

**Panel: *Lot's Wife: The imperatives of disobedience and the spectacle of violence.***

**Convenor: Tamar Garb (UCL)**

When Lot's wife disobeyed the patriarchal injunction against looking back at the destruction of Sodom, she was punished by being turned into a pillar of salt. In a way, one might argue, she became the phallic substitute for the law she flouted. Whether conceived as an ossified tear – the weeping of women has often been used to symbolise grief, loss and mourning – or a memorial to an obliterated past, the question of women's position in relation to violence is posed by this episode from Genesis.

It begs many questions:

Why did Lot's wife (who is never named for herself but only in relation to her husband) look back, why was she punished, what did she see, why was the punishment ossification and what informed her view of the destruction of her home? Central to this biblical narrative is the question of women's relationship to violence and loss.

The turning to look of Lot's wife is an act of disobedience which resulted in death. There are many myths and narratives which end in such punishment. Helene Cixous, for example, narrates in 'Castration or Decapitation' a Chinese story about the beheading of a woman who laughs in the face of military discipline. The price of non-conformity to languages, behavioural codes and dominant injunctions can and has been annihilation.

And yet, women as agents – artists, critics, writers – have and continue to address the question of violence and conflict from their positions as women, despite the cost. What is the responsibility of women to 'look back' as well as 'sideways', to narrate stories which counter dominant narratives and to imagine languages which transgress conventional borders and boundaries, the sites of conflict and oppression? How can or have women's critical and creative energies been harnessed to confront anger, guilt, shame and aggression? How can art and newly imagined poetic/formal languages provide a way out of the impasse of political conflict?

These are the questions this panel will address – looking in particular at the recent past in Africa (South Africa and Rwanda offer particular instances of retrospection, reconciliation and reflection) and the Middle East, in particular the ongoing conflict in Israel/Palestine. Papers that address these localities from a feminist perspective will be welcomed. Women's relationship to conflict and the role of art and poetics in making sense of and shifting our understanding of present and past acts of aggression and violation will be the subject of this panel.

**Submission requirements:** 300-500 word abstracts that address these themes are invited by **23<sup>rd</sup> April 2010**. Please email [t.garb@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:t.garb@ucl.ac.uk) one proposal document (word/PDF), and a second bio/affiliation/30 word bio document (word/PDF) for blind review. Please also note: Notification of acceptance sent out Friday 28th May. Final submission of papers/ presentation content, Friday 17th September.