The law and feminism in India

From African Drills to UK parrots

PG snapshot

A newsletter created by postgraduates for postgraduates
Welcome

Welcome to the autumn 2010 edition of The GradPost.

Hello and welcome to a new academic year and another year of The GradPost. Hope the first few weeks back after the summer haven’t been too traumatic. Welcome also to all postgraduates new to Kent this term. We hope you will find the postgraduate newsletter a valuable source of information and entertainment.

This will be my last edition of The Gradpost as editor in chief, with Tinashe Mushakavanhu taking over the reins for the winter edition. Thanks to all who have contributed to this issue: the editorial team, the Graduate School, Kent Union and our postgraduate contributors. It is always exciting to hear about events and research in the postgraduate community, so if you have anything to contribute next time please contact us at grad-editors@kent.ac.uk.

Kate Rees
GradPost Chief Editor

Editorial

I have been a member of The GradPost since its inception in 2006 under the editorship of Kate Rees (also a founding member) who has been a fantastic team leader and colleague. Now that I am stepping into her big shoes, I hope I will keep up with her work-rate and organisational abilities. As this is the third academic year since the newsletter was launched, I would like to extend a massive vote of thanks to the Dean of the Graduate School, Professor Diane Houston and her team, for their support for this wonderful initiative. The postgraduate experience is more fun and fulfilling if it is shared. This newsletter is an interactive network, a platform to talk about our research interests, life on campus, off-campus, cultural encounters, our grand ambitions after Kent, anything worth sharing. Let’s be part of each other’s experiences! If you feel you would like to become part of this team please contact grad-editors@kent.ac.uk

Tinashe Mushakavanhu
GradPost new Chief Editor

Your students’ union

Welcome to the University of Kent. I am Helen Wood and as the Kent Union President for 2010-2011, I am here to make sure that your time here at Kent will be an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Kent Union is the representative body and social hub of the University of Kent; it is run by students for students. We run a variety of services from an Advice Centre that can help students with budgeting, housing and visa queries to a Job Shop where we can help students find part-time employment. We have many sports clubs and loads of societies, plenty of volunteering opportunities and support groups that are here to help you – nightclubs to cafés; you name it, we’ve got it!

With Kent’s postgraduates in mind, Kent Union also arranges numerous social events throughout the year. We have a dedicated staff member at Kent Union called Murtza Ali Ghaznavi who is the Representation and Postgraduate Student Co-ordinator. As a former University of Kent postgraduate himself, he will be co-ordinating course representation for postgraduates as well as events. He would be delighted to hear your ideas, or hear from anyone who might have an interest in getting involved. Please contact him via email on m.a.ghaznavi@kent.ac.uk.

We also have the newly established Kent Graduate Student Association (GSA), see below for further details. Essentially, Kent Union is here to represent you and your needs here at University and that can be anything from fighting for a fairer funding system to lobbying the University for longer library hours. Kent Union and the GSA will ensure that you are listened to by the University and throughout the local and national community.

If you have any thoughts on what Kent Union can be doing for you, please do not hesitate to contact us, either through our website at www.kentunion.co.uk or by emailing me at union-president@kent.ac.uk.

The GSA has been working hard over the last few months to plan a Welcome Week to provide opportunities for you to meet other postgraduates, get to know the campus, and have a fun time doing so. There will be more activities throughout the following 12 months, such as day trips out of Canterbury, frequent evening socials, and regular quiz evenings, so please keep an eye out for these. I hope that this year will be an opportunity for you to succeed in your academic work, but also to enjoy your time here.

If you have any welfare issues, or if you would like to put forward an idea for an academic, social or sporting event, please do not hesitate to contact us on gsa@kent.ac.uk.

Siobhan Morgan
GSA President

Representing graduates

My name is Siobhan and in June I was elected as President of the Kent Graduate Student Association (GSA).

Firstly I would like to welcome any new students to the University of Kent, and welcome back any returning students, and wish you all every success with the year ahead.

As Helen has indicated in her students’ union article above, the GSA is a new body of representation this year, so my work since June has been helping to create this and establish it within the structure of Kent Union. This is a really exciting development as it provides more opportunities for you to raise individual issues through office-hour sessions and GSA meetings. It will also give postgraduates as a whole a stronger voice within the Union, through representation on vital boards and in a wide range of meetings.

In October I will be calling elections for a set of new officers to represent postgraduates for the 2010-2011 academic year. This is an exciting opportunity; if you would like to be involved, please contact me at gsa@kent.ac.uk. We will be holding a main meeting every three weeks on Tuesdays at 6.30pm; the first will be held on Tuesday 28 September. These will be well-advertised and all postgraduate students are invited, so please feel free to join us.

The GSA has been working hard over the last few months to plan a Welcome Week to provide opportunities for you to meet other postgraduates, get to know the campus, and have a fun time doing so. There will be more activities throughout the following 12 months, such as day trips out of Canterbury, frequent evening socials, and regular quiz evenings, so please keep an eye out for these. I hope that this year will be an opportunity for you to succeed in your academic work, but also to enjoy your time here.

If you have any welfare issues, or if you would like to put forward an idea for an academic, social or sporting event, please do not hesitate to contact us on gsa@kent.ac.uk.

Siobhan Morgan
GSA President
Focus on research

The law and feminism in India

My name is Madhumanti Mukherjee and I am a final year PhD student. I am doing research, funded by the Kent Law School, about the constitutionality of Indian criminal laws of sexual violence. Simply put, my thesis tries to establish, through socio-legal and philosophical arguments that the criminal legal provisions in India dealing with sexual violence are unconstitutional.

My research investigates the interface between criminal and constitutional law within a primarily feminist theoretical framework.

I am an international student. I come from the city of Kolkata (or Calcutta) situated in eastern India. I first came to the UK as a Master’s student in the Kent Law School. The following year I completed the LLM in International Law and Relations and decided to apply for a PhD. I chose the Kent Law School because of its reputation as one of the best critical law schools in the UK. KLS encourages its students to look beyond the content of law, to understand its context, scope and limitations. During my Master’s course I started regularly attending the research methods module taught by Professor Joanne Conaghan. It was not a requirement of my course. In the beginning I attended out of curiosity and later because of the irresistible charms of legal theory taught in the course. I decided to do a research degree around that time.

I chose my topic because of my concern and interest in the role law plays in relation to sexual violence in India. It is in many ways similar to its role in the UK and the world over, in spite of its Indian contextual particularities. In Indian society violence against women, including sexual violence against women is widespread. The culturally specific types of gendered violence – killing brides for dowry, female foeticide and infanticide and ‘Sati’ – are quite well known outside India. My work is on the more universal kinds of violence women face, mainly rape and sexual abuse.

There is nothing particular or special about rapes in India. They happen more or less for the same reasons as elsewhere. What is particular is the social and legal set-up a victim faces after the rape. For example, a rape victim is not looked at with sympathy in India; there is a strong social presumption of victim responsibility and an insane amount of shame/dishonour/stigma attached to the label of a ‘raped woman’. A rape victim faces the intimidating prospect of losing respect in the community if she goes for legal redressal. Sometimes, even if they want to report the crime, they are prevented by their families, due to the fear of family shame, especially when the rapist is within the extended family. Rapes in India are notoriously under-reported, though there is no way to get the actual statistics.

Despite this, some women do report rape to the police. Sometimes women have no choice but to report the rape because of the injuries suffered and medical attention needed. In those cases the long road to legal redress (Indian judiciary is known for its slowness in deciding cases) is made difficult by an insensitive police force and judiciary. In addition, the actual laws of rape in India are inadequate and biased. This is mainly where my research project lies. The laws must change and the aim of my thesis is to spell out as clearly and persuasively as possible the inadequacies of the laws; to question the invisible assumptions and to reveal the underlying bias in the established legal wisdom in India; and the reasons why an immediate law reform is more than justified from the constitutional point of view.

Madhumanti Mukherjee
PhD Law

Enhancing your skills with the Graduate School

In my job before returning to student life I was required to give presentations on a daily basis. While I had no problem with this, I had always been a bit skeptical as to whether my presentations were effective enough for my audience. Although I received a lot of positive feedback from them, I still believed I could improve in some areas.

Fortunately, I found that the University of Kent’s Graduate School offered a number of seminars and workshops during term time. The two part presentation skills workshop that I attended was everything I expected and more.

Firstly, the workshop was small in terms of participants. With this workshop, not only did I receive the feedback I wanted, but the facilitator, Jenny Wade, also shared her own experiences of public speaking.

Secondly, the workshop gave us the opportunity to take what we had learned and put it into practice. It was not just a talk from the facilitator. The need for practice is vital for improving skills and Jenny made sure that we had the time to do this in the workshop. In addition to this, we had the opportunity to critique our own presentations. It may seem a bit difficult at first to point out your own weaknesses, but it is necessary. The fellow participants also shared their feedback. A lot of it was positive.

Thirdly, I appreciated that Jenny provided us with a copy of our own presentations on video. Sometimes when we give presentations we do not pay attention to what we are doing, but the video allows us to review what we have done and make any necessary changes in future presentations.

This workshop was rather enjoyable and I plan to attend more workshops to enhance skills needed for my future career.

Joining in a workshop is very easy to do. Just visit the Graduate School’s website (www.kent.ac.uk/graduateschool/skills) and they provide a list of workshops that are being offered during the year. A few clicks and you are in! I would recommend you do so.

Kenya Brown
M.A International Relations
From African Drills to UK parrots

Since my youth I have always been fascinated by wildlife. After several years in a career that gave me little satisfaction, I was determined to pursue my passion for conservation – I left my job, sold my house and embarked on a life-changing journey to Canterbury and the University of Kent.

I chose to study for my BSc in Wildlife Conservation at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE) in the School of Anthropology and Conservation for several reasons. Mostly, it was the reputation of the department, along with DICE’s focus on global conservation. While returning to higher education was a challenge initially, I soon settled in and thoroughly enjoyed my studies, gaining a high 2.1. Deciding that I wanted to pursue further academic studies, I subsequently undertook an MSc by research, investigating reproduction in the African Drill (Mandrillus leucophaeus), a little-known endangered primate. My MSc research experience was the most enjoyable and rewarding year of my life, and I have now decided that the challenges of academic and applied research are what I want to do as a career.

I am now planning to undertake a PhD and to continue on to a career in academic research, and I have been fortunate to find a project that inspires and challenges me. During my BSc in Wildlife Conservation, I was particularly interested in the problems associated with invasive species and conservation genetics, issues that have global as well as local implications. So I contacted Dr Jim Groombridge, Senior Lecturer at DICE, whose conservation genetics research group focuses on these issues.

Invasive species are a global conservation problem. These are species that have been introduced outside of their native range, and which threaten native wildlife by competing for or damaging habitat, and spreading disease, etc. One such example is the seemingly innocuous ringneck parakeet (Psittacula krameri). Despite being a non-migratory species, this parakeet has managed to colonise much of the globe, including the UK. The UK’s feral population of parakeets is thought to have been founded from just a handful of escaped pet birds in the 1960s. However, today the estimated total population of 20,000-50,000 is possibly one of the fastest-growing of any bird population in the UK. This situation has raised concern at the local and national Government level, not only because of the potential ecological impacts of these parakeets on native British birds, but also the potential impacts of introduced diseases that they may bring. The ringneck parakeets have flourished in their non-native habitats due to their ability to feed generally on a wide range of foods. Furthermore, parakeets are becoming a growing concern for the UK agricultural sector. This is particularly true in Kent, given that parakeets prefer to feed on orchard fruits, as well as maize and sunflower crops. These are likely to become increasingly popular crops in the UK in response to future climate change.

While many of us find it wonderful to see these beautiful parrots in our local parks and gardens, their successful colonisation of the UK may carry unwanted consequences. With this in mind, it is important to characterise the growing parakeet population, and to investigate their potential impacts, in an initial effort to mitigate any negative effects.

For the past few months since January, I have been carrying out laboratory work in the DICE genetics group under the supervision of Dr Groombridge, using genetic techniques to determine the origins of the UK feral population of ringneck parakeets. You may have seen some of these loud, long-tailed parrots around Kent, since one of the largest and possibly one of the original populations is centred around Margate and Ramsgate, as well as in and around Greater London. These parrots are a highly distinctive bird, with bright green plumage and a red bill.

At DICE, we are currently working to identify the genetic origin of these parakeets, whether they are Indian ringneck parakeets from the Asian continent (P. k. manillensis) or whether they are African ringneck parakeets (P. k. krameri). Or, are they a hybrid mix? A DNA sequence database of Old World parrots that has been developed by Dr Groombridge’s group is being used to identify which subspecies exist amongst the free-living parakeets in the UK. Importantly, it is quite probable that the population is indeed a hybrid mix of several closely-related parakeet subspecies. This potential result from my work could have notable implications concerning the ability of this feral population to act as a reservoir for a variety of important diseases. As well as being a potential vector for generic pathogens, the parakeet population in the UK may now be (or may soon become) carriers for agro-economically important diseases such as psittacosis (Chlamydiosis psittaci, or ‘parrot fever’), a bacterial pathogen which is known to be a primary cause of abortion in sheep as well as being transmissible to humans.

Dr Groombridge’s genetics group is well-placed to accommodate this genetic and disease/ecology research. The research is a natural progression of the group’s Leverhulme and NERC-funded research on the conservation genetics and disease ecology of feral and endemic populations of parakeets on Mauritius.

In addition to these genetic investigations, I am also now involved in an associated research project that has recently attracted support from a University Grants Factory award, investigating the potential market for offering genetic services to parrot owners in the UK. I am assisting Dr Groombridge’s group in investigating what commercial services we could potentially provide to pet parrot owners, such as DNA testing to identify or confirm the provenance of pet birds, along with disease testing and immunosassays.

Studying and working at the University of Kent over the last four years has been the most enjoyable, demanding and rewarding time of my life so far. Not only have I made some lifelong friends, but I have been involved in some hugely interesting and challenging projects. I am continuing to develop my skills set within Dr Groombridge’s group at DICE. My intention is to continue my academic studies with a PhD at DICE on the population genetics and disease ecology in the UK’s feral parakeets. Making the initial decision to pursue my passion for conservation has instilled in me a great sense of achievement and satisfaction, and a belief that my work is making a real difference.

Hazel Jackson
MSc in Wildlife Conservation
Kent Graduate School

Welcome

The Graduate School would like to take this opportunity to welcome all our new graduate students to the University. We trust that whether you are embarking on a taught course or undertaking research, you will have an enjoyable experience here with us at Kent. We wish you well with your studies and hope that you are settling in well.

Skills training

The Graduate School provides skills development opportunities to supplement the subject-specific training postgraduate students receive in their academic schools.

Transferable Skills Training Programme

The Graduate School coordinates the Transferable Skills Training Programme for postgraduate researchers. We offer a broad range of transferable skills sessions which are designed to hone competencies such as research management, communication, presentation, networking, team working, leadership, negotiation and career management skills. The development of generic skills has been identified as essential by UK Research Councils as these skills strengthen young researchers’ effectiveness and efficiency when managing their research projects and enhance their employment prospects following completion of their degrees. You can find out more about transferable skills training at: www.kent.ac.uk/graduate/transferable-skills. New postgraduate researchers will be notified about booking a place on one of our first-year skills review workshops in the autumn term.

Global Skills Award – new for 2010

This year, the Graduate School is launching a Global Skills Award and postgraduate students registered on taught programmes of study are invited to apply for a place on our programme which comprises of a range of lectures on global issues and a series of skills workshops which have been specifically designed to improve your employability in a competitive job market. Students have until the end of week 3 (Friday 15 October 2010) to apply for a place. The programme is free and those who successfully complete the programme will receive a Global Skills Award certificate. For further details and instructions on how to apply, email skills@kent.ac.uk

Online Research Skills Training – new for 2010

The Graduate School is delighted to be able to offer a suite of online research skills training workshops provided by Epigeum (an award winning online skills training provider) from September 2010. This online training will be available to all first-year postgraduate researchers, part-time researchers and postgraduate researchers based in Medway and Brussels. The beauty of Epigeum is that you can access high-quality training at your convenience. The online workshops are as follows:

- Ethics 1: Good Practice Research
- Ethics 2: Working with Human Subjects
- Research Methods: An Introduction to Research Skills
- Research Methods: Arts and Humanities
- Research Methods: Social Sciences
- Research Methods: Sciences
- Research Methods: Literature Review
- Intellectual Property in the Research Context
- Project Management in the Research Context
- Getting Published in the Arts
- Getting Published in the Sciences
- Managing your Research Supervisor or Principal Investigator
- Selecting a Conference, Presenting and Networking
- Career Planning in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Career Planning in the Sciences
- Avoiding Plagiarism

For more information about skills training provided by the Graduate School, please email Rhiannon Bimbs (Transferable Skills Training Coordinator) at skills@kent.ac.uk or call 01227 824785.

Academic, social and networking opportunities

The Graduate School works with the Graduate Student Association to provide opportunities for graduate students to meet and socialise and is especially keen to support student-driven initiatives such as workshops and conferences. Notification about future graduate events will be sent to you on a regular basis throughout the year. If you have any ideas for a student event, please email Ros Beeching (Graduate School Coordinator) at graduateschool@kent.ac.uk or call (01227) 82 7838.

New for 2010: The Graduate School is based in the Cornwallis SE Octagon on the Canterbury Campus not far from Woolf College (our postgraduate-only college). There is a postgraduate common room available for your use in the Cornwallis SE Octagon and the Graduate School will be running a series of networking events in the common room throughout the 2010-11 academic year, so please keep an eye on the Graduate School website for forthcoming events: www.kent.ac.uk/graduate/transferable-skills

Capture

I saw you
I swear I did
Your glorious feet
Hammered every rock, every pebble
Till in rest, dripped
Water drops,
When your toes tips dipped

Splash not
The vapor-blurred scene
Stay.
Your detailed thighs
Your hard chest
A place calling to be homed

The peak temple in pride,
Move in humbleness
Sacred,
You whispered,
I treasure you.

My finger drew
Your face,
Tracing every curve, every age
I memorized you,
Save.

Your eyes, lowered
The earth under earth
And stretched
The sky above the unbound
Those lashes,
Divide and unite,
Lands
Kill and revive,
Breath

I saw you
I swear I did
Across streets,
Under roofs,
Behind borders,
Inside of my own temple

Lina Samawi
MA English and American Literature
The editorial team
Kate Rees – Chief GradPost Editor (PhD Pharmacology)
Tinashe Mushakavanhu (PhD English)
Kylie Grant (MA Creative Writing)
Clare Hetterley (MA English and American Literature)
Sarah Scanlon (MRes Art Philosophy)
Lina Samawi (MA English and American Literature)

Graduate School
Barbara Battersby, Administrative Assistant
Suzie Taylor, Graduate School Administration Manager

Contributors
Helen Wood, Siobhan Morgan, Madhumanti Mukherjee,
Kenya Brown, Hazel Jackson.

Production
Design and layout: Design & Print Centre

Creative Campus – a postgraduate art installation
Visitors to the Sports Centre had the opportunity in June to experience MA student Neil Light’s new video installation in preview.

Neil is a postgraduate in Film Studies at the University of Kent. He has made commissioned film works for Arts Council England, the Priory Group, Clerical Medical and South West Arts among others, and has a diverse body of work which includes a drama documentary with female prisoners, and films and live artworks with young people who have Asperger’s syndrome.

On Friday 11 June, Neil’s new video installation was previewed on the University squash court. The piece, entitled RUSH, was commissioned by Slipstream, a contemporary arts showcase event in response to the Creative Campus initiative at the University, offering a parallel perspective on the London 2012 Olympic Games.

If you would like to contact Neil Light regarding his work or research please email him at nil84@kent.ac.uk or njlight@mac.com

(mis)Adventures of a postgraduate student – don’t forget the freebies!
Going to an academic conference is an exciting part of postgrad life, a chance to escape the lab/office for a bit and realise you are not the only PhD student in your field. It’s especially exciting if you get to go somewhere exotic such as Australia, although it’s likely that you won’t see much more than the conference building, so Leeds is just as good.

There are three main reasons to go to a conference: just going to observe (interesting and a good chance to ‘network’ over a beer); a poster (much more scary having to display your work but, ultimately, a lot of quite awkward standing around), or a presentation (Powerpoint, massive nerves amid visions of being torn to shreds by your academic betters), usually short, thankfully, so mauling time is brief.
Conferences are great for getting some much needed motivation and inspiration for your own work – just remember to collect the freebies!

Anonymous

PG snapshot
Name: Siobhan Morgan
Course: MA Eighteenth Century Studies
Supervisor: Jennie Batchelor
Campus: Canterbury
Academic interests: One of my main interests is early women’s writing, the representation of women, and the social and political issues surrounding this in the long eighteenth century.
Academic hero/inspirational figure: Frances Burney and Jane Austen
Place of birth: Southampton
Favourite cheese: Parmesan
Favourite colour: Blue
Favourite film: Far too many... but Superbad and The Green Mile are definitely up there!
What is the best thing about being a grad student at Kent? The support from staff and the Kent Union in terms of academic issues and non-academic events.
Favourite place to eat on campus: Origins
Top tip for postgraduate study: Organisation and getting a balance of non-academic activities as well as study.
If you would like to appear in the next edition’s PG Snapshot, please email us at grad-editors@kent.ac.uk