

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Leicester</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics</p>
<p>Title of case study: Raising International Awareness of Violence against Women</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Violence against women is a feature of personal and social life across the globe; ignorance of the nature and extent of this violence is just as widespread. In the UK alone, one in four women experience domestic violence, 60% of which goes unreported; in France, there were an estimated 84,000 rape victims in 2012, although, similarly, there is much under-reporting. Despite fears being focused on attacks by strangers, in 80% of cases, the aggressor is known to the victim, thereby raising questions about social and family structures. This study outlines the impact of the unit's research in raising public and institutional awareness of the issue, through two discrete but complementary initiatives each characterised by a collaborative and transnational approach. The impacts were underpinned by research covering respectively the literary and the socio-political contexts of gender violence.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Gender studies is a key research strand within and across the School of Modern Languages, forming a bridge between adjacent research areas into Translation and Migration Studies. The case study reflects the commitment within the School to extend awareness of issues around gender and sexual violence beyond the Academy and into local communities as well as seeking to influence thinking at an institutional and policy level.</p> <p>The contribution of Professor Sharon Wood (appointed to UoA in 2000) is rooted in her extensive research into issues of gender and culture, theatre and politics in Italy, and her long-standing collaboration with Maraini, as critic and translator. Work on Maraini (1-4) has interleaved with Wood's broader studies of women's writing in Italy, which always consider writers within specific cultural, historical, regional and ideological contexts. Wood collaborates with Maraini as international assessor for the student theatre prize offered by the annual Festival delle due Rocche, of which Maraini is the artistic director, while other recent translations include Maraini's 'Lettera dall'Italia' broadcast on BBC Radio 4 (5c). For this case study, Wood translated and produced the play, which received its English language première in Leicester in March 2008 (on International Women's Day), working in close collaboration with the professional London-based New Shoes Theatre Company, as well as reflecting on the experience of both translation and performance in conference papers and publication (4).</p> <p>The crime of rape has only been legally and institutionally recognised in France since the 1980s following intense campaigning by French feminist and victim support groups. However, the problem remains significant, with rape victims in France in 2012 alone estimated officially at 84,000 and at 100,000 by support organisations. Between 2006 and 2013, Dr Nicole Fayard (appointed to UoA as Lecturer in 2003) investigated how statutory authorities contribute to shaping the social treatment of rape in France, highlighting the difficulties some victims face in being heard (6-7). The research has revealed a number of factors contributing to the continuing failure of the statutory bodies, including the justice system, to address rape adequately.</p> <p>The research examines the role played by victim support organisations (5), including those representing ethnic minorities and feminist activism, as well as that of the legislative and judiciary institutions. There has been particular focus on the exclusion of groups from access to justice, including ethnic minorities from the Maghrebi and African diasporas. Fayard's research highlights the vital role played by NGOs, lawyers and support groups in establishing support networks for survivors, and in lobbying for legislation.</p> <p>She interviewed activists in several support organisations including those working with women</p>

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from the Diaspora, such as Ni Putes Ni Soumises and Voix de femmes (8). As well as sociologists, psychologists, leading feminists, health professionals and forensic experts directly involved in the field, she interviewed French MP Guy Geoffroy, French police specialist rape officers, lawyers and the General Prosecutor of Douai, and analysed published testimonies of Francophone and Maghrebi survivors. While professionals recognise the underlying causes of sexual violence, discursive, institutional, territorial and also constitutional practices continue to discriminate against survivors because of their gender, ethnicity, social status or disability. The research has led to a number of initiatives promoting the role of support organisations and raising awareness of sexual violence, as described below.

3. References to the research

(1) Wood, S, 'Contemporary women's theatre' in *Cambridge history of Italian theatre* eds Paolo Puppa and Joseph Farrell. Cambridge 2006. 368-378;

(2) Wood, S., 'Italian feminist narrative in the Twentieth Century' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, ed Peter Bondanella and Andrea Ciccarelli, Cambridge 2003;

(3) Wood, S., 'L'altra biblioteca: la scrittura delle donne' in *Il canone e la biblioteca*, ed. Amadeo Quondam, Rome 2007.

(4) Wood, S. 'Alla ricerca della madre: lo spazio e il corpo femminile' in Juan Carlos de Miguel y Canuto (ed) *Scrittura civile: Studi sull'opera di Dacia Maraini* (2010); 'The performative text: translating *Passi affrettati*' in *Differences on Stage*, ed Puppa, De Martino and Toninato, Cambridge 2013.

(5) Fayard, N. 'Après le cas Savile: Où nous mènent les enquêtes sur les agresseurs sexuels les plus médiatisés du Royaume Uni?' December 2012

http://www.cfcv.asso.fr/communiqués/c2_communique.php?id=103

(6) Fayard, N. 'Bodies Matter: The Materiality of Rape in Twenty-First Century France' 2013 In Maggie Allison and Imogen Long (eds), *Matière*, Peter Lang.

(7) Fayard N and Rocheron Y "Moi quand on dit qu'une femme ment, eh bien, elle ment." The Administration of Rape in France and Britain 2011 *French Politics and Culture and Society*, 29 (1). 68-92.

(8) Fayard N and Rocheron Y, 'Ni Putes ni Soumises: A Republican Feminism from the Quartiers Sensibles', 2009, *Modern and Contemporary France*, 17 (1), 1-18.

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4. Details of the impact

The reach and significance of **Wood's** work on violence against women is demonstrated by the impact on the public perception of domestic violence through the translation, staging and follow-up public discussions of the play, *Passi affrettati* (*Hurried Steps*), written in Italian by Dacia Maraini and based on testimonies provided by Amnesty International, and translated into English by Wood. Wood also dealt with funding and budgeting, advertising and promotion, location, communication and liaison with domestic violence units and other local and regional stakeholders as well as with the theatre company *New Shoes*. The play explores the worldwide incidence of domestic violence which Maraini has highlighted since the 1960s in her work on gender and politics, culture and violence against women. Maraini was a candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature and finalist for the International Man Booker Prize in 2012.

Maraini sought Wood's collaboration in 2008, and the play had its English-language première, a

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New Shoes Theatre Company production, at the University of Leicester in March 2008 – the first of many performances across the UK, the latest at the Cockpit Theatre, London. The project of *Hurried Steps* is also the subject of a TED talk in December 2013 and is currently being published as a performance text by Oberon Books. Options for linking the play and performance with Routes into Language initiatives are currently being explored. Each performance has been followed by a one-hour extensive discussion between the general public and a panel of local stakeholders, service providers and policy makers in order to bring into a local context a phenomenon of global importance that transcends social and cultural boundaries. The production is still on tour across the UK and has now (to July 2013) been seen by over 4,000 people in 12 different venues.

The performance plus discussion format of the staging aims both to raise awareness of this significantly under-reported situation which transcends national, ethnic, class and religious boundaries, and to address issues such as funding, prioritisation and service provision at a local level. The British Crime Survey, for example, reports that two women a week are murdered by their partner or ex-partner, while ‘femminicidio’, the murder of women, has been a topic of intense debate in Italy over the past few months See *The Guardian* 12/2/2013 article by Jessica Abrams with contribution from Wood’s PhD student M. Turno: ‘Why Italy can’t forgive the priest who says women provoke abuse’. The information, experience and contacts gained are coalescing into a broader partnership between the academy and service providers. National and local government personnel are invited to performances, and in the context of widespread cuts to services around domestic violence, the play has acted as a conduit for discussion while the theatre company’s website hosts links to key service providers, ensuring continuity of access to information and assistance.

Audience response is monitored through individual evaluation forms to raise the awareness both of practitioners and participants (5b). The impact of *Hurried Steps*, a dyptich of performance and discussion, has been considerable. Performances have been acclaimed in the national press and elsewhere (5a) ‘Nicolette Kay directs the often exhilarating proceedings...a production of real and moving character’ *The Guardian*; ‘There are fine performances in this gripping but measured production’ *Evening Standard*; ‘It’s beautiful work from the Finborough, the actors, director and designers ...’ Blanche Marvin, *London Theatreviews*... ‘You cannot help but feel sadness at the stories, and that makes you want to go out and do something’ Jafar Iqbal, *Extra! Extra!*

Audience feedback is overwhelmingly positive: 97% would recommend others to see the show; over 90% felt their understanding of the issues was deepened. Respondents also appreciated the work as a piece of art, not merely agit-prop. Average rating was 4.4 out of 5. Comments suggested that audience members also re-evaluated their attitude towards live arts, and this was particularly significant among potentially excluded/ self-excluded audiences (5g). ‘It is very intense so makes you think about women’s rights in different cultures’; ‘I would like my friends to see it so they can be aware of the extent of violence against women’; ‘eye-opening’; ‘the play gives you an international insight into the whole issue’. After seeing the play in Brighton, a group of young women from local housing estates worked with *New Shoes* to produce a work of theatre which would tell their own stories, staged in May 2012.

Fayard makes a significant contribution at an institutional level to the way rape is understood and dealt with, and highlights the significant and transformative political power of support organisations. Her article on the Jimmy Savile case, ‘Après le cas Savile’, aimed at the European lay audience, has appeared on French NGO websites and been widely disseminated within NGOs membership infrastructure (5c). Her identification of new areas of consensus and contention around sexual violence has led to plans for a pan-European network of organisations concerned with the prevention of violence against women and the provision of victim support. This collaboration is working towards the production of a dataset which will enable objective transnational comparisons interpretations of rape and its consequences, which will inform and potentially influence EU legislation. International campaigns against rape will be initiated through the sharing of good practice, with Fayard, as bilingual researcher, strategically placed to coordinate. The network (Co-ordinated Action on Rape in Europe – CARE) will enable groups to share knowledge and expertise, enhancing understanding and improved policies and practices in this field. Practitioners

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and support agencies working in this area have spoken of the benefits of taking part in the research and of joining the network, testifying to its value in terms of shaping policy and legislative debate, learning from international practices and experiences, and challenging perceptions and orthodox analyses of the issues underlying rape.

The work has already raised the awareness of the groups and key individuals in this field, through its identification of factors contributing to the continuing failure of the socio-political processing of rape including the justice system. A representative of the French gender equality pressure group Mix-Cités stated: “As a result of [our exchange] I feel I have come a long way, I have asked myself questions on things to which I did not use to give much thought before, well, I would say as far as the aggressors are concerned” (5e). Fayard presented her work at Mix-Cité to an audience of activists and the general public October 2011 (5f). The trans-national nature of Fayard’s research has stimulated great interest and brought a fresh perspective: A representative of the government organisation Observatoire des Violences Faites aux Femmes said in an interview concerning Fayard’s research findings and her link with Rape Crisis England and Wales: “I’m very interested in the work done by the UK because their work could be of help to us. If we can improve our links particularly with Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, to fight forced marriages, then this would be a major gain for us” (5d)

Fayard has also acted as a consultant for the prestigious BUILD (British United Indian Liberal Democrats). This has included collaboration on two motions, one entitled “Violence against Women’ and another on Female Genital Mutilation, which were both passed at the Liberal Democrat Conference in September 2013. She was invited as a keynote speaker to the Annual Ghandi Commemorate Debate in June 2013, in collaboration with Women Liberal Democrats ‘Campaigning to stop Violence against women’ at the National Liberal Club, Whitehall, London. The meeting was attended by political figures, journalists, activists, and leading female professional figures from the Asian community as well as the general public.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- a) Press reviews for *Hurried Steps*: eg www.lit.ethz.ch/fag/Italienisch/Veranst/passi_affrettati_londra; See also http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Hurried+steps&og=Hurried+steps&gs_l=youtube.3...3977.10094.0.11063.13.12.0.0.0.0.197.1335.5j7.12.0...0.0...1ac.1.11.youtube.B_R67K-KCYA
- b) Audience feedback collected and evaluated by Wood with *New Shoes Theatre Company*.
- c) Available at <http://www.mix-cite.org/actualite/index.php3>. Published 27 December 2012
- d) Transcription of interview with representative of Observatoire des Violences Faites aux Femmes
- e) Transcription of interview with representative of the French group Mix-Cités.
- f) <http://www.mix-cite.org/actualite/index.php3>