

RESEARCH FOR THE WORLD

LSE then and now: women and the media

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Dr Simidele Dosekun is Assistant Professor in the Department of Media and Communications at LSE. She is the author of *Fashioning Postfeminism: spectacular femininity and transnational culture*.

For 125 years, research has been at the heart of LSE's teaching and engagement with the world. In this series, we've paired up four of our historical figures with four early career academics, reflecting continuity and change across the years. Here, **Simidele Dosekun** discusses the link between media and daily life, brought to the fore by the pandemic.

My research focuses on black African women – in Africa mostly, but also as they travel or move in and out of black diasporic spaces – and my core interest is in how such women see themselves and seek to make or fashion their own lives.

I am very excited and proud that my first monograph was published in June 2020. *Entitled Fashioning Postfeminism: spectacular femininity and transnational culture*, the book is about how young, certainly very class-privileged women in Nigeria see themselves as what I term “already individually empowered,” and hence beyond the need for feminism as a collective politics. With this book, and in my career more broadly, I hope to contribute to more complex scholarly engagement with and imaginations of African women, in all their – or let me say all our – diversity.

Writing this in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hard to make predictions. The world has changed so much in just a short few months, and across the board social scientists (and others) are rightly asking what the “new normal” will be. But one thing that the crisis has made clear is just how central and deeply embedded media and communications are in our societies and daily lives. Existing questions in the field of media and communications have become all the more urgent, including how media variously increase and mitigate social inequalities, from gender to class relations; tensions between surveillance technologies and privacy, and many other issues.

Eileen Power was a feminist economic historian who, among other things, sought to tell or bring into the record “women's stories”. I think this is very important, and remains so – although we have come a long way since Power's time, it is still the case that “history” is overwhelmingly men's history.

Eileen Power (1889-1940): economic historian and radio broadcaster

Eileen Power was a respected historian who became LSE's second (and second female) Chair in Economic History in 1931 and a BBC radio broadcaster.

She taught at both Cambridge and LSE during the First World War. Student numbers at LSE dwindled but wartime in Cambridge gave Eileen wider opportunities to teach economic history. She also lectured at the League of Nations and as a historian favoured an international yet social perspective, rather than the nationalism she believed led to war and fragmentation.

After the war she carved out a successful career as a medieval social historian, becoming Director of Studies in History at Girton College, Cambridge and travelling the world with the Kahn Travelling Fellowship in 1920. She met Gandhi in India and visited Japan, but fell in love with China on her travels. In 1921 Eileen returned to LSE full time to teach economic history in 1921 disappointed that Cambridge had refused to give women degrees, unlike LSE who had welcomed women since its inception.

Eileen Power's research focused on medieval women and ordinary lives within the context of the medieval world at large. She published *Medieval People* in 1924 and also produced children's history books, *Boys and Girls of History* – and BBC radio broadcasts - with her sister Rhoda Power. Their aim was to bring history to life for children.

Her LSE lectures were immensely popular and she spent a term teaching at Barnard College in the USA in 1930, where she was so successful that she was invited to stay. However, she returned to LSE and became the second woman to be appointed to the Chair in Economic History, in 1931.

Despite her standing, she was paid less than male colleagues and career progression was slower for women. She married former student MM Postan in 1937, remaining at LSE and using her influence to get him a similar post at Cambridge. She co-created the Economic History Society and *Economic History Review* journal which she worked on through the early part of the Second World War. Her work was cut short by her early death in 1940, aged 51. ■

This introduction to Eileen Power is
by Sue Donnelly, formerly LSE
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