

**“CELEBRATION EVENT TO HONOUR THE FEMINIST RESEARCH AND
ACTIVISM OF CYNTHIA COCKBURN”
At the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.**

October 13 – 14, 2017

Concluding session:

Cynthia’s thanks

Hi, dear friends. Friends here beside me, and so many of you out there in front! That was a breath-taking experience, so many wonderful memories! Thank you! It’s the kind of celebration of a life that a person doesn’t usually get to hear except at their funeral. And it’s not even my birthday!!

Let me say a special thank you now to Nadje and Awino, for having the wild idea of this two-day event, and especially for setting up this celebratory afternoon. It’s beyond belief, really! And behind them in the shadows are, first, the Centre for Gender Studies, our hosts here at SOAS, and the Journal *Feminist Review*, generous co-sponsors of this weekend. A big thanks to them too.

You’ll understand, I know, that I’ve got to detain you all just a bit longer on the theme of my life, because I can’t possibly miss this chance to recall, and thank, the many people who in different ways have helped me along the way.

For instance, I want to remember certain individuals who gave me a foothold in research. Until the late sixties I’d earned a living first as a shorthand typist, latterly as a freelance journalist. It was around 1969 that the late Duccio Turin at UCL hired me for and supervised me in my first little research tasks. Then I recall how the late Peter Marris, at the Centre for Environmental Studies, informally and generously coached me in research method.

It was 1979 that I saw the chance of my first major Research Grant. But I needed an academic base from which to apply for it. There was me...! with no qualification beyond an A-level, and absolutely no connection to any university. Somebody, I forget who, said “Go and talk to Professor Jeremy Tunstall at City University London. He’s a friendly guy. He might know what you could do.” What good advice! I went to this kindly academic with my problem. And he said, “Here - use our City University letterhead to apply to the Research Council, and if they give you a grant you could come to our department and be an honorary research fellow.” Can you imagine such open-minded generosity! Jeremy, I have a feeling you’re in the room somewhere. I’m just so happy to be able to say “thank you” for that incredible help. It was a turning point for me. It’s led on to four decades of association with City University. And on that score, a big thank you also to Michele Barrett and other women at City who (twenty or thirty years and a dozen research grants later) negotiated for me the honorary title of professor, which made me very proud.

Other important support I'd like to acknowledge came from women colleagues at the University of Lund, in Sweden, who at a certain moment endowed me with an honorary doctorate. So lovely of them! And Laura Potts and others at the University of York who a few years later crowned me with one of those funny hats as an Honorary Fellow. I owe a very big thank you to Nickie Charles, right here at the table, who with other women not long ago organized to have me named an Honorary Prof in the University of Warwick – something that made me specially proud because it links me with the wonderful Centre for the Study of Women and Gender of which Nickie's director. I'd like to thank colleagues in the School for a Culture of Peace in the Autonomous University of Barcelona, in the Humanist University of Utrecht and the University of Linköping in Sweden, for giving me, in different ways at different times, an academic belonging in your countries.

A particular feature of my working life is that I've never sought a teaching post because I wanted to focus on what I love most: research and writing. That I could do this is actually thanks to my parents. Why? Because they bought me while I was still young a secure home: a 4-storey terrace house in Camden. It was 1965. It cost £7000. Wrong, seven thousand one hundred pounds! Being securely housed without rent or mortgage to pay has freed me ever since from the necessity of a steady and high level income. Instead I've been able to take the more risky route of a succession of finite research grants.

Incidentally, this house, where I still live half a century later, has always had a couple of spare rooms that I could let, and over the years this has brought me the enriching company of scores of lodgers, postgraduate students from all over the world. Nadjie was one of them. And now Isabel! And tomorrow, actually, Paniz is joining us. What luck is that!

Talking of family and household makes me realize that I need to swing back to much earlier times in this round of thanks. First, I need to remember and thank the partner of my youthful days, Charles Cockburn. I had the luck to meet him when we were only twenty, and he was an ideal pal with whom to travel widely in Asia and Africa for ten years or more. In the Sixties, as we settled into London, Charles and I had two children, our two daughters, Claudia and Jess, here today with daughters of their own (Deniel, Elsa Maria, Josie: wave kids!). I want to thank you, Jess and Claudi, here and publicly, for bringing so much joy to my life.

When they were kids I was blessed with years of the most loving and professional child care you can possibly imagine from Linda Pincus (also here today), and from my mother-in-law and dear friend Jillie Cockburn. Between them, these two very special women assured my daughters a secure and happy childhood while enabling me to develop my work and activism. Another personal family thank you... I'd like to mention my dear friend Susie Final, who's here with us this afternoon. After Charlie and I split up in the mid-seventies, Susie became his enduring partner, loved by all of us. And in these latter years it's Susie who bore, patiently and lovingly, the whole burden of caring for Charlie in his long final illness. Some debts can never be repaid.

Back to the business side of things...It's important to place on record my gratitude to the many funding bodies, both public and charitable, that have paid my salary and expenses over 40 years of scarcely interrupted work. Although I'd like to name each one separately, I'm going to spare your patience by putting a list on the overhead. [PUT UP THE LIST) I hope I haven't forgotten any. A big thank you, here and now, to all of these funders for their trust in my choice of research themes and my ability to deliver on them. You've been the very basis of my livelihood.

Another debt is to my publishers. My first encounter, and what a lucky one, was with Pluto Press. They published my first four titles. Richard Kuper was principal editor at Pluto in those days and he was a wonderful guide and teacher to me as I learned the writing trade in the late '70s and early '80s. Thank you Richard, I don't forget it – you were so important! I've had other publishers since then, notably Zed Books to whose support I owe three or four titles.

I've had books translated into, I think it's ten languages. And in many cases that's been thanks to facilitation by certain supportive individuals. They're too many to name. But may I at least mention the help I had, not long ago, from Daniele Kergoat and Patrick Lescure who got me into French at last!

And now, with the book we're launching later this afternoon, Pluto Press has come back into my life. They're such an efficient and helpful team, and I thank them all. It's been a special privilege and pleasure to work with Anne Beech, Pluto's senior editor. She's been so patient and encouraging. I think you may be going to meet her at the book launch later. If you do, please add your thanks to mine!

Let me end by thanking the scores of women who've been my companions in two major movements. Without a movement one is nothing! First, socialist feminism – for instance I'm thinking back to ten years of our European Forum of Socialist Feminists, 1985 to 95. Do you remember? The wonderful Frigga Haug, a lot of you know her, was key to that. As she also is to our present Marxist Feminist Forum – into which Nora Raethzel here puts a lot of work. Second, the women's anti-war movement, Greenham, WILPF, and, specially important for me, Women in Black, who you've just heard about from Liz. The little handful of friends who keep our London Wednesday evening vigil going give me something very special : a means of being regularly on the street, where I most love to be, with a meaningful message: non-violence, no to war.

I know that as soon as I stop I'm going to remember someone I've forgotten to name. But imagine me saying it, please: thank you. Thank you for all you have given me, all of you.