and shape the way in which they see images. Similarly, Crang (2014: 133) argues that all representations are 'seen and pictured from somewhere' therefore images and representations are open to multiple readings and interpretations (Scott, 2009). In this way, not all audiences will be able or willing to respond to a particular image in the way intended by its producer, therefore changing the way in which an image is consumed (Rose, 2012). This can also lead to contestation of the meaning of an image and an audience may challenge a particular representation (Scott, 2009). Questions of audiencing will be vital for this project as the production of knowledge through different visual practices has no meaning without an audience. Changing the

way in which history is written and increasing the visibility of female historical figures, through popular culture requires public engagement in order to have meaning and change the dominant understandings of the world.

Drawing together literature from feminist geography, biography and representation provides the theoretical framework used throughout this project. This project can be situated in feminist cultural and historical geography, expanding the scope of historical geography to engaging with the present day. With a focus on popular culture, this project encompasses the politics of, and the complexities associated to writing biographies as a form of representation. Overall the project addresses the gender inequality, bias and marginalisation experienced by women, as well as theories of situated knowledge production, imaginative geographies and intersectionality.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This project employs a feminist framework to establish a cultural geography of the narration of women's histories through popular culture. Each empirical chapter in this project explores a key theme of feminist geography through a case study of a cultural product and uses different research methods for each. This methodology will first outline and justify the feminist framework through which this project has been written, followed by a discussion of the specific research methods used to study each intervention. It is also important to distinguish here between research methods and a methodology: a method is associated to the doing of research, whilst a methodology is about approaching research (Sharp, 2009).

This project is also underlined by an engagement with biography, a topic that has emerged in the discipline of geography, with a variety of literature published. This project does not employ biography directly as a geographical research method, rather it studies the way in which biography has been utilised as a tool in cultural products to create a feminist revisionist history, by (re)narrating women's histories. This project centralises a feminist biographical approach reflecting an increased interest in feminist interventions in history, the consideration of smaller, personal stories, everyday experiences, and questions of marginality and privilege. Additionally, in order to study visual materials, Rose (2016) presents a clear and coherent structure for a critical visual methodology, arguing that visual materials should be thought of in terms of four different sites: the site of production where the image is made; the site of the image itself and its visual content; the site of circulation, and the site of audiencing where the image encounters its spectators or users. This provides a framework used throughout this research, highlighting a number of key areas for data collection. The methodology chapter will therefore also outline the engagement with both biography and visual materials that are analysed in the empirical chapters.

A Feminist Framework

This project employs a feminist methodology, which Moss (2002: 12) notes encompasses the conventional aspects of research such as the design, the data collection, the analysis and the circulation of information as well as lesser acknowledged aspects of research such as 'relationships among people involved in the research process, the actual conduct of the research, and process through which the research comes to be undertaken and completed'. In this way, this methodology will not only address the methods through which data was collected but also the way in which this project was conceptualised (Sharp, 2005).

Moss (2002: 3) also notes how 'doing feminist research means actually undertaking the task of collecting and analysing information while engaging a feminist politics'. In this way, the choice to use a feminist framework for this project reflected the focus of a feminist framework on working to acknowledge and challenge gender bias, challenge the basic assumptions on the position of women based on their gender, and address the absence of women in academic work and the privileging of the male voice. Through studying different cultural products using a feminist lens, whilst continuously engaging a feminist politics, these issues have been effectively addressed.

Furthermore, central to a feminist geography framework is the paramount importance placed on power and knowledge, particularly the critique of masculinist knowledge production and the recognition that knowledge is situated. The idea of situated knowledge is crucial for this project, acknowledging that all knowledge produced by the feminist revisionist histories studied are subjective, partial, and situated, therefore the contexts in which they are written, circulated and consumed must be understood. Reflecting this, two key considerations in a feminist methodology are positionality and reflexivity, a consequence of feminist critiques which argue that all knowledge is produced in specific circumstances and that those circumstances shape it in some way and must be understood (Rose, 1997).

Positionality refers to the way in which a researcher's social, cultural and subject positions affect the questions they ask, how they frame them, the theories they are drawn to and how they read them (Pratt, 2009d). Thien (2009) notes how knowledge is embodied and grounded in real bodies therefore it is important to be aware of the identity of the person creating that knowledge. In this way, England (1994) explores how geographical research is intensely personal therefore the identity of the researcher, based on their class, gender, race, sexuality and other characteristics, plays a central role in the research process, and in the final written text. Identifying the power and impact of these factors and acting on them is known as reflexivity, 'a reflection upon the conditions through which research is produced, disseminated and received' (Matless, 2009: 27) which includes 'a self-conscious examination of the relationship between researcher and researched' and 'a deliberate attempt to situate one's knowledge' (Kobayashi, 2009b).

It is important here to acknowledge that much discussion on positionality and reflexivity addresses the relationship between two different people or groups of people, the researcher and the researched, however this project engages with cultural products instead of human subjects. Positionality and reflexivity however are still of paramount importance in the conducting of this research as all research is carried out from a particular position, whilst all cultural products and representations are also produced and consumed from a particular position, and this intersection of the position of different agents is considered in this project.

The importance of the relationship between the researcher and the document being researched, and how this can have a substantial impact on the research process is explored by Rose (2000) who reveals the ways in which particular spaces can have effects on the relationship between the researcher and researched through systematic labelling or regulations. This is particularly notable in studying the *We Are Bess* exhibition which is primarily displayed and consumed in a much more controlled environment than *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* or *Hidden Figures,* which can be freely consumed by audiences in different spaces. Rose (2000) also highlights the role of feelings in research and the way in which emotional connections can be made between a document and the spectator, whether it be a researcher or a public viewer, demonstrating the need for a reflexive approach to researching visual materials. Therefore, an understanding of the significant difference in the positioning of a researcher compared to a public audience is also necessary. This illustrates the way in which understanding the power dynamics between the researcher and the researched, in any format, is essential to a feminist methodology.

Rose (1997) however acknowledges the anxieties and ambivalences surrounding the use of reflexivity amongst feminist geographers, highlighting the difficulty, and even impossibility of examining positionality and writing this into research in a transparent way. She argues that the search for positionality through transparent reflexivity is bound to fail as it assumes that the messiness of doing research can be fully understand (Rose, 1997). To conclude she argues that being transparent requires a certainty that is as harmful as the universalising certainty that so many feminists have critiqued (ibid.).

Exploring the *We Are Bess* Exhibition

Exhibitions such as the *We Are Bess* exhibition, are dynamic and multifaceted, drawing together multiple media types and therefore posing difficulties for study using one individual method. In order to study the *We Are Bess* exhibition it was necessary to develop a critical methodology which encompassed a number of different approaches to analysis. For this chapter, analysis of pre-existing biographies was combined with visual analysis of photos and textual analysis of exhibition text. This was supported using research on the site of production, and the site of consumption as outlined in Rose's (2016) critical methodology.

First, the politics of biography and the shift away from traditional to more contemporary forms of biography were central to researching the *We Are Bess* exhibition. Bess of Hardwick has been the subject of a number of biographies which were studied in the early stages of research in order to provide a detailed and in depth understanding of her life and was essential to contextualise the exhibition, beyond the information that is given at Hardwick Hall itself. This also allowed a comparison to be made to the new lens through which Bess' life is being told in the exhibition. In this way, underpinning the *We Are Bess* exhibition is the use of biography to reveal how

traditional accounts which privilege the histories of white, male heroes can be disrupted. Here, *We Are Bess* works to re-narrate history from a women's perspective in order to tell alternative versions of histories. This reflects geographical engagement with biography in the work of Thomas (2004), who challenges traditional understandings of imperial history through a biographical analysis of Mary Curzon, the Vicereine of India, shifting the focus away from her husband George Curzon, the Viceroy of India. This illustrates a shift away from focusing solely on men, and towards unheard voices of women, a focus that has received too little attention in previous biographical works.

Next, the content of the exhibition was analysed using both the online and physical versions of the exhibition. Here, visual analysis of the twenty portraits and textual analysis of the accompanying text in the exhibition guide was used to pull together a picture of Bess' character, supported with evidence from the previously studied biographies. Recurring aspects of Bess' life experience and character could be drawn out, and categorised, reflecting different ideas of womanhood and therefore addressing different themes of feminist geography. The categories included, 'motherhood', 'Bess as a maligned wife', 'business and property', 'politics and law', 'emotion and loss', and 'Bess the real woman'. To allow for the size of this project, only three categories could be selected for further discussion.

In order to go beyond the content of the exhibition, information from a number of different sources was collected. To study the site of production, three articles on the curation, photography and historical research that were published as part of the online version of the exhibition were used to develop a broader understanding of the messages and ideas the exhibition portrays. Furthermore, due to difficulties with contacting key participants who played a role in the curation of the exhibition, two online video interviews with various participants have been used instead. Additionally, an email interview following a set of nine prepared questions on the creation, content and audiencing of the exhibition was used to collect data from the House Steward at Hardwick Hall, presenting a different perspective than those available online. To achieve an insight into the site of consumption, informal conversations with volunteer members of staff working alongside the exhibition were carried out as well as a brief period of observation to gain an insight into the audiencing of the exhibition.

Customer Review Analysis of *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls*

Addressing the absence of women in historical narratives is central to this project. *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* takes a biographical approach to this through narrating the histories of one hundred women through a collection of short biographies. This is reflective of the work undertaken by feminist historical geographers, who are increasingly engaging with biography to address the notable absence of women in the history of geography, building on the work of Domosh (1991) on Victorian women travellers. Here biographical research has been utilised to explore and make visible the

contributions of these women in a number of areas including admission into the RGS (Bell and McEwan, 1996; Evans et al, 2013), women in expeditions (Evans, 2016) and more broadly repopulating the history of geography with women by uncovering their role in areas such as travel, higher education, fieldwork, war work, teaching and academic careers (Maddrell, 2009). This variety in the location of women in history is broadened in *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls,* which aims to repopulate a multitude of areas of history with women. The concept of celebration, drawn from the work of Bell and McEwan (1996) was significant in researching this chapter, as there is a clear distinction between acknowledging and remembering a figure and their life by simply relaying the facts and telling a subject's story in a purposefully positive light in order to celebrate a life.

Drawing on Rose's (2016) critical visual methodology, the most significant site of study for *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* was the site of consumption. Here, the primary method of research was content analysis of online customer reviews selected from Good Reads and Amazon. As of March 2019, on Good Reads, the book had received 20,316 ratings, averaging 4.35 stars out of 5, and had 2662 reviews. The website allows the viewing of up to 300 reviews at a time depending on the combination of filters used. Therefore, the first 300 reviews of all editions were used, sorted by default to get a range of dates, dating from 20th November 2016 until 1st March 2019. All reviews written in the English language were selected, totalling 103 reviews. On Amazon, the book had received 1137 customer reviews and ratings, with an average star rating of 4.7 stars out of 5. The first 50 top rated reviews, of all star ratings and all formats were used. Reviews based on the physical condition of the book, the ordering process or delivery were omitted. Using websites such as Amazon and Good Reads also opens a space to the study the site of circulation, outlined by Rose (2016), as this demonstrates the increasing accessibility of feminism through popular culture and a shift towards public engagement.

Once each review was selected, the reviews were coded into different categories and themes using a colour coding system which can be found in appendix 1. The use of specific words was also noted, for example the use of empowering, empowered, or empowerment; inspirational, inspired and inspiration; and role model. Reflecting the feminist framework used in this project, one of the most important considerations for this chapter was contextualising the data collected from the audience, as this was vital to gain an insight into the theme of situated and partial knowledge production that is central to this chapter. Here it is important to note that the audience is not passive, and their perspective is shaped by their own position. This means that the audiencing of a product and the intentions and expectations of an author for their product's impact do not always match.

Once colour coded, the data collected was categorised into key themes which were reflexive of broader theoretical ideas within feminist geography, which then formed the structure of the chapter, and key quotes were selected to support the key themes.

Each quote is referenced to a specific user; however, the usernames have been anonymised, numbered and changed to Good Reads User (GRU) or Amazon Customer (AC) to conceal their identity. Data on the site of production and the site of consumption of the book was collected from press coverage, video reviews and online interviews with the authors.

Hidden Figures Film Analysis

Studying *Hidden Figures* reveals how individual biographies can be used to explore broader issues and trends as studying the life of an individual is always connected to the study of the different disciplines, institutions, cultural movements, ideologies, practice, places and objects with which they come into contact, and are therefore situated in their social and political contexts (Terrall, 2006; Hodder, 2017; Roberts, 2002). In this way, uncovering the stories of Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson and Dorothy Vaughan in *Hidden Figures* and making them visible in a history in which they had been previously concealed can also be used to explore broader social and political contexts for example the Civil Rights Movement, segregation, the Space Race, and issues associated to racism and sexism in the workplace at NASA.

This reflects geographical engagement with biography such as the work of Barnes and Abrahamsson (2015) on father and son Karl and Albrecht Haushofer, exploring the relationship between geography, geopolitics and the Nazi regime through their personal experiences with and relationship to the Nazi leadership. This also reflects the work of Barnes (2001) demonstrating how scientific accomplishments in the quantitative revolution are socially embedded and therefore entangled in their wider political, social and cultural contexts and cannot be separated from the people and places in which they originated from. This interconnection of scales is evident across all three chapters as through embedding the use of biography in geography into a feminist framework, this project reveals the way in which stories of individual women can be used to open up a dialogue to address broader theoretical ideas present in feminist geography.

Researching *Hidden Figures* revealed the importance of the sites of the image itself and the site of production in studying the role of film in creating a feminist revisionist history. As shown in appendix 2, in order to study the image itself scene analysis was used to create a detailed description of the events in each of the twenty eight scenes as well as additional notes on the key dialogue and intertitles (shown in italics), elements of the cinematography and the types of footage used (shown underlined) and details of the mise-en-scéne including the setting, lighting, props and costumes (shown in bold). This allowed an exploration of the narrative structure of the film and highlighted the importance of its social and cultural background. This also meant the key themes of the film, racism and sexism, could be drawn out and examined. It also allowed

character relationships to be examined, exploring how they differ between pairings of different races and genders.

Next, shot by shot analysis was used to analyse four key scenes identified as being most important in telling the story. This allowed a much more detailed analysis of the cinematography used in each scene including type of shot, camera angle, camera height and camera movement. This allowed a more detailed study of the tools used to present particular messages to the audience. Here, each shot was coded in a table with the shot number, duration, description, key dialogue and notes on cinematography, as shown in appendix 3. The scenes analysed were scene one, six, fifteen and twenty, with particular emphasise on the mirroring of shots between scenes one and twenty. Whilst these scenes were not entirely based on events that happened in real life, they are crucial in making the film powerful, entertaining and inspirational.

Concluding Remarks

Drawing together literature on a feminist methodology and geographical engagement with biography, this methodology illustrates that a feminist framework is the most effective way to approach studying a cultural geography of rewriting women's histories through popular culture in order to address and challenge the bias, assumptions and absences of women based on their gender. Furthermore, using a biographical lens to study women through popular culture reveals the important contribution biographical work has in (re)narrating women's histories and in addressing broader feminist concerns, and the way in which this project can contribute to understandings of biography in geography.

It is also evident that Rose's (2016) critical visual methodology provides a clear and coherent set of avenues through which to explore different aspects of each cultural product, with different sites proving more important for one chapter than another, as reflected in the specific research methods chosen to study each product. Finally, this methodology reveals that a single research method would have been ineffective in critically analysing the creation of a feminist revisionist history through popular culture. Pulling together a diverse range of methods to analyse different materials has resulted in a more comprehensive exploration of the production, consumption and content of a feminist revisionist history.

CHAPTER 4: THE WE ARE BESS EXHIBITION

Introduction

Exhibitions do not simply display information but play a role in the creation of meaning and the production of knowledge (Crang, 2003). Therefore, exhibitions can be used to disrupt dominant narratives and tell stories from a different perspective (Driver, 2013; 2014). Exhibitions, thus, are one format in which a feminist revisionist history can be created, rewriting the history of a woman from an alternative perspective and challenging the taken for granted assumptions about a subject that have previously existed.

This chapter explores the *We Are Bess* exhibition, a photography exhibition on display in the Long Gallery at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire. The exhibition tells the story of Bess of Hardwick, Countess of Shrewsbury, a notable figure in Elizabethan society, through the voices and portraits of twenty modern women of diverse backgrounds who in some way relate to her, her experiences and different parts of her identity. The exhibition aims to retell the story of Bess of Hardwick from multiple women's perspectives, disrupting the dominant misogynistic narratives of her found in many traditional biographies, which have predominantly been written by men. The exhibition also reflects on broader questions on the way women are represented and what parts of a subject's life are included or excluded when their story is told. In this way the subject of Bess acts as a lens through which the wider experiences of women can be explored, addressing broader themes in feminist geography.

This chapter first provides an introduction to the politics of biography and an exploration of pre-existing biographies of Bess of Hardwick. Second, it introduces the *We Are Bess* exhibition, the portraits and the aims of the exhibition. Finally, the third section discusses the multiple identities of Bess using comments made by the women in the exhibition, supported by information from different biographies of Bess, and explores the way in which these connect to broader feminist concerns.

The chapter argues that in creating a feminist revisionist history of the life of Bess of Hardwick, the *We Are Bess* exhibition demonstrates how the biography of one historical figure can illustrate the diverse, multifaceted nature of womanhood. It argues that a woman's identity is made up of multiple selves, meaning that there is no universal experience of being a woman. Underlying this argument, the chapter illustrates the way in which the experience of women in the past and in the present are interconnected, and how the life of a historical figure such as Bess of Hardwick can be used to address many of the issues experienced by modern women today, issues that underpin the work of feminism and feminist geographers. Therefore, the chapter highlights the enduring persistence of the inequalities that women face, which are firmly embedded in society, and that feminism works to address and challenge.

The Politics of Biography and the Misrepresentation of Bess

The *We Are Bess* exhibition illustrates the way in which an individual biography can be used to explore broader themes or ideas (Naylor, 2008), as well as links between the personal life of a subject and the wider political and social contexts (Barnes, 2001; Roberts, 2002), key ideas presented in geographical engagements with biography. The exhibition also highlights a number of issues associated with the politics of biography. Firstly, Lee (2009) uses two contrasting metaphors to describe biography: the portrait and the autopsy. Whilst the autopsy presents simply a temporal recount of a life and the events that took place between birth and death, this exhibition presents the biography of Bess in the style of a portrait, drawing out her emotions, feelings and a warmer, more energetic side of her personality. There is also a clear link here between framing biography as a portrait and the use of portraiture in this exhibition and as a key part of society during the sixteenth century. Lee (2009) also highlights that biography, like many other types of representation and knowledge production, can never be seen as objective, as it is always written from a certain position and constructed by the elements of the author's life including their race, class, gender, education, beliefs and social politics.

Traditionally, many biographies are written by someone who knew the subject or their families, and this can be reflected in accounts which draw on the legacy left behind by the opinions of her husbands, and also the dominance of male voices which present misogynistic attitudes about Bess, and women of the time. In contrast, the way in which Bess' story is told in this exhibition and the aspects of her life that are emphasised reflect the lives and experiences of the women who have taken part, thus presenting another subjective, partial perspective but one that challenges the masculinist ones that have existed previously. Finally, Lee (2005) notes that biography is a process of making over someone's life, breaking up, rearranging, altering and editing information. Therefore, the *We Are Bess* exhibition does not claim to present new information about Bess or deny the timeline of her life that is already presented, rather it portrays these facts in a new way to generate new discussions and understandings. In this way, the exhibition disrupts a temporality based approach to narrating Bess' life, instead framing it through the lens of womanhood, narrating her life through the interconnected experience of Bess and modern women.

In studying Bess of Hardwick for this chapter, a number of biographies of Bess were used in order to develop a detailed understanding of her life, marriages, children and most important properties, thus producing the most well-known and therefore dominant and accepted representation of Bess. The entry on Bess of Hardwick in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* by Elizabeth Goldring (2004) can be seen as the most well-known and the most accessible biography, simply relaying her life events in a clear and concise biography, with little additional information. Extra details were found in a number of other biographies: *Bess of Hardwick and her circle* by Maud Stepney Rawson (1910); *Bess of Hardwick* by Ethel Carleton Williams (1959); *Bess of Hardwick:*

Portrait of an Elizabethan Dynast by David Durant (1988); and *Bess of Hardwick: First Lady of Chatsworth* by Mary Lovall (2005). These biographies also take a traditional approach to biography, narrating her life temporally, but also drawing attention to and providing a critique of the ways in which Bess has been described by historians. Williams (1959) notes that over time Bess has been described as a 'termagant' by Professor Pollard, a 'woman of masculine understanding and conduct' by Edmund Lodge, and as 'selfish, overbearing, treacherous and unfeeling' by Reverend Joseph Hunter, and these descriptions have had a lasting effect on her legacy, shaping the reputation she has today.

The more contemporary biographers criticise these descriptions for example Durant (1988: 227) argues that she has been 'judged unjustly and cruelly misrepresented'. Instead Bess is described as being 'no ordinary woman', a remarkably powerful opportunist with charms of wit and beauty (Durant, 1988: 1). Additionally, she is described as being ambitious, successful, intelligent, capable and a woman ahead of her time (Lovall, 2005). Furthermore, Lovall (2005) argues that whilst many regarded her as a cold-hearted shrew, Bess was actually shrewd rather than shrewish. Rawson (1910: 193) also argues that 'such a lady would naturally make enemies' and it is the emotional opinions of these enemies that colour her representation (Lovall, 2005). This demonstrates the way in which knowledge about a person is shaped by the opinions and attitudes of the people who produce it, which itself is situated and shaped in a particular spatial and temporal context. This highlights that biographies are interpretations, retellings and reimaginings of a life lived rather than a definitive account.

Studying these biographies highlights a three-part transitional shift in the types of biographical content produced about Bess. Firstly, these biographies show a shift from the dominant narratives forged by traditional male historians, to a broad description of her life containing criticisms of these opinions and a fairer exploration of her character, using more celebratory language, presented by the likes of Rawson (1910), Williams (1959) and Durant (1988). This exhibition does not present new information about Bess of Hardwick and her life; therefore, its contents reflect that found in these biographies. However, here Bess' life is portrayed from an alternative perspective, prioritising the voice of women and emphasising the multifaceted nature of womanhood, and therefore Bess' character. This reflects Roberts (2002) argument that feminist research impacted biography to give empowerment and a voice to women. It can also be noted that the biography presented by Lovall (2005) is most aligned to the later perspective, reflecting the more recent date in which it was written. It is also worth noting that Bess is the subject of a lot of biographical work, suggesting that whilst being a prominent figure of her time resulting in a lot of attention, taking practical issues of recovery and biography into account there is a sizeable and accessible collection of materials on her life existing in the archives and in the physical site of Hardwick Hall, which has been used to document her life.

Reflecting the ideas visible in these written biographies, the research that underlines the *We Are Bess* exhibition was carried out by Dr. Emma Turnbull, research fellow at the University of Oxford. Turnbull describes how during her research she found a fascinating Bess that surprised her as she was completely different to the Bess portrayed throughout history (Turnbull, 2018), but one that can be seen gradually appearing in biographies written later on. Here, the Bess found was resourceful, kind, smart and shrewd, with an active network of female friends, who used her power to influence the society she lived in (ibid.). This exhibition therefore aims to make these attitudes towards Bess and the aspects of her life that they reflect visible, disrupting the dominant narrative that has branded her as a shrew. This is summarised in the comments made by Kate Mosse OBE, author and founder of the *Women's Prize for Fiction*, who notes:

> *"Determined, principled, articulate, enthusiastic, philanthropic, confident, a lover, a stateswoman, a mother, a woman of fortitude, but yet … jealous contemporaries and historians following in their footsteps, twisted her words and her actions and tried to blacken her reputation. This exhibition not only gives this amazing woman the honour and credit she deserves, but finally gives Bess back her voice."*
>
> -Kate Mosse OBE

Introducing the *We Are Bess* Exhibition

The *We Are Bess* exhibition is a photography exhibition on display in the Long Gallery at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, and online. The exhibition was a collaboration between the National Trust, University of Oxford research fellow Dr. Emma Turnbull, and creative director Dr. Suzannah Lipscomb, historian from the University of Roehampton. The *We Are Bess* exhibition coincides with the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which granted some women the right to vote. Reflecting trends across the cultural sector as a whole, this anniversary was celebrated by the National Trust in their Women and Power Campaign, consisting of a programme of events, exhibitions, talks and art interventions (Potter, 2019).

The exhibition begins with an introductory video by Dr. Emma Turnbull, Dr. Suzannah Lipscomb and the House and Collection's Manager Dr. Nigel Wright, which sets the context for the exhibition, ending with a series of powerful questions, encouraging the audience to reflect on their own lives and question how their experiences connect to those of Bess of Hardwick. Here, the language used in this video is purposefully catchy and provocative, disrupting the sense of historical distance between the audience and the subject, making the audience aware that the exhibition they are about to see is as much about themselves as it is about Bess and the twenty women involved, thus framing the audience's mindset before they have even set foot inside the exhibition hall.

> *Have you ever been told that you are too ambitious?*
> *Then you are Bess*

Have you ever been told that you can't do something, or you shouldn't do something?
Then you are Bess
Has an ex ever spread lies about you behind your back?
Then you are Bess
Have you ever been slut shamed?
Then you are Bess
If you've ever experienced loss
Then you are Bess
Have you ever felt the only woman in a man's world?
Then you are Bess

-Emma Turnbull, Dr. Nigel Wright and Dr. Suzannah Lipscomb (2018)

The exhibition consists of twenty portraits of diverse, influential modern women, hanging in the Long Gallery alongside Tudor portraits of Bess, her family, and key figures in society for example Queen Elizabeth. The portraits display women from a range of fields, jobs and disciplines, and represent different ethnic, social and religious backgrounds, ages, sexual orientations, and abilities. A portrait guide is available for visitors which gives details of the women in each of the photos and their comments on how they relate to the experiences of Bess. A list and description of the twenty women in the exhibition can be found in appendix 1. The portraits (figure 1) were taken by photographer Rachel Adams, a documentary and portrait photographer who works with sub-cultures internationally, capturing otherwise unseen aspects of life (National Trust, 2019). She is particularly interested in documenting style, performance and cultural practice that remain neglected by the mainstream media, placing personal stories at the heart of her work (ibid.).

Figure 1a: Photos showing a selection of portraits hanging in the Long Gallery at Hardwick Hall, part of the *We Are Bess* exhibition. Photos show portraits of Phyll Opoku-Gyimah, Claire Cadman, Robyn Riggans, Cathy Newman, Juno Dawson and Patricia Greene MBE.

Figure 1b: Photos showing a selection of portraits hanging in the Long Gallery at Hardwick Hall, part of the *We Are Bess* exhibition. Photos show portraits of Pinda Leihal, Natalie Haynes, Afua Hirsch and Dr. Frances Ryan. Author's photo (2019).

The *We Are Bess* exhibition aims to change the way in which Bess of Hardwick is viewed, moving away from the negative misconceptions about her that were left behind by the opinions of her husbands and that have been passed down from male historian to male historian. Through the voices of twenty modern women, her story has been retold, reframing the misogynistic narrative and unfair misrepresentation of her character. Through the use of modern female voices, the audience is encouraged to think about how women are talked about in the past and present, whether women are believed when they speak, and about the ways in which women's power and life experiences are represented.

The purpose of the project was primarily to mark a moment of change for Hardwick Hall; to create a programme that includes a display, discussion and debate that challenges expectations of the types of subject matter that can be tackled in a Treasure House (Potter, 2019). Similarly, in the client brief outline by Dr. Nigel Wright, the project aims to change perceptions about Hardwick Hall as an attraction, and the risks it is prepared to take with strong content (ibid.).

The client brief also outlines a number of aims of the project for the audience. Firstly, audiences will understand that people who live in different times or cultures have both a shared humanity with us, but also different mind-sets and cultural contexts. Next, audiences will realise that historians exert bias and prejudice, and sometimes accept prevailing narratives, passing them on across generations, therefore highlighting the role that female historians play in giving new insights into old stories. Finally, audiences will feel that there are recognisable issues for women today as in the sixteenth century, and what this means for both women in the past and the present, and how this can be carried into the future. This reflects work by Roberts (2002) who notes the importance

of biography in revealing and understanding the personal links with its social and political context demonstrating that the story of a single individual resonates with experiences through the past, present and future and can be used to illustrate broader issues about the changing, and more importantly, prevailing attitudes towards women across different time periods.

One of the key messages of the *We Are Bess* exhibition is the idea that there is no single type of woman and therefore no single framework that a woman should be expected to fit into. In this way, when studying women, no universal claims can be made regarding the lives and experiences of women as a whole. Building on this, it is important to recognise that each individual woman has multiple selves and multiple different identities which not only intersect and shape one another but intersect with external factors in different spaces, places and times to shape the way in which they are treated by the world. Here, each woman in the portraits is quoted detailing their personal connections to Bess as a woman and the way in which they relate to particular parts of her identity. Through this exhibition, the multifaceted nature of Bess' character is acknowledged and explored, thus shining a light on the different aspects of Bess' personality that have not previously been addressed (Turnbull, 2018).

The most commonly known element of Bess' life is her role as a businesswoman and the builder of magnificent Elizabethan houses, most famously Chatsworth House and Hardwick Hall. This is emphasised by the nickname of 'Building Bess' given to her by some writers (Rawson, 1988). Furthermore Williams (1959) describes her as an unrivalled businesswoman and the greatest female builder England has ever seen. However, whilst this is the most famous part of her legacy, this is not the only important aspect of her life. Throughout her life, Bess went through eight pregnancies and births, one possible miscarriage and four marriages. She raised eight children, multiple stepchildren and grandchildren, whilst managing the household finances for several estates, ensuring rents were collected and servants were paid. She even handled a public scandal in light of the breakdown of her last marriage to the Earl of Shrewsbury, a scandal that has unfairly come to be one of the defining aspects of her life and therefore her legacy. This is reflected in comments made by Hollie McNish, a poet, writer and spoken word artist featured in this exhibition:

> *"I travel all across the UK meeting with parents who find it nearly impossible to juggle children and work and relationships and their own health and happiness. That Bess did what she did with eight children, six surviving, eight or more pregnancies, multiple husbands and national slander against her is quite a thing, especially in those days and even for a woman of perhaps wealthier means than most of us."*
>
> - Hollie McNish

It is clear that Bess had a rich and diverse identity, encompassing many different experiences and roles as a woman. The next part of this chapter will focus primarily on three of these key characteristics that are explored in the exhibition and emphasised

by the comments and connections made by some of the twenty women who have taken part. Firstly, it will explore Bess' experience with loss and emotion, followed by Bess' experience as the maligned wife of the Earl of Shrewsbury and the abuse she experienced during their marriage, and finally issues associated to what it means to be a 'real woman'. Through exploring these aspects of Bess' life, the *We Are Bess* exhibition is a lens through which broader contemporary issues associated to womanhood in society today can be addressed, demonstrating the interconnection between the past and the present, and the continuity in experience between Bess of Hardwick and women today.

A Life of Loss and Emotion

Emotion is an essential aspect in a person's biography, as it has 'the power to transform the shape of our lives' (Davidson et al, 2007: 1). Therefore, encompassing emotions in a subject's biography also turns a biography from an autopsy of a person's life to a portrait (Lee, 2009). Furthermore, the importance of taking emotions seriously in academia was addressed by feminist geographers, highlighting the need to recognise and theorise the significant role emotions play in a person's life. The dominant descriptions of Bess of Hardwick as being unfeeling, shrewish and selfish, overlook the emotional side of Bess' character as Lovall (2005) notes that there is in fact more evidence that Bess was an affectionate, kind-hearted and caring woman. The *We Are Bess* exhibition frames Bess in this way, highlighting a life characterised by loss. Addressing these elements of Bess' life opens up a space to discuss women's experiences with loss and emotion, a potentially defining part of some women's lives. This section will also address two emerging areas of feminist geography: emotional geographies and the geographies of dying and death.

From a very young age Bess' life was characterised by loss: losing her father during her childhood; losing one of her stepchildren Mary in her teens; and losing all four of her husbands. Here, Williams (1959) argues that the loss of her father John Hardwick can be seen as a defining part of her childhood and therefore played a significant role in shaping her identity, and the development of traits which made her such a remarkable woman. For example, the lack of male relative to turn to generated a 'sturdy independence and self-reliance', and the impending poverty the family were left with resulted in 'insecurity and an increased passion for thrift' (Williams, 1959: 3). Bess was also a strong and protective mother, with a passion for the advancement of her children and placing paramount importance on their future prospects. However, a study of Bess' role as a mother, and the list of her children and their accomplishments that feature in official biographical work should not overlook the main loss in Bess' life, two of her eight children, Temperance and Lucretia. This loss has been emphasised in this exhibition through the portrait and voice of Claire Cadman, mother of three who lost one of her sons Luke in 1997. Claire is now the event's coordinator for the Chesterfield branch of Stillbirth and Neonatal charity to support other families dealing with the loss of a baby. Additionally, some biographies of Bess also point to her experience with

miscarriage, a topic that is often overlooked and ignored due to its taboo nature and the negative feelings associated with it. Bess' experience with the loss of her children is what connects Claire Cadman to Bess:

> *"Like Bess, I have lost a baby. You re-build your life after your child has died, but the pain remains. Bereaved mothers are still mothers. Since my first son was stillborn, I have tried to keep his memory alive and break the taboo surrounding baby loss."*
>
> - Claire Cadman

Addressing this aspect of her life and acknowledging that Bess would not have been the emotionless, unfeeling woman as often described, but that this emotion does not deter from her strength and power, is vital in changing the way in which Bess is described as a woman. Addressing this aspect also provides a space in which experiences with loss and emotion can be discussed more broadly, reflecting emerging areas in feminist geography. Calling for an engagement with emotional geographies, Anderson and Smith (2001: 7) note that whilst reflecting on the extent to which the human world is constructed and lived through emotions, they were 'forced to confront the silencing of emotion in both social research and public life'. This element of the exhibition illustrates how an engagement with the personal intimate scale can enrich and deepen the biography of a subject, as emotions are inherently political and gendered, thus important in controlling how lives are lived and societies are made (Anderson and Smith, 2001). It also reveals how traditionally discussions of emotion are often excluded in academic narratives, most likely due to the gendered nature of knowledge production and the topic of emotion being seen as feminine, thus opposed to the enlightenment ideal of the rational objective masculinist knower. However, with the influence of feminist geography on the discipline there is increasing recognition of the important of emotions in creating richer understandings in geography (Davidson et al., 2007; Sharp, 2008).

Building on emotional geographies, McNiven (2016) notes that geographies of death and dying is an emerging area of academic inquiry interested in the spatialities of mortality and extending into themes of bereavement and loss, drawing on the work of Maddrell and Sidaway (2010). Most relevant to this discussion McNiven (2016) studies the grief and mourning associated to different pregnancy losses including miscarriages, terminations and early neonatal deaths, noting that pregnancy loss remains a taboo topic for discussion in society and therefore has been neglected in academic research. This demonstrates the way in which the *We Are Bess* project highlights taboo aspects of women's lives such as pregnancy, miscarriage and emotional labour. These subjects are vital aspects of a woman's life and one that even in the present day is stigmatised, whilst discussions surrounding these subjects associated to the lives of women in the sixteenth century would be previously unheard of. This exhibition therefore reveals the importance of centring these experiences, instead of marginalising them. By drawing on this aspect of Bess' life, the *We Are Bess* exhibition therefore opens up a

space for the discussion of issues of emotion and loss that are emerging within feminist geography.

Bess the Maligned Wife

During the breakdown of her marriage to George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, Bess became a victim of abusive behaviour at the hands of her husband. This is an experience that a number of women in the *We Are Bess* exhibition express their connections with. Framing Bess' experience of marriage in this way highlights the ideals and expectations of women held by men in society and the consequences that arise if these ideals are not met. Therefore, this can be seen as a tool to open up a dialogue about prominent feminist issues of gender roles, marital expectations and domestic abuse. Towards the end of their marriage Shrewsbury experienced dramatic changes in his personality, which changed his relationship with his wife, resulting in obsessive paranoia against her. This led to Shrewsbury spreading lies about Bess, accusing her of slander, banishing her from all her houses, taking away her allowance and generally mistreating her (Durant, 1988).

The end of Bess' marriage to the Earl of Shrewsbury has had a lasting impact on the way Bess' story has been told as letters written by the Earl during this time have falsely informed historians of her character. Shrewsbury became bitter, disillusioned and angry (Lovall, 2005), expressing his feelings towards his wife in various letters, writing that she had a 'heart replenished with deadly malice and hatred', calling her a 'wicked and malicious wife' and claiming he was 'ashamed of his choice of such a creature' (Durant, 1988: 126). Shrewsbury also told his friends that Bess was extravagant, accused her of having a 'wicked tongue', and branded her a 'shrew'. At this time, these descriptions of Bess were taken as an accurate representation of her character (Lovall, 2005) and have been passed along by historians to become the dominant narrative of Bess, thus demonstrating the way in which the male voice often shapes and controls the way in which knowledge about a particular subject is formed, and is therefore gendered (Rose, 1993; Pratt and Kraft, 2014).

This aspect of Bess' experience illustrates the way in which women are labelled and abused for not conforming to certain expectations held by men on how women are supposed to act and behave. This is demonstrated in the following quote by Cathy Newman, featured in the exhibition, who is the first female presenter of Channel 4 News and a politics writer and author, who emphasises the continuity in the way in which women in positions of power are often treated:

> *Today, the words 'shrill' and 'hysterical' are flung at women – and only women - in the public eye to belittle and undermine them. She [Bess] was slandered in the royal court. Today, women's reputations are trashed online. So yes, we are all Bess. The only surprise is it's taken us four hundred years to realise it.*
>
> - Cathy Newman

This aspect of Bess' experience draws attention to the figure of the wife, and the importance of gender roles and expectations in controlling the behaviour of a husband. Drawing on feminist theory of familial patriarchal ideology, Smith (1990) argued that husbands who adhere to such an ideology are more likely to beat their wives than husbands who do not. Here a familial patriarchal ideology centres on the idea that there is male dominance within a family, and focuses on themes of the wife's obedience, respect, loyalty, dependency, sexual access and sexual fidelity (Smith, 1990). In situations when these ideals are violated by the wife, as shown in the behaviour of Bess as a strong minded, determined and independent woman, men become aggressive and violent. It can be seen that these ideologies on the expectations of women underline the life of Bess and that her strength, power and independence, and therefore non-conformity to the traditional expectations of a wife, resulted in her mistreatment by her husband.

These ideas however are outdated, as studies of domestic abuse have moved away from explanations based solely on patriarchal ideologies and gender roles to issues of mental health, substance abuse and childhood trauma (Alcorn, 2019). Additionally, the heteronormative universal claims based on studies of married heterosexual couples have been undermined by the recognition that domestic abuse occurs within same sex relationships, and that men are also victims of domestic abuse. Furthermore, the dominant narrative of domestic abuse is no longer based on wife beating at the hands of a husband, but is described more broadly as psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional abuse at the hands of a spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, son or daughter, parent, sibling or an ex-relation (ONS, 2018). Taking all these factors into consideration however, this example of Bess' experience still highlights the prevalence of domestic abuse within society and the role it can play in the experience of womanhood for many women, as statistics show that in the year ending March 2018, an estimated 1.3 million women aged 16 to 59 years experienced domestic abuse (ONS, 2018). This is illustrated in the exhibition by Robyn Riggans, who set up the charity Women on the Road to Healing (WORTH) to help women who have been in abusive relationships, having escaped from an abusive relationship herself and turned her life around:

> *"The man who was supposed to love me became the person who abused me and then spread lies about me. Having lies told by someone so close causes a deep level of heartache. I now run a charity that supports women that have been in abusive relationships to rebuild lives and self-worth."*
>
> - Robyn Riggans

Exploring Bess' experience as a maligned wife thus demonstrates how the *We Are Bess* exhibition illustrates the way in which the story of one historical woman can be used to explore the idea of womanhood and opens up a space to address the multifaceted nature of women's experience. In particular, this section has drawn attention to feminist issues such as traditional gender roles, and the prevalence of domestic abuse.

However, the importance of the diversity of experience amongst women in similar situations must be highlighted, as each domestic abuse case is individual and specific, and experiences cannot be studied under the solely heteronormative lens presented in the life of Bess. However, it must be noted that experiences of domestic abuse are extremely difficult to uncover, particularly the voices of those that are marginalised in society, therefore telling the story of Bess in the space of a treasure house draws attention to a topic which would have previously been ignored.

Bess the 'Real Woman'

The expectations and requirements of a 'real woman' are discussed throughout daily life, reflecting ideals based on every aspect of a woman's life from the way a woman looks, dresses and acts to their corporeality and reproductive rights, to their education and profession. Work done as part of the feminist movement, aims to move away from traditional, misogynistic ideas about expectations of women's behaviours and the boundaries and confinements they must exist within under the patriarchy. This is highlighted by a number of women in this exhibition and will be explored here through the lens of the transgender 'debate', a paramount but complex issue in contemporary society.

Bess' experience as a woman in the sixteenth century was accompanied by the common accusation that she was not a 'real woman' as she did not confine herself to the traditional boundaries of what a woman was seen to do at the time. Bess was often labelled as not being a 'real woman' or being a woman of 'masculine understanding and conduct' due to her role as a businesswoman, an estate manager and an active agent in lobbying parliament, using the legal system to her advantage, to protect herself and her family, thus venturing into arenas typically dominated by men and where women were seen as not belonging and out of place. Her actions demonstrate her strength and independence, showing that she was not the subservient wife she was meant to be and therefore labelled as not a 'real woman'.

Given today's political climate and the significant impact discussions of identity politics and LGBT rights are having on people's lives, the elements of the *We Are Bess* exhibition which address the idea of a 'real woman' draw paramount attention to prominent debates about the idea of womanhood that exist in society today. Whilst Bess' experience cannot be directly compared to that of a transgender woman, by drawing attention to the idea that standards for a 'real woman' exist, the exhibition highlights the transgender 'debate' as a key feminist concern. This is supported in a comment for the exhibition by Juno Dawson, a transgender teen fiction writer on sexuality and identity:

"As a transgender woman, I am often told I am not a 'proper' woman, not a 'real' woman. It seems to me that both Bess and I are 'self-made' women albeit in different ways. The notion of 'correctness' is passed down from the patriarchy and we must rebel against it."

- Juno Dawson

The transgender 'debate' is a prominent and complex debate within society today, and one that attracts significant attention in academia, social media and the press. Within feminism, the transgender 'debate' has been framed in many different theoretical ways, drawing on complex philosophical ideas. In general, the majority of feminists see the struggle for transgender rights and acceptance as an important feminist issue, with the emergence of transfeminism which situates the rights of transwomen as an integral part of the feminist struggle for women's rights as a whole. Here, transwomen are fighting for the right for their inclusion and participation in women-only events, organisations, spaces, and service provisions and the right to self-define without meeting unnecessary medical requirements.

Furthermore, transgeographies has become an emerging area of research in geography, studying the specificities and complexities of the experience of transgender lives (Browne et al., 2010); exploring how transgender lives navigate and disrupt the gender binary and associated dichotomy of femininity and masculinity; and looking at the spatialities of being transgender and issues of inclusivity and exclusivity in LGBTQ spaces (Nash, 2010). However, the transgender community has been subject to a vocal radical feminist critique opposing the existence and equality of transgender women, rejecting the inclusion of transwomen in women's spaces and events, and objecting to the idea that transwomen are 'real' women. One argument for this rejection is based on the idea that as transwomen are assigned male at birth, they experience some degree of male privilege and their experiences cannot ever be conflated to a cis woman. It is this notion of a 'real woman' that the *We Are Bess* exhibition, and Juno Dawson, highlights.

There is considerable distance between the life of Bess of Hardwick during the sixteenth century and contemporary debates on gender, identity politics and transgender rights, making its juxtaposition in this exhibition surprising. However, this section demonstrates that whilst the personal struggles are different, the fact that women's lives are shaped and controlled by societal expectations of femininity remains the same. This exhibition, therefore, further illustrates the interconnections between women's experiences in seemingly separated historic and contemporary societies. Additionally, it further indicates how the biography of one individual can be used to explore broader ideas of womanhood. Framing this geographically allows for important work in situating the personal in its larger social, cultural and political contexts, and demonstrates the interconnections between different scales of study.

Concluding Remarks

The example of the *We Are Bess* exhibition at Hardwick Hall highlights a number of key points on the rewriting of women's histories and the creation of a feminist revisionist history, using the example of a well-known figure and her story and changing the way in which it has been told. Throughout, the exhibition demonstrates the paramount importance of female historians in producing more accurate representations of female figures throughout history, overwriting the misogynistic narratives of their male counterparts. The *We Are Bess* exhibition illustrates how the history of one historical figure can be used to open up a discussion about the multiple identities and selves of women and demonstrates connections between women's experiences, past and present. It also illustrates the way in which the biography of an individual such as Bess of Hardwick can be used to generate discussions on a multitude of issues present in feminist geography from gender roles and domestic abuse, to emotion and loss, to identity politics and transgender rights. In this way, the project opens up a space to discuss taboos, mainly affecting women, that are still present in society today. Therefore, through discussing these topics in the space of a treasure house, and situating them in historical narratives, the exhibition challenges expectations of the types of subject matter that can be tackled in this type of space.

However, whilst the exhibition demonstrates the multifaceted nature of women's identities and experiences, using women with diverse identities to illustrate what it means to be a modern woman today and the impossibility of defining what it means to be a woman or to be feminine, it seemingly fails to address the privileged aspects of Bess' own identity. Whilst there is no denying that Bess was subject to the sexist attitudes of the society of the time, overcoming a number of significant obstacles, it cannot be ignored that Bess is a white, middle class, presumably heterosexual woman and therefore significantly more privileged than others, and therefore not representative of the experiences of women as a whole. Whilst Bess can be seen as a role model in regard to issues associated to gender, due to her lifestyle and the time she lived in, there is very little evidence to suggest that Bess would have held attitudes and opinions that align to the intersectional feminist ideas of today. Therefore, this exhibition illustrates the continued need for an intersectional approach to studying women as it fails to acknowledge the privileged position of Bess and how acknowledging this privilege would impact the messages the exhibition is presenting.

Here it must be noted, however, that it is in fact Bess' privileged position that allows her to be studied, due to records and documentation of her life existing. Therefore, the life of Bess can be used as a window to study those in marginalised positions whose experiences historically cannot be uncovered. Furthermore, drawing on the aforementioned quote by Kate Mosse OBE who notes that "this exhibition not only gives this amazing woman the honour and credit she deserves, but finally gives Bess back her voice", the impossibility of giving Bess back her voice must be acknowledged. Instead, the exhibition emphasises and projects the voices of other women, speaking

for Bess, who want to support, celebrate and uplift her as a woman, not displaying the attitudes of Bess herself.

Finally, this chapter has revealed the ways in which exhibitions can be used as a tool to intervene in the narration of women's histories, disrupting and challenging dominant narratives through the creation of a feminist revisionist history. In this way, exhibitions have the potential to draw together visual and textual materials, new technologies and innovative uses of space in order to create meaning and produce new historical knowledges.

CHAPTER 5: GOOD NIGHT STORIES FOR REBEL GIRLS

Introduction

Since 2016, the publishing industry has seen the increasing popularity of non-fiction children's literature celebrating women, their lives and their achievements. The market is abundant with a number of books that aim to enlighten young children to the stories of female historical figures across all careers and disciplines. A few examples include Kate Pankhurst's *Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World (2016), Fantastically Great Women Who Made History (2018)* and *Fantastically Great Women Who Worked Wonders (2019);* Rachel Ignotofsky's *Women in Science: 50 Fearless Pioneers Who Changed the World (2017)* and *Women in Sports: 50 Fearless Athletes Who Played to Win (2018);* and Katherine Halligan's *HerStory: 50 Women and Girls Who Shook the World (2018*). These books provide brief biographies of women throughout history and the achievements or contributions made to society, thus celebrating the successes of women and highlighting their importance historically and in the present. The popularity of these books shows the progress feminism has made over the last few years, demonstrating the way in which feminism is becoming increasingly accessible, encouraging engagement from children of a young age and reaching audiences outside of academia.

This chapter explores the role of children's non-fiction literature in the creation of a feminist revisionist history, exploring the present-day engagement with women's histories, using the example of award-winning book *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls (2016)* by Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo. It is the commercial success of this book which can be seen to have sparked this new, long over-due trend (Leszkiewicz, 2018; Noble, 2017). This book is the focus of the chapter due to its notable popularity, the level of public engagement and media response it has received, and the vast number of biographies narrated within it. The chapter will begin with an introduction to the book, followed by an exploration of trends in children's literature before a discussion of a range of issues drawing on customer reviews from Good Reads and Amazon as well as the analysis of media coverage and interviews with the book's authors.

This chapter firstly argues that in creating a feminist revisionist history, the book can challenge imaginative geographies of gender through inspiring and educating its audience. Secondly, it addresses the situated, partial nature of all knowledge and the consequences this has on its contents and the messages conveyed. This chapter also addresses the complexities of celebrating female historical figures, highlighting complicated issues of role models, controversial figures and questions of inclusion and exclusion in a feminist revisionist history. Finally, the chapter addresses the contemporary approaches to feminism undertaken in *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* exploring its increased accessibility, its target audience of young girls and its individualistic approach. In this way, it addresses new and alternative ways in which

feminism can be encompassed into popular culture, and ways this could be effectively built on.

Introducing *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls*

Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls by Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo is a collection of one hundred short stories about women and their contributions throughout history and in the present day. The book itself consists of a double page spread dedicated to each woman, in which one page provides a written biographical summary of the woman's life whilst the other displays an illustrated portrait. The biographies are written in the style of a children's bedtime story or fairy tale, with many starting with 'once upon a time…' or 'once there was a girl…' thus leading to their marketing as good night stories. The portraits were illustrated by sixty different female illustrators from around the world, each with their own unique and individual style.

The one hundred women included in the book cover a diverse range of biographies and contributions. They have been born and have lived in countries all across the globe and through a range of time periods; representing different ages, races, religions, ethnicities, sexualities and abilities. They also display different career types, achievements and ambitions including sports, music, art, literature, politics, activism, medicine, science, and mathematics as well as less conventional figures such as pirates, spies and key players in war and conflict. The book has now sold over one million copies, been translated into more than 40 languages (Moorhead, 2018) and has become a brand within itself with the sequel *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls 2* published in 2017 as well as the production of branded journals, postcards, temporary tattoos, a calendar, a colouring book and a podcast.

Figure 2: Images showing the front cover of *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* and an example page showing the story of Amelia Earhart, illustrated by Giulia Flamini. Source: *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls,* Timbuktu Labs, Inc. (2016).

For the authors, Elena Favilli, an award winning journalist and media entrepreneur, and Francesca Cavallo, a published writer and award-winning theatre director, founders of Timbuktu Labs in 2011, the motivation to write this book came from a

place of anger at their own experience as female professionals in Silicon Valley, trying to get investors to help their media start up (Cavallo, 2018). After being told that they would never get their book of the ground on their own as two women, Favilli and Cavallo launched the most successful literary crowdfunding appeal to date, raising almost one million dollars through 20,025 backers on *Kickstarter*.

Their motivation also came from a place of sadness, looking back at their childhood and the lack of female figures that were presented to them. Therefore, Favilli and Cavallo aim to address the gender disparities in children's literature and challenge the gender stereotypes of girls as princesses and boys as heroes they often present (Rannard, 2017), trends which will be explored in a subsequent section. Additionally, before the creation of this book, the authors had a passion for exposing children to real world events as demonstrated in their iPad magazine titled Timbuktu which presents news stories to children as a form of entertainment with bright colours, easy to read language and use of sound. The authors have also donated $100,000 to the Malala Fund, leading the fight to give all girls access to education especially in countries where they are traditionally marginalised. The authors note that 'we couldn't be more aligned with her mission and vision for a brighter and more equal future' (Eyre, 2018). These actions embed the values encompassed throughout *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls*, thus demonstrating the author's commitment to challenging gender inequality and improving the lives of girls beyond the impact of their book.

Trends in Children's Literature

Research undertaken by *The Guardian* using Nielson BookScan data looking at the top 100 illustrated children's books in 2018 shows that not only is there significant inequality in gender representation in children's books, but there is in fact growing marginalisation of female characters compared to the same research undertaken in 2017 (Ferguson, 2019). From this research it was found that in 2018, 41% of characters were female compared to 59% male, and male characters outnumber female characters in more than half of books (ibid.). Meanwhile, in comparison to the 2017 statistics, speaking parts for male characters rose by 19% while the number of lead roles for male characters increased by 9% and decreased 7% for female characters (ibid.). What this research also draws attention to is the lack of diversity of characters beyond their gender, particularly the marginalisation of characters of ethnic minorities. For example, in 2018, 85% of illustrated human characters in the books were white, leaving only 15% portrayed as from ethnic minorities. Furthermore, 70% of books with illustrations of black, Asian or other ethnic minority (BAME) characters featured them in non-speaking roles and only in 7 books were they important enough to be referred to by name. The lack of diversity in the characters can be seen to reflect the lack of diversity amongst the illustrators and authors themselves as all were white, and around two thirds were male (Ferguson, 2019).

These statistics demonstrate that very little has changed as research on children's books in the US between 1900 and 2000 by McCabe et al (2011) found that compared to female characters, male characters are represented nearly twice as often in titles and 1.6 times as often as central characters. The importance of this is also highlighted as children's books play a significant role in celebrating and reaffirming cultural values therefore contributing to the way in which children understand gender roles and expectations and how stories continually reproduce and legitimise gender inequality (McCabe et al, 2011). Furthermore, Sharp (2000: 328) looks at the connections between literature and imagined geographies, noting how literature is a way in which 'discourses of identity and difference are established and communicated' illustrating how people's understandings of the world are a product of the cultural products and visual media they engage with. This is supported by Squire (1996) who notes how children's literature is a method of conveying and shaping meanings, attitudes and values. In this way the marginalisation of female characters in children's books, as well as characters of ethnic minorities or different sexualities or abilities shape reality for children as they are led to believe that the stories they read are true representations of the real world.

Highlighting another trend in children's literature, reviewers admire this book for bringing female characters into the forefront of stories and challenging the stereotypes often presented in children's books aimed specifically at girls. Set out to mirror traditional fairy tales, the one-page stories in *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* are far from traditional, as one reviewer describes the stories as 'fairy tales for heroines who definitely don't need rescuing' (GRU 3). This is a stark contrast to popular fairy tales in which female characters are seen as weak, dependent and in danger until the male protagonist arrives and saves the day. For example, one reader writes 'instead of believing that the only women they can admire as children are princesses destined to marry princes and live in castles, they can strive to be like real life heroines…what a breath of fresh air it is to swap those fairy tales for this modern feminist equivalent' (GRU 91). Reviewers therefore argue that the book teaches children, regardless of their gender, that they are the protagonist in their own lives, and they are in control of their own outcome. However, it is important to note that in addressing the issues of gender, these books at times ignore other important situational factors that can limit children's ability to gain access to specific spaces for example their class or access to education.

Challenging Imaginative Geographies of Gender

Cultural products such as non-fiction children's books play a role in producing and circulating imaginative geographies: 'representations of place, space and landscape that structure people's understandings of the world, and in turn help shape their actions' (Driver, 2014b: 246). Imaginative geographies come to be regarded as real because they reflect, sustain and legitimise people's imagination of the world, becoming the dominant understanding (Gregory, 2009). Driver (2014b) notes that

imaginative geographies are disseminated and circulated by different types of popular culture for example television, film and literature. However, he also notes the potential of popular culture to intervene and disrupt these imaginative geographies.

Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls, and similar products, can therefore be used to challenge the taken for granted assumptions about gender that are produced by imaginative geographies thus producing counter imaginative geographies. Here, the book challenges stereotypes of what it means to be a woman, illustrating that there is no universal woman and showing a diversity of identities. Products such as books structure people's understandings both of the world and society around them, but also of themselves. In this way, these books teach people to challenge societal norms about the role, experience and expectations of women in general, created and circulated through a patriarchal society but also empower individuals who can connect and relate to specific characteristics of the women represented in the book, whether it be a particular personality trait, interest or background. The following discussion will examine the way in which *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* acts as a tool to challenge the imaginative geographies of gender through its aims to inspire and educate. By praising the achievements and successes of different women, presenting figures as role models, and teaching children about issues of gender inequality, the book reshapes existing imaginative geographies of gender.

The most commonly used descriptions throughout the reviews refer to the inspirational and empowering nature of the book. Many reviews admire and celebrate the featured women, describing them as 'revolutionary, smart, strong, powerful, charismatic, talented and fearless' (GRU 2), 'courageous and inventive' (GRU 3) and 'fierce, amazing and unique' (GRU 64). Here, *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* can be seen to be breaking down boundaries and 'expanding our horizons about the scope of what is possible' (GRU 10), encouraging the audience to not see gender as barrier to what they can achieve. It inspires young girls to be educated and develop an understanding of the restrictions that stand in their way, challenging the patriarchy which upholds gender inequality or overcoming obstacles put in their way based on their class, race or other parts of their identity. The diverse selection of women in this book aims to demonstrate that there is there is no singular identity or role for women, and there is no one correct way to challenge social norms. Indeed, the book conveys to its audience that woman can succeed in all occupations or industries including those traditionally dominated by men. In doing this, the book aims to normalise the place of women in all aspects of society, encouraging women to push against and tear down the boundaries themselves and not wait for men to grant them access to these spaces.

The illustrations used in the book also help to foster an inspirational nature, using the specific and diverse artistic styles of the illustrations encompassing diverse colours, and techniques to create an emotive and evocative tone to the book, which engages and motivates the reader. Many reviewers praise the illustrations, describing them as 'hypnotic and ethereal' (GRU 30) and 'bold and playful' (GRU 103). A selection of

four of the portraits can be found below in figure 3 demonstrating the diverse range of styles, techniques and approaches used, each powerful and engaging in their own way. Favilli (2018) discusses the choice of artists for the illustrations noting that they wanted to use the book as a platform for elevating and showcasing female talent, and to demonstrate the uniqueness of all the illustrators, celebrating their vast variety of styles.

Figure 3: Images showing portraits of Jane Goodall by Emmanuelle Walker [a], Astrid Lindgren by Justine Lecouffe [b], Brenda Chapman by T. S. Abe [c], and Maya Gabeira by Martina Paukova [d]. Source: *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls,* Timbuktu Labs, Inc. (2016).

Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls also challenges the imaginative geographies of gender through acting as an educational tool, generating discussions and debates about key issues and encouraging children to ask questions, thus acting as a 'springboard for further research' about particular figures or events (AC 18). In this way, the book opens up space for dialogues about important contemporary feminist issues, for example, for one reader the book 'brought to the table very important conversations in a way she [reviewer's 11-year-old sister] could understand them. With this book we talked about racism, sexism and transphobia' (GRU 66). Furthermore, another reader describes how they used the book 'as a starting point for explaining complex issues to children [for example] forced marriage, gender identity, stereotyping and oppression' (AC 2). Supporting the aforementioned research of McCabe et al (2011), one reader highlights the role of children's books in shaping personal development, contributing to a child's beliefs, aspirations, behaviours, values and morals (GRU 42). Similarly, another reader summarises the importance of the book for the education of young children writing that 'this book sets an example, one that has the power to influence the mindset of every tiny human out there, so that they will go out into this world with a fairer, and more respectful view about the women who shape this world' (GRU 2). In this way, *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* teaches important societal issues and instils values and messages which are often absent from curriculum education, encouraging an understanding of the everyday challenges faced by women.

Partial Knowledge Production and Sanitised History

One of the key concerns of feminist geographers is the critique of knowledge production, a debate which is reflected in a number of reviews of *Good Night Stories for*

Rebel Girls. Some reviewers criticise the stories told in the book based on their partial, subjective approach, accusing the book of being politically skewed (GRU 5) due to the types of messages the book portrays. However, using partiality as a basis for criticism of a certain set of knowledges seemingly ignores or displays a lack of awareness of the partiality of all accounts of history that exist, some of which have become the normalised world view. Here, it is most likely that accusations that the book is politically skewed stem from an audience member whose own personal political views are not aligned to that of the author and therefore the contents of the book. Haraway (1991) exposes the social production of knowledge, noting that is impossible to claim objective, scientific, detached, universal knowledge as this presents a distinctively masculinist and exploitative understanding of the world (Holloway, 2011). Instead Haraway (1991) argues that all knowledge comes from somewhere and is shaped by the conditions in which it is produced, and therefore located. This results in a subjective, embodied, partial and situated knowledge. This is an important consideration both for the knowledges produced by the book, but also the reviews that analysis the book.

In this way, it must be acknowledged that all knowledge and therefore all history that is written, taught and consumed is partial. However, traditionally this only represents the perspective of white, middle class, heterosexual men. These histories also never acknowledge their partiality but rather lay claim to their universality. It is only by engaging with feminist theories that we can begin to deconstruct and highlight these processes and the discourse which has naturalised this knowledge. The new trend of rewriting women's histories, shown in *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls,* attempts to do this. Being political and acknowledging the politics within a biography does not mean the resulting historical narrative is invalid, rather it lays bare its intent, its theoretical lens, it invites discussion, dialogue and disagreement; it invites analysis. It is the acknowledgement of the situated nature of all knowledge and taking steps to change them that is at the centre of creating a feminist revisionist history. In this way, an audience should not always take the dominant narrative of history as an accurate reflection of the truth as there is always multiple knowledges about a certain person, place or event, all situated in different ways, and therefore multiple histories. *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* works to fill in the gaps created by an exclusionary traditional history, instead creating a more diverse and inclusive history by introducing female historical figures into a narrative in which they have been previously excluded.

Similarly, the book has also been heavily criticised for the way in which the stories have been told, accusing the book of being 'misleading' (GRU 54) and full of 'misdirections and illusions' (GRU 5). Many readers argue that the book is overly positive with any negative aspects of a figure's life being omitted, to overlook any corruption or scandalous behaviour. Due to the target audience being young girls, and the marketing of the book pointing to bedtime stories, the adaption of history for a young audience means that the stories can be seen as sheltered or censored (GRU 54),

missing out important pieces of information that may be inappropriate for young children to engage with.

Engagement with biography within geography highlights the politics involved in the writing of biography as Lee (2005:6) notes that 'biographies are also full of things that aren't there' referring to gaps in knowledge due to difficulties recovering the life of a historical figure, or in this case the purposeful omittance of information to shape the messages conveyed by the biographies. Reflecting on this it is also important to note that as well as the author shaping the content of a biography, biographies are always written with an intended audience. In this case it is the intended audience of young girls which shapes the type of information included or excluded in the book. This can also reflect issues of responsibility in biographical writing questioning whether an author has a moral obligation to tell the truth about a person's life and the events that took place within it (Eakin, 2004) or whether there is a duty to the audience to create a product that is entertaining, engaging and enjoyable to read. This is reflected in the acknowledgements found at the beginning of the book which read:

> *'This is a work of creative nonfiction. It is a collection of heart-warming and thought-provoking bedtime stories inspired by the life and adventures of one hundred heroic women. It is not an encyclopaedic account of events and accomplishments of their lives'.*
>
> -Favilli and Cavallo (2016)

This highlights the complexities in the writing of biographical work and the creation of a feminist revisionist history and can generate a debate on the difference between celebration and education, questioning which aspect should be prioritised in a book of this nature, and how it reflects its target audience and its overall intended message. Here, there is a substantial distinction between accurately documenting the life of a historical figure or twisting the truth to celebrate only the positive aspects. As an educational tool this book could include figures that have had both a positive and negative impact on society, as all women are part of history and there is great importance in including the negative parts of a figure's life for accuracy as well as to teach children that not everyone who played a significant part in history is perfect as one reader notes 'human beings are flawed and this should be celebrated, not silenced' (GRU 72). However, here the language and framing of the book must be used carefully to make it clear which figures are being celebrated as not all female historical figures should be celebrated, labelled as heroic, and positioned as role models for children. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between acknowledging that people are flawed resulting in certain aspects of their biographies being problematic, but whose work can still be praised, and someone whose actions are detrimental to communities. Here there is a significant difference in reader's disapproval with the inclusion of Zaha Hadid, for example, an architect whose story describes her quite rude, selfish and entitled attitude to getting her own way, compared to the inclusion of some political figures whose actions have destroyed people's lives. This will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

Inclusion in a Feminist Revisionist History

One key area in feminist geography is the creation of a feminist historiography of geography, aiming to broaden geography beyond exclusionary histories of white, male, aristocratic heroes by making visible the experiences and lives of women and their contributions to geographic knowledge production (Domosh, 1991; Maddrell, 2009). *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* takes a similar but much broader approach to creating a feminist revisionist history, telling the stories of a diverse range of women. However, this is primarily framed through the lens of inspiration, celebration and making visible their admirable achievements rather than contributions regardless of the nature of their impact.

This language is where the inclusion of some of the figures in this book becomes problematic or controversial. Many reviews focus on the upholding of the women as role models, with a number of customers arguing that 'some of the women featured are not actually fit to be role models' (GRU 27) with others listing 'pirates, shady politicians, drug addicts [and] tyrants from Ancient history' (GRU 25) as examples. In contrast, others admire the inclusion of unconventional figures such as pirates and spies for presenting alternative images about how women should or should not behave. Debates surrounding the inclusion of certain women in this book will be discussed through two examples, highlighted in reader reviewers as the most inappropriate inclusions: Margaret Thatcher and Aung San Suu Kyi. Their portraits can be seen in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Images showing portraits of Margaret Thatcher by Debora Guidi [a] and Aung San Suu Kyi by Lizzy Stewart [b]. Source: *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls,* Timbuktu Labs, Inc. (2016).

The inclusion of Margaret Thatcher (figure 4a) attracted much criticism from readers who argued that the decision was 'uninformed and plain stupid' (GRU 92) and 'shameful' (AC1). Furthermore, book reviewer Jean Menzie (2018), in her YouTube video review on her channel *Jean Bookishthoughts* highlights the example of Margaret Thatcher to note how care needs to be taken when celebrating a woman purely based

on the fact that they are a woman in a position of power. Margaret Thatcher's story reads:

> *'Once upon a time in Great Britain, there was a girl who did not care about what others thought of her. She believed in doing what she thought was right. Some people liked her for being honest, others thought she was rude…When she took free milk away from primary school children, the people disliked her. When she won the war against Argentina in the Falkland Islands people admired her strength and determination'.*
>
> - Favilli and Cavallo (2016)

Here the book appears to be addressing her damaging actions but masks them using light-hearted language. This is particularly problematic as it means that audiences that are unfamiliar with British politics are unaware of the realities behind the figure held up for them as role models. This illustrates the complexities of presenting figures from all across the world to audiences in so many countries as a figure's actions often have differing consequences for other countries or cultures. Menzie (2018) points to broader questions about powerful women as role models, highlighting the presumption that a female leader should always be admired. However, a female leader that implements policies that negatively impact other non-powerful women shouldn't be celebrated just because they are a woman. Just because a woman has achieved a position of power, in an arena traditionally dominated by men, it cannot always be seen as a victory for feminism. Furthermore, the book introduces women with diverse, multifaceted identities, telling stories of women of different ages, classes, religions, sexualities, and races with many stories demonstrating the ways in which the subject overcame obstacles based on such identities, thus showing steps that have been taken to address the intersectional experiences of women. However, this example demonstrates the way in which the authors fail to address the intersectional privilege experienced by some women (Weldon, 2008) and what this means for the messages about women that are portrayed by the book. This lack of care can have serious implications as it can lead to young children admiring inappropriate figures, their values and their actions.

Similarly, another controversial inclusion is Aung San Suu Kyi (figure 4b), who is celebrated in the book for having 'won the Nobel Peace Prize and inspired millions of people in her own country and across the world, all without leaving her house' (Favilli and Cavallo, 2016). However, since the publishing of the book, Aung San Suu Kyi's response to violence against Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims, described by the United Nations as possible genocide, has triggered calls for her to be taken out of future editions (Merrick, 2017). In response, the authors have stated that they do not exclude the idea of removing her from reprints (ibid.). This further demonstrates how history can be continuously revised to make stories visible or not depending on what is deemed appropriate, with this example of a feminist revisionist history being revised further in light of changing circumstances. This also builds on the aforementioned discussion on the sanitisation of history and the removal of all negative aspects from the women's life stories. Some would argue that through her actions, both positive and negative, Aung

San Suu Kyi plays an important role in history and therefore should be present if a feminist revisionist history is about making women visible. However, in a book with an upbeat and celebratory tone, the backlash suggests that her story written in its current form is inappropriate.

The primary concern here, therefore, is addressing the balance between celebrating powerful women who have achieved great things and have had a positive impact on the world and celebrating women for overcome barriers based on their gender to achieve positions of power regardless of what they used it for. Again, this debate comes down to whether a feminist revisionist history is about celebrating and admiring women throughout history or making women visible in history. Traditionally, history is dominated by men, both heroes who had a positive impact on the world and those who had detrimental and damaging impacts on the people around them, and the problematic nature of the narration of these well-known figures is never discussed. Here it is the target audience and the positive, celebratory lens taken by the authors that restricts its success in repopulating history with women in an entirely educational, informative and accurate way, and results in a largely uncritical discussion of women in history (Leszkiewicz, 2018).

A feminist revisionist history does not have to be just about giving credit to the women that deserve it, celebrating all their positive achievements and framing histories in an inspirational and empowering way. Instead a feminist revisionist history should be about repopulating history with all types of historical figures, the good and the bad, thus presenting a richer, more complete and more realistic account of history, moving beyond a history dominated by men. This highlights the potential of a feminist revisionist history to address the 'bad women' throughout history. Through the use of a strong ethical framework, and with much care taken, there is potential to discuss women who have had negative actions or consequences in a way that does not reduce them solely to their sex or gender, but explores how this is embedded into their social, political and cultural contexts. In this way, there is a duty of care and a responsibility to consider how these stories are told, who is included and who will be impacted in their narration, and therefore the author must be explicit in their chosen framework, perspective and aims. The issues of care, responsibility and ethics that this reveals thus further highlights the suitability of feminist geography in addressing these concerns.

Accessible Feminism

Critiques of the political messages in the book reflect broader debates on feminism as a political movement and the differential attitudes people have towards it. Some critics show a disapproval for the movement, accusing the book of being 'mean spirited' (GRU 36) or 'junk' feminist propaganda (GRU 76). In contrast, others praise the book for making feminism more accessible for children, illustrating the importance of engaging children in feminist issues and teaching them about equality. This reflects a broader movement in the role of children in creating a feminist revisionist history and

such cultural products are increasingly aimed at younger generations. This can perhaps be seen as a way to change attitudes of a whole population by filtering upwards from the younger, more open-minded generations. The importance of this is emphasised by Cavallo (2018) who notes that the book was always intentionally political, as children are not just the citizens of the future but citizens of the present and their opinions and attitudes are important and should be listened to, therefore they should be pushed to engage with the real world as well as fantasy worlds.

Important questions on the target audience for this type of feminist revisionist history are also highlighted due to its controversial title. Whilst the title *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* indicates the book is aimed at young girls, a number of reviews comment on the relevance and importance of boys engaging with this book labelling it as 'extremely relevant for boys as well' (GRU 7), 'the perfect gift for all humans' (GRU 33) and 'a must read for everyone' (GRU 47). Additionally, Lowther (2018) is very critical of the approach to gendered audiences taken in books specifying 'for girls' or 'for boys' in their title. Lowther (2018) is a founding member of the Let Books Be Books campaign which since 2014 has persuaded eleven children's publishers to remove the words 'for boys' and 'for girls' from their book covers. Here, Lowther (2018) notes that books which supposedly claim to be breaking down gender stereotypes are only reinforcing these stereotypes through their labelling. Specifying which gender a particular book is suitable for tells children that they are different from each other and restricts their ideas about what they should and should not be reading and therefore who they should or should not be learning about and admiring. Whilst the premise of the book has good intentions, in this case a simple switch from *Good Night Stories For Rebel Girls* to *Good Night Stories Of Rebel Girls* would not at all change the contents, message or impact of the book but would make it more inclusive and encourage boys to engage with the material as well.

Contemporary feminist literature increasingly displays the trend of celebrating women for being 'nasty', 'badass' and 'rebellious' and Leszkiewicz (2018) criticises this approach to feminism that has swept the industry. Leszkiewicz (2018) argues that the process of idolising defiance raises difficult questions about an individualistic approach to feminism. Overall, she concludes that her problem lies with the constant use of 'rebel'. She notes that 'there is a thrill in being a lone trailblazer who crosses boundaries and breaks away from the constraints of patriarchal systems, however the sole focus on these figures ignores the women that are left behind'. To summarise, Leszkiewicz (2018) asks 'at what point does glorifying rebellion only serve to reinforce the oppressive structures that prevent most women from reaching the same heights? If a dash of boldness can free you from your cage, is it really a cage at all?' In this way, only focusing on those at the top, and that have been successful, ignores those that started in a similar situation but did not succeed. It also ignores the groups of women that may have been harmed by the actions celebrated in this book.

The use of the word rebel can also be seen as problematic for children that are the target of this book. The word rebel has many negative connotations, therefore labelling the book as one for rebel girls can portray the message that engaging in this type of material, and therefore feminist content striving for the equality of women is doing something wrong, perhaps even breaking the rules. On the other hand, the use of the word rebel can be interpreted in an alternative way. Some would argue that 'rebellious' is the most appropriate way to describe the actions required for women and girls to breakdown and overcome the boundaries that restrict their existence. In this way, marginalised groups need to be rebels, as these boundaries need to be overhauled completely instead of just expanded to allow women into certain spaces, roles or careers. This requires a complete reimagination of space not just an extension therefore it is necessary for women to rebel against social norms, push back against boundaries and challenge expectations to gain equality. This 'rebellion' shouldn't be seen as a negative action, but a necessary one.

Concluding Remarks

Whether inspiring, educating or celebrating, telling the stories of often forgotten, hidden or ignored women throughout history and their lives, experiences and achievements illustrates a positive and progressive trend in children's non-fiction literature, making *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* and other similar books a welcome addition to book shelves in stores and bedrooms across the world. This chapter has demonstrated how children's non-fiction books can be used as a tool to challenge imaginative geographies of gender, and therefore disrupt dominant narratives of what it means to be a woman that prevail in a patriarchal society. However, despite the positive messages these books display, one must be critical as using cultural products such as these to create a feminist revisionist history is complex.

This chapter highlights the situated partial nature of all knowledge production, both in traditional accounts of women's lives throughout history and in the accounts of women's lives presented in this book. It also highlights the important consequences this has on the accuracy of the information displayed in *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* and the ways in which both the authors and the intended audience shape a products content and messages. Additionally, through a discussion of a sanitised history and the examples of two specific figures, there has been a discussion of the difficulties in navigating the boundary between celebration and education in the creation of a feminist revisionist history, and in this case, a book of this nature should be clear in its contents and what it aims to achieve. Furthermore, it also opens up a discussion on the importance of taking an intersectional approach to women's experience and identifying where privileged identities mean that care must be taken when selecting appropriate figures for inclusion.

Furthermore, the writing of a feminist revisionist history is about inclusion, including women into a history that they have traditionally been written out of, and this inclusion

should be carried through to its audience with a title that reflects this. The impact and reach of children's non-fiction books such as *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* remains restricted by targeting a book to a specific gendered audience, simultaneously building up the same gendered boundaries it is trying to break down. To conclude, this chapter has revealed the role played by non-fiction children's literature in narrating women's histories and contributing to a feminist revisionist history. In this way, collections of short stories for children provide a space for narratives of a male dominated history to be challenged, and act as a tool for the engagement of younger generations with the concepts and ideas of the feminist movement.

CHAPTER 6: HIDDEN FIGURES

Introduction

Film is another example of a cultural product through which a feminist revisionist history can be created. This chapter uses the example of *Hidden Figures (2016)*, which tells the story of three female African American mathematicians who worked for NASA, and whose (until recently, largely unacknowledged) work helped successfully send man into space, and eventually to the moon. These women played a key part in the history of the US and in fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics however due to the intersection of their gender and race, their contributions have been previously ignored and their stories unheard, an issue that this film aims to rectify.

Using a combination of scene analysis and shot by shot analysis this chapter will explore the key themes, character relationships, mis-en-scéne and cinematography used throughout the film to reveal their story, as well as an analysis of the media and critics response to the film. First, the chapter addresses the importance of employing an intersectional approach to studying the lives and experiences of women, particularly centring on the intersection of race and gender. Second, the chapter explores the techniques used to address the intersectional experience of black women working at NASA, highlighting the role of clothing, lighting and colour in its discussions of racism and sexism. Finally, the chapter more broadly discusses the successes and fallbacks of the film industry in addressing gender and race issues by discussing the white saviour trope, and its problematic intention to inspire the next generation.

Film Synopsis

Hidden Figures (2016) is a biographical drama film, directed by Theodore Melfi, written by Allison Schroeder and Theodore Melfi, loosely based on a non-fiction book of the same title by Margot Lee Shetterly. *Hidden Figures* tells the untold true life stories of three African American mathematicians, Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), Mary Jackson (Janelle Monáe) and Dorothy Vaughan (Octavia Spencer), who worked as human computers for NASA during the US Space Race. Overcoming all boundaries based on their gender and race, these women overcame many obstacles and became pioneers in their fields. Set in Hampton, Virginia in 1961, the film takes place in the gender and racially segregated Langley Research Center during the Civil Rights Movement in the US. The film has been hugely successful, generating $235,956,898 at the box office globally and $169,607,287 in the US alone (IMDb, 2016). The film has also been nominated for three Oscars, two Golden Globes, two Grammy Awards, and a BAFTA Film Award (ibid.).

The storyline follows the experience of Katherine, Mary and Dorothy as they navigate their lives and careers at NASA. Firstly, Katherine is assigned to the Space Task

Group, where she works on calculating the trajectories for the launch and landing of multiple missions, working under the Director of the Space Task Group, Al Harrison (Kevin Costner) and Head Engineer Paul Stafford (Jim Parsons). Meanwhile, Mary is assigned to work in the engineering department where she is encouraged to apply for the engineer training program. As she does not have the correct qualifications, Mary's story centres on her fight to get the law changed, allowing her to attend the white only school to study for them. Finally, Dorothy's story centres on her unofficial role as supervisor, her struggle against her boss Vivian Mitchell (Kirsten Dunst) and the threat to her job presented by the introduction of the IBM Computer to NASA.

Figure 5: Hidden Figures Film Posters.
Source: https://www.foxmovies.com/movies/hidden-figures

Intersectionality

Intersectionality describes the ways in which categories of difference including gender and race interact, and the subsequent effect this intersection has on lives, practices, ideologies and power structures (Davis, 2008). The concept of intersectionality emerged in feminism and feminist geography in response to the critiques of western feminism for making claims based on the universal experience of women, whilst only representing those most privileged (Bowlby and Tivers, 2009).

Originating in law scholarship, through exploring the multidimensionality of black women's experiences, Crenshaw (1989) noted that law cases often focus on the most privileged members of a group. In this way, race discrimination cases focus on sex- or class- privileged black men, whilst sex discrimination cases pay attention to race- or class- privileged white women (ibid.). Therefore, multiply burdened groups, specifically black women, are marginalised, thus highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to women's experience and a new framework in which black women's experiences can be understood, studied and theorised.

Within feminism, the concept of intersectionality has been expanded to encompass a range of divisions including nationality, race, class, religion, ability, age and sexuality, which intersect to define women's experiences. Furthermore, within geography the intersection of these identities in specific spaces, and the consequences of this in terms of power, have been explored. This chapter will focus on the intersection of gender and race, specifically that of African American women who worked for NASA during the space race, and the way in which this intersection shaped their lives and experiences. The chapter will explore the techniques enlisted throughout the film to address this intersectional experience, focusing primarily on the women's experiences in the workplace, but also at home and in the wider community.

It has been noted that the experience of ethnic minority women has often been omitted from discussions of sexism and racism in the workplace (Berdahl and Moore, 2006). However, Hall et al (2012) note how there are higher rates of unemployment amongst black women and those in employment are more likely to work in support positions with fewer rewards and less opportunity for advancements, and their jobs are less secure than their white male counterparts. Berdahl and Moore (2006) build on understandings of black women's experiences in the workplace by studying their experience with harassment and discrimination, noting that overall minority women experience higher incidents of harassment as a result of facing both sexual and ethnic prejudice. Furthermore, Hall et al (2012) add to these discussions through studying how women cope with the stress resulting from their experiences at work and how this affects their mental well-being, concluding that stressors in the lives of black women differ in magnitude and content from white women and black men.

These examples illustrate how the gender and race of black women continually intersect to shape and control women's experiences in the workplace in the twenty-first century, reflecting the experience of Katherine, Mary and Dorothy during the 1960s that is explored in *Hidden Figures.* This demonstrates the interconnected nature of women's experience past and present and the way in which uncovering hidden histories can be used to explore contemporary issues. In the next section, this chapter will begin to explore the ways in which racism and sexism are portrayed throughout the film.

Film as a Tool for Education

Geographical engagements with film can be seen to reflect the 'crisis of representation' taking place in the discipline of geography (Lukinbeal and Zimmermann, 2006). Here geographers have distinguished between the 'real' and the 'reel' to illustrate how like many other forms of representation, images shown in films are not an accurate and truthful reflection of real life (Aitken and Dixon, 2006). Furthermore, Hopkins (1994: 47) notes how 'the cinematic landscape is an ideologically charged cultural creation whereby meanings of place and society are made, legitimised, contested and obscured' demonstrating how films impact the way in which people see and experience the

world. However, the advantages of using film as a pedagogical tool in geography have been demonstrated (Cresswell and Dixon, 2002) as film is a useful vehicle to understand different social and cultural meanings, relations, identities and issues of race and gender (Pratt, 2009c). Furthermore, films have effects in shaping the real world and Lukinbeal (2009: 126) notes how 'films are not merely images, but rather actively reconstruct our daily lives'.

Here, *Hidden Figures* illustrates this by demonstrating the way in which film is a useful tool for education, teaching the audience about key moments in US history including the space race, segregation and the Civil Rights Movement. Similarly, the film is an important tool for exploring the racism and sexism engrained in NASA as an organisation and in society at the time. Firstly, racism in the film will be explored, framed in two different ways: segregation and everyday racism; and institutionalised racism and police brutality. Secondly, this section will provide a discussion on the way sexism is also portrayed.

Segregation and Everyday Racism

Hidden Figures is set in 1961 during the Civil Rights Movement, at a time when much of the US was racially segregated by law. Throughout the film there are numerous references to the political atmosphere of the US at the time and the unequal treatment of black people that characterised society under segregation laws for example segregated buses, libraries, dining halls, water fountains, bathrooms, coffee pots, court rooms and education facilities. These examples of racism permeated every aspect of life and are mostly clearly identified throughout the film through the presence of signs. However, the differential treatment of black people is also demonstrated throughout the film using the film's mis-en-scéne including props, colour, and lighting.

Firstly, there is a stark difference in the condition of the 'coloured' ladies bathroom in comparison to the other bathrooms; the room is dull, bare and deteriorating, and there is no soap or paper towels. However, when the audience gets an insight into the condition of the other bathrooms, once the segregation of bathrooms at NASA has been removed, the bathroom is much cleaner, with pink curtains, fancier lights, soap and paper towels. Next, segregation within the workplace at NASA is also illustrated by different uses of colour and lighting as different lighting is used to show the different office spaces that the human computers work in. The office for the white computers is much more spacious, with each computer at a separate desk, the room is bright with warm lighting and large windows. In contrast, the office for the 'coloured' computers is found in the basement, a much smaller room, with no windows and duller lighting.

The use of colour and lighting is also used to illustrate the difference in atmosphere of the characters' experience at home or at work. The offices in NASA are very neutral, the areas occupied by the 'coloured' computers are dull and the offices where the white male employees work are brighter but still simple white and neutral colours. However,

scenes showing the spaces that the women occupy outside of work are brightly coloured, for example the bright blue car in scene 2, the green fields and trees, the church service and the gathering outside of it, the birthday party with balloons and streamers, and the scene in which Katherine and her future husband Jim Johnson (Mahershala Ali) go for a drive. This contrast is shown in figure 6 below. Furthermore, warm lighting is used in the home to create a comforting, safe atmosphere contrasting the cold lighting used in the offices at NASA, particularly in the Space Task Group office creating a more uncomfortable atmosphere where Katherine feels isolated and vulnerable. This demonstrates the way in which the women's home lives and the community they live in provides an escape from the marginalisation they suffer at work.

Figure 6: Shots of the film illustrating the use of colour inside and outside the office. Source: https://www.foxmovies.com/movies/hidden-figure

The techniques and tools used throughout the film to show the segregation and racism that underlines the lives of the protagonists, both reflecting broader US society during the Civil Rights Movement and NASA as an organisation, serve to highlight the normality of racism and the way it is engrained in everyday life. By highlighting the mundanity and ordinary nature of racism, the film demonstrates the way in which everyday, repetitive practices are used to marginalise and exclude the black women working in the offices. Geographers point to everyday life as being a 'realm associated with ordinary, routine and repetitive aspects of social life that are pervasive yet frequently overlooked and taken for granted' (Pinder, 2009). Therefore the mundanity of spaces in which racism is engrained such as the bathrooms, offices and their homes continuously has its own political function, to reinforce the normality of these

conditions and ensure that the power relations that are operating through them are not questioned. In this way, the mundanity and ordinary nature of everyday life becomes a hegemonic tool in which beliefs and values of the elite are reinforced, thus reinforcing a hierarchical social order through the everyday actions of those who benefit the least from its existence (Flint, 2009).

Institutionalised Racism

Racism is also addressed in *Hidden Figures* through references to the institutionalised racism within the police force, and the fear that black people experience at police presence due to the high rates of police brutality. This is demonstrated in the second scene of the film (figures 7 and 8) where the three women are stranded at the side of the road after their car has broken down. A police officer arrives and questions them, however after checking their ID and finding out that they are working for NASA and therefore helping the fight against the Russians, the police officer offers them an escort to work. The women accept and Mary follows behind the police officer at high speed, expressing the irony that three black women are chasing a white police officer and not the other way around. Additionally, throughout the film there are a number of references to protest and conflict for example in scene 12, Dorothy and her sons are walking to the library and pass a protest against segregation, surrounded by police officers and police dogs. Furthermore, in scene 17, Mary's husband Levi Jackson (Aldis Hodge) is watching a news report on how the FBI has arrested four white men for throwing a firebomb into a freedom rider bus in Alabama.

Figure 7: Interaction between the women and the police officer. Source: Video titled Hidden Figures: Breaking Boundaries, 20th Century Fox. https://www.foxmovies.com/movies/hidden-figures.

Figure 8: Image showing police escort of the three women to work. Source: Video titled Hidden Figures: Official Trailer [HD], 20th Century Fox https://www.foxmovies.com/movies/hidden-figures.

Whilst the inclusion of these scenes serves to illustrate to the audience the political atmosphere of US society at the time, and the racism experienced by the black community, these scenes also illustrate the way in which these experiences are connected to contemporary experiences of institutional racism and police brutality. Therefore, this demonstrates the way in which making visible the stories of historic female figures through creating a feminist revisionist history can be used to address experiences in the present day.

One issue highlighted by the film is the significance of institutionalised racism in US society, referring to the systematic racism present in social and political institutions, in this case the criminal justice system. Institutionalised racism in the criminal justice system means that racism is engrained in police culture, in its policies, procedures and the attitudes and values of the people working within it, reflected in the attitudes and presumptions held by the police officer in scene 2. This manifests itself in racial profiling and discriminatory targeting resulting in rates of stop and searches, arrests, and imprisonment of ethnic minorities that are disproportionate to their population. This is demonstrated by Fagan et al. (2005) who note that evidence supports perceptions that police disproportionately stop African American and Hispanic citizens, and once stopped these citizens are more likely to be searched and arrested. This means that 'close surveillance by police has been part of everyday life for African Americans and other minority groups' (Fagan et al, 2005: 3). In working towards creating a feminist revisionist history, the film enlists scenes such as this in order to reveal the continuity in the experience of the black population in the US today.

Next, police brutality is a paramount concern, particularly in the US, referring to the undue violence and abuse of authority by the police. This is referenced throughout the film through the fear felt by the characters in response to police presence. Disturbing statistics show that in 2017 police killed 1147 people, of which black people made up 25% of those killed, despite being only 13% of the population and black people are three times more likely to be killed by police than white people (Mapping Police Violence, 2019). Additionally, between 2013 to 2017, 13 out of 100 of the largest US city police departments killed black men at higher rates than the US murder rate

(ibid.). This demonstrates a significant problem in the US, one that *Hidden Figures* draws attention to with the inclusion of this scene, extending the scope of the film from just addressing historic events and experiences to reflecting on current events in the US as well. This also reveals how *Hidden Figures* can be connected to broader geographical concerns illustrating how police brutality demonstrates everyday geographies of violence, the creation of gendered and racialised landscapes of fear and how these shape the experience of public spaces for black people (Springer and Le Billion, 2016).

Sexism

The experience of the black women computers at NASA is characterised by sexism as well as racism, thus demonstrating how their race and gender intersects to shape and control their lives. The theme of sexism is most significantly demonstrated through the use of costume, with certain items of clothing emphasised on multiple occasions throughout the film. The most notable is the significance of high heels, which is often seen as a symbol of femininity. This is first shown in scene 4, when Mary has been assigned to work on the Mercury 7 prototype. Upon her entering the wind tunnel in the engineering department, the engineers announce a test will take place in a minutes time and Mary needs to vacate, however, when leaving, Mary's high heel becomes stuck in the grate on the floor. After struggling to remove her shoe from the grate and being told by one of the engineers that "no shoe is worth your life" she takes the shoe off and leaves it behind.

Similarly, throughout the film there is a number of close up shots of high heels for example when Katherine needs to use the bathroom, when Katherine is running across the campus to reach the bathroom, and in scene 21 when Dorothy and the rest of the West Computing Group have been assigned to work on the IBM and leave their building. Here, the focus on the high heels serves as a continuous reminder that the expectations of the women in regard to their clothing is what makes them different from everyone else at NASA. It also demonstrates the way in which something so mundane and ordinary as the expectations for women to dress a certain way, had such a hinderance on their work. This is emphasised by Katherine in the powerful monologue she makes to Al Harrison which will be discussed subsequently.

The sexism experienced by the women is also notable when the relationships between the women and their husbands are explored, particularly between Mary and Levi Jackson, and Katherine and Jim Johnson as not only are the women subject to marginalisation at work due to their gender and race, they are subject to further sexist attitudes from within the black community, and specifically in their most intimate relationships. Firstly, in scene 9, Mary's husband Levi is critical of his own wife and her ambitions, telling her there is no such thing as a negro female engineer, and showing distaste in her desire to attend the whites only school. Furthermore, Levi is also critical of the way she is raising their children, commenting on the amount of time

she spends at work and away from home. Similarly, when Katherine first meets Jim Johnson in scene 9, during a conversation after the church service between the two discussing Katherine's work at NASA, Jim jokes "that's pretty heavy stuff…NASA let women handle that sort of thing?". This illustrates that the women experience sexism within communities of the same race, and most significantly within their closest relationships, by people that should love and support them the most.

These two examples illustrate the importance of an intersectional approach to studying women and their experiences as the film clearly demonstrates that the experience of black women is significantly different to the levels of oppression experienced by their black male or white female counterparts. This is demonstrated as the sexism towards the white women is also shown in the film, as all the women occupy the role of human computers or are in administrative positions, acting as secretaries to their white male superiors. However, here we see that the main way for these characters to gain any level of superiority is the power they have over the black women and the mistreatment they give them.

The White Saviour Trope

Hidden Figures can be seen as a useful tool for studying racism and sexism in society in the US, in NASA as an organisation and in shaping the lives of Katherine, Mary and Dorothy, particularly due to their intersecting gender and race. However, this film can also be used to discuss broader successes and fallbacks of the film industry in addressing race issues. The most significant of these fallbacks, apparent in both *Hidden Figures* and a number of other films addressing stories of race is the white saviour trope. As well as being a recurring figure in films, the figure of the white saviour is one that has been interrogated in the discipline of geography, dominating the historical geographies of science, exploration and geography itself in the form of the explorer which reflects the rigorous, scientific, and heroic body that was celebrated (Livingstone, 2003). Here, the enduring persistence of the white saviour, which was legitimised in scientific disciplines, subsequently has a firm place in popular culture such as this film. Furthermore, within geography, most notably feminist historical geography, geographers have begun to deconstruct this figure, challenging these dominant narratives by revealing the contributions of marginalised figures (Domosh, 1991), thus revealing the suitability of geography as a tool to analysis the presence of the white saviour in popular culture.

Perhaps the most well-known scenes in *Hidden Figures* is Katherine's experience with segregated bathrooms. In scene 6, Katherine asks Ruth (Kimberly Quinn), Al Harrison's secretary where the nearest restroom is to which she replies that she has "no idea where *your* bathroom is". Everyday Katherine has to run the half a mile distance to the West Computing Group building to use the coloured ladies' restroom as that is the only rest room she is allowed to use in the whole of the Langley Research Center. In scene 15, Katherine has to run in the rain and when she returns to the office

Al Harrison questions where she has been, and where she often goes for forty minutes at a time. This leads to Katherine making a powerful monologue in front of the whole office:

> *"Picture that Mr Harrison. My uniform, skirt below my knees, my heels, and a simple string of pearls, well I don't own pearls, lord knows you don't pay coloureds enough to afford pearls. And I work like a dog day and night, living off of coffee from a pot none of you wanna touch. So excuse me if I gotta go to the rest room a few times a day".*

In the next scene we see Al Harrison taking a crowbar and knocking down the 'colored ladies' bathroom sign (figure 9), allowing the black women to use which ever restroom they desire, afterwards he turns to the group of black women that have gathered to watch and says "here at NASA, we all pee the same colour".

Figure 9: Scene in which Al Harrison knocks down the 'colored ladies' room' sign. Video titled Hidden Figures: Official Trailer [HD], 20th Century Fox https://www.foxmovies.com/movies/hidden-figures.

This scene in which Al Harrison knocks down the 'colored ladies' toilet sign never happened in real life, instead Katherine Johnson has stated that she refused to enter the coloured bathrooms, no one ever tried to make her do so, and she used the white one instead (Thomas, 2017). This is demonstrated in the book as Shetterly (2016) writes:

> *'As far as Katherine was concerned, there was no reason why she shouldn't use those [unmarked bathrooms] as well. It would be a couple of years before she was confronted with the whole rigmarole of separate bathrooms. By then, she simply refused to change her habits – refused to so much as enter the colored bathrooms. And that was that. No one ever said another word to her about it.' (Shetterly, 2016: 129).*

The inclusion of these scenes and the portrayal of these characters in this way is known as the white saviour trope, in which a film's director, in this case a white man, adds a white hero into the story who's only purpose is to soothe the conscience of a white audience, allowing them to feel like they would have been one of the good ones (Thomas, 2017). This trope can also be seen in the changing attitudes of Paul Stafford at the end of the film. In this way, the depiction of black-white relations using harmful stereotypes reifies historic understandings of racial difference and frames whites as moral and innocent, thus serving the remove the white's guilt and responsibility (Murphy and Harris, 2018).

The white saviour trope is commonly used in films about interracial relations as Hollywood 'relies on narratives that romanticise racism, recuperate stereotypes and promote the ideology of a post racial society' (Murphy and Harris, 2018: 49). This is demonstrated in an analysis of *The Help (2011)* (ibid.) but is also present in many other films including *The Blind Side (2009), Freedom Writers (2007)* and *Green Book (2019)* demonstrating that within the last decade very little has changed in the way Hollywood addresses racism in film (Ocbazghi, 2019). In the case of *Hidden Figures*, the director, Theodore Melfi has admitted to adding in these scenes of a white hero but stated that it is about capturing the essence and the emotions at the heart of the narrative and evoking a specific response from the audience, all part of the process of adapting a non-fiction book into a moving piece of entertainment (Blay, 2017).

Here, Melfi claims that they are 'creative choices…not catering to a white audience or catering to a black audience' (ibid.). Zeba Blay (2017) writes: 'the inclusion of the bathroom scene doesn't make Melfi a bad filmmaker, or a bad person, or a racist. But his suggestion that a feel-good scene like that was needed for the marketability and overall appeal of the film speaks to the fact that Hollywood at large still has a long way to go in telling black stories'. Whilst there is no doubt this is an issue that lies at an industry level, it is important however to hold individual directors accountable as in this case the director's intersectional privilege means he holds the power to control how these stories are told therefore directors should be made aware of where changes and improvements could be made and how the creative decisions they make, in the name of entertainment, have a negative impact on the stories they are telling. This can therefore be seen as reflective of the stark diversity problem in Hollywood and the significant gender inequality in the film industry, particularly in terms of who occupies director positions. This acts as a barrier to the production of a feminist revisionist history as those with the power to create new histories and uncover these stories are

either unaware, uneducated or unwilling, leading to problematic narratives, whilst the voices and perspectives of women in the film industry continue to be unheard.

This issue is further supported in a comparison between the film and the contents of the book it was based on. In the book the names and lives of many other women are identified and intertwined with the stories of the three main subjects. The most notable is that of Miriam Mann, one of the first West Area Computers. Shetterly (2016) details the events surrounding Miriam Mann and a 'coloreds only' sign which sat on one of the tables in the cafeteria, a constant reminder of the inequality that lay outside of the offices. Whilst disrupting segregation elsewhere was impossible for the computers, the removal of the sign from the table was in their reach, so Miriam Mann removed it. The book reads 'The West Computers watched their colleague remove the sign and banish it to the recesses of her purse, her small act of defiance inspiring both anxiety and a sense of empowerment' (Shetterly, 2016: 44). In each case, once Miriam removed the sign there would be no sign for a few days or even a week until it was replaced with an identical sign. Miriam continued to remove the sign every time it appeared, an act which became a topic of conversation among the women of West Computing, giving them a small hint of resistance. Whilst only a small action, change must start somewhere, therefore the inclusion of these details in the film would reinforce the idea that the black women at NASA did not need to wait for their white male counterparts to grant them freedom from their oppression.

This scenario is very similar to the scene in the film in which Al Harrison removes the bathroom sign. This further demonstrates the problematic nature of the role played by this character and this scene in utilising the white saviour trope. Here it is clear that an event of a similar nature, albeit on a smaller scale and with less impact, took place in real life. Instead, this could have been over emphasised and dramatised to develop a scene in which it is the African American women themselves who use their own resources and own power to overcome the obstacles in the way of their equality. In a powerful story such as this, which aims to demonstrate the power, strength and independence of black women in a time where so many obstacles were stacked against them, there should be no need for a white saviour just to generate an emotional response and make the film marketable and appealing. The power of the women themselves should be the stand alone focus and selling point of the film.

Inspiring the Next Generation

In the US, African American women are disproportionately underrepresented in the domains of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) due to the intersection of their race and gender identities (Charleston et al, 2014). Furthermore, research finds that African American women simultaneously experience racism and sexism in their STEM careers, being situated in an environment historically dominated by white men as illustrated throughout the film (ibid.). Reflecting this, one of the aims of this film beyond making a previously unheard story visible was to inspire and

encourage young girls to engage with the fields of STEM in order to increase inclusivity, equality and fill this gap, however the approach taken in this film can be seen as problematic. The promotion of *Hidden Figures* took steps in promoting these subjects to young girls through free screenings organised by various charities, businesses and institutions to improve youth awareness in education and careers in STEM fields. Starting as an act of personal activism by Octavia Spencer but picked up by Melfi, Henson, Monáe, Williams and Parson, 1,500 seats in cinemas across various states were made available, free of charge to poor individuals and families who would not have had the opportunity to see the film otherwise.

Furthermore, the intention for the film to present an inspiring, motivating and empowering message is demonstrated by the mirroring cinematography in scenes one and twenty which shows the development of Katherine from an 8-year-old student at school to an adult working as a human computer at NASA. Scene 1 shows Katherine's parents meeting her teachers to discuss a scholarship Katherine has been given to attend West Virginia Collegiate Institute, the best school in the state for black students above eighth grade, despite the fact she is only in sixth grade. The scene also alternates to young Katherine in a class of students much older than her. The teacher gives her the chalk and asks her to complete the calculations on the black board in front of the class. To the shock of the other students and the teacher, she successfully completes the equation without difficulty. At the end of this scene, the voice over of the female teacher says, "in all my years of teaching I've never seen a mind like the one your daughter has…you have to see what she becomes".

Scene 20 provides a key example of the person that Katherine has become. Now working for the Space Task Group at NASA, Katherine is attending the Pentagon briefing regarding John Glenn's Friendship 7 mission and is asked by her boss Al Harrison to complete the calculations for the landing coordinates on the black board in front of the group of white male employees. In both scenes Katherine finds herself amongst a group in which she is seen as not belonging, one where her peers see her as out of place and are confused by her presence. In both scenes, Katherine is asked by the man in charge to perform a calculation under the watch of the rest of the group, who have low expectations and are visibly shocked at her successful outcome. The sequence of shots in both scenes mirror each other.

The parallels between these two key scenes appear to portray an incredibly powerful message, allowing the audience to see how far Katherine has come. This aims to inspire young girls in general, but particularly young black girls to follow their dreams, teaching them not to give up in the face of adversity, but to overcome the obstacles put in their way and prove people around them, and their racist and sexist attitudes and expectations, wrong. However, this message is complex, and this raises important questions in the way in which this film approaches the problem of gender inequality in STEM subjects. Charleston et al. (2014) notes a number of ways in which the intersection of African American women's race and gender impacts their entry and

advancement into STEM fields, noting that at a young age girls are alienated from these subjects due to gendered stereotypes, pedagogical techniques and a lack of exposure, whilst black women are restricted by cultural expectations and social isolation which act as obstacles to their advancement. In ignoring these types of issues, and focusing on the idea of 'inspiration', the messages portrayed through the marketing of this film, contributes to the individualising of structural inequalities in which the gender inequality within science and other STEM subjects is placed on women themselves. These ideas seek to minimise the structural inequalities within educational institutions which make STEM disciplines inaccessible to women and women of colour and emphasises the importance of individual girls pursuing these careers themselves as a way of overcoming the imbalances.

Concluding Remarks

The film *Hidden Figures* is a key example of the production of a feminist revisionist history in action. *Hidden Figures* demonstrates the role of biographical film in writing women into well-known stories that they have been absent from, and making previously invisible, forgotten or ignored women the centre of a narrative previously dominated by men. It also demonstrates the way in which film can be a pedagogical tool for teaching about key historical moments. The chapter also demonstrates the techniques and tools employed throughout the film in order to explore important historical and contemporary societal issues such as racism and sexism. This draws out the interconnected nature of women's lives throughout the past and the present and shows how the creation of a feminist revisionist history opens up a space for the discussion of women's experiences in the present day.

Most significantly, the example of *Hidden Figures* addresses the vital importance of taking an intersectional approach when studying the experiences and lives of women, both in academia and public culture. Here, the lives of the women as illustrated through this film cannot be studied solely through the lens of their gender or their race but must be studied through a framework which acknowledges that these identities are entangled with each other. Finally, this chapter has revealed the potential for the use of film in creating a feminist revisionist history on a much larger scale compared to children's non-fiction books and exhibitions, due to the significantly higher funding, increased access to resources and larger audience reach. However, this chapter also serves to raise broader discussion points regarding the successes and critiques of the film industry, and the responsibilities of filmmakers, in addressing race issues, identifying that there is significant space for improvement.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

Feminist Geographies in Popular Culture

This project centres on the present-day engagement with the past, exploring the ways in which cultural interventions have used biographical approaches to make previously untold stories heard, therefore rewriting women who have previously been excluded, ignored or forgotten, back into history. These products thus challenge the dominant narrative that history is all about men, repopulating history with female figures. However, whilst the focus of this project is on the writing of a feminist revisionist history, it is evident that more emphasis is in fact placed on the present day and moving into the future. The examples explored in this project demonstrate the way in which feminist geographies are embedded in popular culture, mobilising women's histories to open up a dialogue for the discussion of key issues in feminist geography and the wider feminist movement, addressing a myriad of concerns for example domestic violence, gender expectations, emotional geographies, geographies of loss, the transgender 'debate', the intersectional experience of sexism and racism, the situated nature of knowledge and the multifaceted nature of womanhood. In this way, this project illustrates the interconnected experiences of women in the past and the present. Building on this focus on the present day, the scope of the cultural interventions also extends into the future as the education, inspiration and empowerment of the audience, with particular emphasis on the future generations, is at the heart of the narratives. The subjects across all three products are held up as role models, with the overall message of a feminist revisionist history being one of a celebration of women and womanhood.

This project also demonstrates the breadth of engagement with a feminist revisionist history, showcasing three very different cultural mediums that convey similar messages through a range of formats. The *We Are Bess* exhibition exemplifies a much more academic orientated approach, targeting, but not confined to, a particular group of higher educated, wealthier adults who are most likely to engage with treasure houses and their associated contents. *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* produces a more accessible version of a feminist revisionist history, adapting its contents to suit a younger target audience and is a format completely embedded in popular culture. Finally, *Hidden Figures* demonstrates the largest scale approach, using the Hollywood film industry with its millions of dollar budget for production, advertising and dissemination, a multitude of resources and technologies, and vast audience.

Through analysing the creation of a feminist revisionist history, this project reveals that studying the individual histories of female historical figures can be used to open up a dialogue for discussing broader feminist theoretical ideas. For example, the vast diversity of women in the examples, addresses the idea of womanhood, specifically the multifaceted nature of women's identities and therefore the impossibility of defining a

universal type of woman. Furthermore, reflecting the multiple identities of women, through telling stories of the most privileged, most marginalised, and the diversity of experiences in between, this project highlights the paramount importance of taking an intersectional approach in studying the lives, histories and experiences of women, reflecting much feminist geographical work which has begun to acknowledge the intersectional nature of women's identities. Finally, this project has highlighted the partiality of all knowledge production, both in traditional narratives of history, and in the feminist revisionist histories explored, drawing on Haraway's (1991) concept of situated knowledges. The project addresses the politics underlining all representations and the writing of biography, as neither can ever be objective and are always shaped by the life of the author. The situated nature of knowledge means that the messages portrayed are unavoidably political, however these examples of popular culture acknowledge the partiality of traditional accounts and aim to fill in the gaps created by an exclusionary traditional history, creating a more diverse and inclusive history instead. Labelling these cultural interventions as 'radical' 'propaganda' or 'politically skewed' thus seemingly ignores or demonstrates a lack of awareness regarding the political bias of all knowledge and the traditional dominance of white, middle class, heterosexual, male perspectives.

The Limitations of Cultural Interventions

The cultural interventions explored throughout this project have demonstrated how popular culture can be effective in (re)narrating women's histories, disrupting and challenging imaginative geographies of gender, and producing alternative knowledges. However, as well as highlighting a number of theoretical considerations as aforementioned, a number of practical issues have been raised associated to the authors, funding and overall geographies of creating a feminist revisionist history. Considerations on who has the power to create a feminist revisionist history are reflected in the diversity of the creators of the studied products. The *We Are Bess* exhibition for example was primarily developed and created by female academic historians, whilst *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* was created and produced by a lesbian couple, and *Hidden Figures* was directed by a white male director, and these identities can be seen reflected in their approaches, thus posing questions on who should be creating feminist revisionist histories.

However, these questions aren't as simple as who holds the interest and drive to rewrite women's histories but are often a reflection of broader trends in the publishing industry and the Hollywood film industry, and the engrained structural inequalities that present obstacles for women producing content. The differential scales of production which may result from these structural inequalities is also reflected in the successes and fallbacks of each of the products, also reflecting the platforms on which the product is disseminated and the funding that underlies each product.

It is also important to note that whilst inclusion and diversity appears to be of paramount concern within the cultural products explored throughout this project, overall the narration of women's histories through popular culture has a clear geography. This project portrays a solely westernised version of a feminist revisionist history, as the products are primarily produced and disseminated in the UK or the US, telling stories of western women and their experiences. This is reflected in the need for cultural interventions addressing women's experiences to acknowledge this privilege, and take an intersectional approach to their work, addressing the multiple identities of women beyond their gender and how this impacts their lives, embedding this in the narration of their histories.

The Contribution of Cultural and Historical Geography

Framing this project through a feminist geographical lens, using concepts and theories embedded in cultural and historical geography reveals the important and useful contribution cultural and historical geography has in furthering the agenda of feminism in reviving and (re)narrating women's histories. Developing a cultural geography of the rewriting of women's histories provides a rich and dynamic exploration of the way in which the past and the present are entangled and the ways in which these entanglements can be drawn out across the different spaces of representation. Furthermore, drawing on a cultural geography means the politics associated to the creation of representations and the writing of biography are interlaced throughout, attending to the situated, located and positioned nature of knowledge produced by the cultural interventions studied. This project further engages with issues of identity and meaning, which extends beyond the reaches of a purely historical approach to women's histories.

Additionally, this project explores the histories of female historical figures through the lens of the present day, addressing contemporary engagement with history, and thus drawing on Moore's (2018) call for an urgent engagement with public culture and the gender politics of the present within historical geography in order to maintain its critical edge. This project has engaged with public culture through the use of popular culture, acknowledging its role in shaping particular shared beliefs and values, and its potential to disrupt and challenges others. In this way, this project contributes to the discipline by providing an alternative approach to women's histories than those that have dominated feminist historical geography, those that focus on illuminating and successfully repopulating the history of geography as a discipline with women.

In this way, this project illustrates the importance of historical geographers looking beyond the history of geography, and beyond the academy to engage with public culture (Driver, 2014a) as a way in which to transcend the boundaries between academic and non-academic audiences. It can be argued that the proliferation of complex feminist theories, and the confinement of feminist work to academia acts as a

significant boundary to the feminist agenda, therefore it is necessary to study the ways in which feminism can be engaged with in popular culture in order to make it more accessible.

Future Provocations

Feminist cultural and historical geography is suitably positioned to address the biases, inequalities and oppression experienced by women both in the past and in the present. However, for substantial change to take place in society there must be an accessible understanding of these issues that reaches further than academia to non-academic, public audiences. Feminist geographers, therefore, should continue to engage with contemporary popular culture due to its role in knowledge production; its potential to create and disrupt imaginative geographies; and its significance in controlling public culture in contemporary society through shaping understandings of the modern world and forming shared public attitudes, values and beliefs.

The uncovering of women's histories in all disciplines and arenas is a welcome addition, addressing the gender imbalances in dominant understandings of history and thus making history increasingly more accurate, repopulating history with important female figures and giving individuals the recognition they deserved. However, going beyond this to continually contextualise and critically analyse both the production and consumption of these histories and the consequences this has for their impact and the messages they portray will result in a richer understanding. Reflecting on this critical analysis, feminist geographers should consider the potential to utilise their geographic theories, methods and techniques to intervene in the creation of feminist revisionist histories themselves, which poses the opportunity for future collaboration between academics and creators of popular culture.

CHAPTER 8: APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Example of *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* online customer reviews coding.

Code
Inaccurate portrayal/ missing information
Space at the end of the book for a personal story/ portrait
Role Model
Tool for education or to encourage further research
Diversity
Accessible Feminism
Controversial Figures
Target Audience: Age and Gender
Empowerment/ Empowering/ Empowered
Politics
Inspiration, Inspirational or Inspired
Illustrations/ Aesthetic appeal
Princesses/ Fairy Tales

Good Reads User 5, Rating 1/5 Stars, 5th August 2017

This is difficult to review because, while I loved the artwork and the lovely cover, some of the historic people that were featured in this book are very controversial. Many of them are not fit to be held up as role models for young girls! Pirates, shady politicians, drug addicts, tyrants from Ancient History, and downright gross people; I counted 19 bios out of 100 that I had serious problems with, and which I would never allow a child to read about.

I liked the bios of the decent people, like Helen Keller, the Bronte sisters, Amelia Earhart, Ada Lovelace, Rosa Parks, and others. However, I felt that some of those bios left out points that ought to have been emphasized, or emphasized points that I thought were inconsequential, or portrayed a mixed message of the person's life.

Most of the writing was skewed to a certain political viewpoint that doesn't give a complete picture of the person's achievements or what their life meant in influencing history. I could barely enjoy the good parts of this book because of so many misdirections and illusions about what these good people stood for and what made them famous. And I really didn't enjoy the bios of the people I don't admire, because the writing covered up the true nature of their corrupt lives.

Some historic figures that I expected to see in the book were missing too; people like Mother Teresa and Amy Carmichael who saved thousands of children's lives.

One thing is for certain, both in the bios chosen to be included and in the way those bios are written, there is a definite political message in this book. This writing is so biased it cannot be called historical writing. These are NOT just some great stories of role models to inspire girls to do amazing things and never give up and believe in themselves. These are stories that send out a very particular philosophic message, and I'll just say, it's not a traditional message. I don't think it's a healthy message.

Appendix 2: Example of *Hidden Figures* scene analysis.

Scene 1 (0:44-3:04)
Intertitle: Based on true events.

Intertitle: White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia 1926

Scene one is not in full colour, 'Katherine' from the original score by Hans Zimmer, Pharrell Williams and Benjamin Wallfisch

The opening scene starts with a young Katherine Coleman, **dressed in smart clothing, wearing glasses, and holding her school books,** walking along a path through some trees reciting her two times tables and prime numbers to herself. Her mother and father are at a desk in an office, having a meeting with a male and a female teacher, discussing the education of their daughter. The teachers inform her parents that West Virginia Collegiate Institute, the best school in the state for Black students above eighth grade has offered Katherine a full scholarship, despite the fact she is only in sixth grade, but they want to take her early. The scene switches between the discussion in the office and Katherine sat outside of a bench, identifying geometric shapes that appear on a stained-glass window opposite her, **her age and height is emphasised by her legs kicking in the air as she cannot reach the ground**. This scene also switches between Katherine in a class of much older students in which the teacher chooses Katherine to solve the equation on the board. There is a close up of the teacher handing the chalk to Katherine and she begins to solve the equation on the board. The camera switches between a view of Katherine from the back and from the front with her peers watching her. The camera also shows the students reactions to her work. Once Katherine finishes the equation, she circles her final answer before turning to the class and explaining her work and walking back to her seat. The female teacher's voiceover says, *"in all my years of teaching I've never seen a mind like the one your daughter has."* Back in the office, the female teacher explains that there has been a small collection to help fund the family's move closer to the school. Next, the camera follows Katherine walking along the pathway from the first shot, running towards her parents who have shouted her, waiting by the car. The camera shows a car driving off into the distance, then shows the family with a young boy in the back of the car, Katherine is staring out of the window. The voice over of the female teacher continues *"you have to see what she becomes."*

The camera pans out to a long shot of the landscape, showing trees and films, the image gradually slow gains full colour.

Intertitle: FOX 2000 PICTURES PRESENTS HIDDEN FIGURES

A blue car has stopped at the side of the road, a woman can be seen leaning on the rear of the car and a woman is lying on the floor at the front of the car

Intertitle: Hampton, Virginia 1961

Appendix 3: Example of Hidden Figures shot by shot analysis: Scene 1 (0:44-3:04).

Shot	Duration	Description/ Key Dialogue	Notes on Cinematography
		Intertitle: Based on true events. Black and white. Music titled 'Katherine' (Hans Zimmer, 2017)	
1	0:07	Young Katherine walking along a path next to a forest, reciting her two times tables and prime numbers to herself	High angle shot, rear view, medium close up to medium long shot
2	0:04	Wider shot of the trees in the foreground, Katherine in the background	Diagonal view, extreme long shot, intertitle: White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia 1926
3	0:03	Katherine walking along holding school books and kicking leaves	Front view, low camera angle, long shot
4	0:06	Katherine's mother and father at a desk in an office with a male and female teacher discussing Katherine's education, male teacher details the best school in the state for Black children and the female teacher adds that this is the only school that takes on pupils past the eighth grade	Front view of the teachers, rear view of the parents, long shot
5	0:04	Katherine sat outside of the office, identifying different shapes on the windowpane in front of her	Front view from behind glass window, visible through gap in the window, medium close up shot
6	0:02	Katherine continues identifying shapes	Right side view, medium close up shot
7	0:04	The shaped panels of glass are highlighted and pulled out of the window into the foreground. Voice of Katherine	Katherine's point of view
8	0:02	Parents in the office, discussing Katherine's age	Front view, medium close up shot, female teachers' point of view
9	0:01	Female teacher tells parents the school wants to take her early	Front view from behind the parents' heads, medium close up shot
10	0:01	Katherine's feet swinging back and forth as she sits on the bench	Close up, right side view
11	0:03	Katherine sat on the bench swinging her feet back and forth, still identifying shapes	Long shot, right side view, camera moves closer towards her
12	0:02	Katherines notebook, voice over of the teacher telling the parents the school is offering a full scholarship	Close up, off camera sound

Appendix 4: Table showing the descriptions of the twenty modern women whose portraits make up the *We Are Bess* exhibition. Adapted from the online exhibition (National Trust, 2019).

Name	Description
Karen Finlayson	One of PricewaterhouseCoopers' most senior women Partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers' Risk Assurance practice and leads both the health industries practice and the internal audit practice across the North.
Claire Cadman	Mother to three children, sadly losing one of her sons Luke in 1997. Event's coordinator for the Chesterfield branch of Stillbirth and Neonatal charity to support other families dealing with the loss of a baby.
Pinda Leihal	Local teacher. Mother of six children.
Hollie McNish	Poet, writer, and spoken-word artist. Publisher of five books of poetry. Winner of the 2016 Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry. Organiser of poetry classes and workshops, mostly in schools and often for pupils who are struggling. Travels the UK meeting parents struggling to juggle children, work, relationships and their own health and happiness.
Robyn Riggans	Walked away from her abusive relationship and turned her life around. Set up WORTH (Women on the Road to Healing), a charity that supports women in Chesterfield who have been in abusive relationships. Currently taking an MA in Understanding Domestic and Sexual Violence.
The Right Reverend Libby Lane	Trained for the Church of England ministry at Cranmer Hall in Durham Ordained in 1993, serving her curacy in Blackburn, Lancashire – though she was not eligible to become a bishop until 2014.
Sue Perkins	Comedian, broadcaster, actor, television present, panel show host and writer. Came to prominence through her comedy partnership with Mel Giedroyc but is best known for presenting *The Great British Bake Off.* Worked on a wide range of solo projects, including documentaries, art, popular fiction, travel and history.
Juno Dawson	Best-selling teen fiction writer and regular contributor to news items and magazines concerning sexuality, identity, literature and education. Became a School Role Model for the charity Stonewall in 2014.
Natalie Haynes	Writer and broadcaster. Writes for *The Guardian* and *The Observer* and is a regular contributor to BBC Radio 4.

Kate Mosse OBE	Author of six novels and short story collections. Founder Director of the *Women's Prize for Fiction* and sits on the Executive Committee of Women of the World. Awarded an OBE in 2013 for services to literature and women. Named 'Woman of the Year' for her service to the arts in the Everywoman Awards.
Professor Val Gibson	Head of the High Energy Physics Research Group at the Cavendish Laboratory, The University of Cambridge. A Senior Lecturer and the Senior Woman Fellow at Trinity College. She is a champion of Women in Science and is the University's Equality & Diversity Champion.
Afua Hirsch	Writer, journalist and former barrister. She is a columnist for *The Guardian*, and appears regularly on the BBC, Sky News and CNN.
Akeela Ahmed MBE	An equalities campaigner specialising in youth and gender issues. In 2014 Akeela founded *She Speaks We Hear*, an online platform bringing together women's voices. In 2017 she helped organise the *Women's March on London.* She received an MBE for services to Muslim women in 2018.
Professor Dame Mary Beard	Professor of Classics at The University of Cambridge. Author, blogger and television personality.
Cathy Newman	The first female main presenter of Channel 4 News. Politics writer for *The Daily Telegraph* and author.
Dr. Frances Ryan	A freelance journalist and columnist for *The Guardian,* who has made a number of television and radio appearances. She has a doctorate in politics, covering educational inequality.
Patricia Greene MBE	An actress, best known for her role as Jill Archer in the radio serial *The Archers*. World's longest serving actor in a soap opera. Awarded an MBE in the 1997 Queen's Birthday Honours List for her services to radio drama.
Hilary McGrady	Worked for the National Trust for 13 years and was appointed Director General in 2018. Married a Catholic at a time when so-called mixed marriages faced extreme prejudice.
Phyll Opoku Gyimah	Co-founder and executive director of UK Black Pride. Works for Public and Commercial Services Trade Union as their Head of Equality & Learning. Voice in the fight for equality for queer people of colour. Trustee of the LGBT rights charity, Stonewall.
Amika George	18-year old student from London. Started the #FreePeriods campaign, which calls on the government to give free menstrual products to children from low-income families. Featured in a number of national and international publications, and, while studying for her A-levels, continues to raise awareness of period poverty in the UK and globally.

CHAPTER 9: REFERENCES

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