



**Snapshots from the  
Embodying Social Justice Conference  
University of Roehampton/PCSR  
10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> June 2016.**

**Gesturing.** In her day one key note Carmen Joan Abblack shows us a photo of the red hibiscus flower which is blossoming on her terrace. It reminds her of the red hibiscus which her mother planted when she found out she was to leave the Caribbean for England (maybe the flower is a descendent of the original plant?) Years later, returning to her family's former Caribbean home, Carmen finds that the red hibiscus has now self-seeded along the whole wall outside her family's former home. I am reminded of the beloved hibiscus Syriacus in our garden which is also starting to spring to life. Across the way is the tree peony my grandmother proudly grew from seed "you have to be patient" she said "it could take years to bloom". The plant reminds her of her garden in India. It recently bloomed; its dramatic deep pink petals then falling into a pool of tears.

**Daring.** I love Susie Orbach's invitation to "dare to be comfortable", shifting from seeing ourselves as centre of the world to the centre of ourselves in a world in which body preoccupation robs women in civil society. She affirms all that we know as therapists: about sorrow, about fears of succeeding, about the splintering and conflict, about the knotty reasons for abusive relationships, about the othering and becoming objects and how hard it is, since the war in Iraq, to fight back. I hear her keynote call as a way to find a way to enrich our therapeutic practice with political energy.

**Respect.** Women weaving words on the unthinkable and often unspeakable and skilfully splicing images and music to highlight the plight of the often forgotten and lost and left. These awesome, talented women.

**Laying down ghosts.** The cameraman appears - his camera seems huge all of a sudden - just as I'm showing Eugene the two pictures I've chosen in response to 'having the race conversation'. "Please can you not photograph me at the moment?" I ask. "Oh, don't worry, it's a video" he tells me. My God, that's far worse. My heart's

sinking. "I don't want to be video-ed either, thanks." My body rises from the memories of the tangled sadness and abandonment of my grandmother and great-grandmother to want to make sure I haven't offended the cameraman, who seems like a Very Nice Man indeed. He walks away and big tears roll down my cheeks for all the times I've had to rise above the mess of my tangles in response to a man making his mark. And crying for my brown great grandmother, depicted in the postcard in front of me, laying down her white baby who passed herself off as being related to a Spanish princess. The Spanish princess my grandmother hated with venom.

**Summertime.** The sun's shining, the food is good, I'm sitting on the deck, laughing with colleagues, talking about Druidism and Wicca and how I can find Buddhism in the 'West' not quite earth-touching or sort of messy enough at times. The living feels easy. Then the camera man appears and I'm to do an interview, pulled back into the camera world.

**Post-tango lesson.** "My feet hurt - can we go home now?"

**Rebirth.** My body re-enacts the story of my birth in front of a perfectly intimate stranger. I come to rest and look in my partner's eyes - she's moved - I'm happily shocked by my body and its fluid knowledge. I'd loved Carmen's reminder to see the body as an event, an event in process, the body in process. It's true.

**Meeting the ancestors.** Ireland - I'm talking about Ireland (Sligo and Galway and folk from County Cork lost and hiding in Islamabad) with colleagues all of sudden. Carmen's mention of diasporic agency has sparked conversations and lit fires. Reclaiming lost legacies and agencies through lost links, our forefathers - and foremothers - and fore-however-they-defined-themselves - attempts to reconnect and keep the story going without the cracks. Our parents desires for a better lives for us all.

**Dash.** Quick as you like, a squirrel dashes across the lawn as we settle with our morning tea.

**Quick silver.** Secrets, lies, misunderstandings and unsaids leak out like mercury, following any available channel. Hear through someone's throat forming into words, there in the silent poison running in the veins of the scared - all of us, that is. I'm falling through space, into a familiar vortex, but know I need to right myself at come back to now. Sickened by leakiness. I'm sure it's poisonous, mercury, I mean? Suddenly I'm reminded of playing with water on nasturtium leaves in my grandmother's garden (Here she is again - she's making herself noticed, isn't she. Narcissists are good at that. Though she isn't one anymore, she reassures me.) My partner confirms that mercury is poisonous. "It makes you go mad" he says "as mad as a hatter - that's where the phrase comes from" (how does he know stuff like that? He knows some science stuff, I know some art stuff, it works well.) I remember Susie speaking of the knotty reasons for abusive relationships which therapists understand. So knotty and so much yet to learn in containing not leaking, opening not closing, thawing when frozen. I'm not alone.

**I see beauty.** That's the thing as I watch the film so lovingly made by Alison Lee in her exploration of "Busting Out". The beauty of these people - mainly women -

talking so honestly about recovering from so-called 'eating issues'. Except they're issues of connection, broken bonds - or bonds never made - issues of a society obsessed with defining ourselves from the outside in, the tape rule measuring our wealth, colour, success, conformity, and beauty rather than our health and ability to roll with life. I'm so glad the film refers to eating issues and not disorders. A lighter label to pull off. I breathe into my softened, flattened thigh muscles and belly on the floor. The beauty of their eyes, expressions, complexions, their comradeship. Most of all, their survival. The beauty of the film-making; a loving lens, that love for the creativity of this work in someone who knows horror, her longing to bring this work across the world and tell these survival stories.

**The end.** The man on the reception desk has a lovely smile. He catches me leaving with friends on Saturday evening - "Yeah, we did it!" - with a sigh of relief and satiation. He nods and smiles. Two squirrels scamper about the lawns as we push open the heavy front doors and take a last look at the sculpture of the three pods remembering 'the spirit of the wood'.

#### **About Kamalamani.**

Kamalamani is a body psychotherapist and ecopsychologist. She has been a practising therapist since 2003 and is particularly interested in the interface between therapy and social, ecological, and climate justice. Previously a steering group member of Psychotherapist and Counsellors for Social Responsibility, and editor of its *Transformations* journal, Kamalamani is also a member of the Climate Psychology Alliance. In addition to several journal articles she has written two books: *Meditating with Character* and *Other than Mother* and is a regular writer for the US journal *Somatic Psychotherapy Today*. For 22 years she has worked as a facilitator including: teaching postgraduate international development studies at Bristol University, with NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa, offering Wild therapy, and leading retreats. Since 1995 she has been practising meditation and Buddhism. [www.kamalamani.co.uk](http://www.kamalamani.co.uk).