

Leila Ahmed

I first met Connie Buchanan in the early to mid-1990s, and it was soon after that that she invited me to join the WSRP Advisory board. Serving on the board entailed reviewing Research Associate applications and attending annual meetings of the National Leadership Conference which brought together the Research Associates and the donors who supported the program and who flew in for the weekend from across the country. Many among the latter were themselves innovative thinkers and leaders in the world beyond academia, and the event consequently, brilliantly presided over by Connie, was always a scintillating and enriching affair.

At that point I was teaching at the Women's Studies Program at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a program which, founded in 1975, was one of the oldest women's studies programs in the country. WSRP had been established a couple of years earlier, but it would only be after Connie became its director in 1977, that it secured funding from the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, and appointed in 1980 its first full-time Research Associates.

I mention all these dates because, thinking about Connie, I find myself thinking also about the extraordinary history of Women's Studies more generally, and of the importance of Connie's leadership role in that larger story, as well as in the history of Women's Studies in Religion at the Divinity School. As she did with me, Connie reached out to and drew in many scholars from various other campuses across the U.S., and her initiatives here, presiding over the stellar program she oversaw, had its ripple effects across the academy. Her achievements, consequently, grounded in her scholarship, the clarity of her vision and her outstanding leadership, were of importance then not only to the Divinity School but also in the larger and remarkable story of women's studies in our time.

Those of us who remember how much tougher and bleaker the academic world was for women, and particularly for women who worked on women's issues, back in the 1980s, know very well that it took extraordinary gifts for Connie to achieve all she achieved – and that, indeed, she more than earned her place on the paneled walls of the Braun Room.

By the time I joined the Divinity School, Connie had left for the Ford Foundation, so I never had the pleasure of working with her on a daily basis.

But I continued to see her, typically several times a year, at the meetings she hosted at the Ford Foundation and to which she kindly invited me.

On a personal level, Connie was, in my experience, almost in a category of her own in terms of her intellectual generosity and her unstinting willingness to discuss, engage with and support the work of others. During the years that I worked on my book on veiling in the Middle East and America, I know for certain that, but for Connie's support, that book would never have been completed—and I owe her a measureless debt of gratitude.

And so yes, thinking of Connie today, I think of the many gifts she brought to the Divinity school, to women's studies in religion and to the field of women's studies more broadly. And I think of the great gifts she gave me, and of my immense gratitude to her, and of my gratitude too, altogether, that Connie was exactly who she was and that she did exactly what she did—as I am grateful too, for the fact that I was lucky enough to have known her.