
The Forgotten Foundations of Feminist Legal Scholarship

Maria Drakopoulou* and Rosemary Hunter**

The papers in this collection were first presented in a workshop organised by the Kent Centre for Critical Thought in June 2022. Under the title “The Forgotten Foundations of Feminist Legal Scholarship, Part I (1970-1985)” the workshop sought to understand why, unlike in other fields in the humanities and social sciences, contemporary feminist legal scholarship appears to have no consolidated history and almost no canonical texts; and why individual studies, however radical or sophisticated, appear situated only in the ‘feminist present’, with legal feminism’s past appearing essentially void of any heritage deemed worthy of being handed down. It is as if what credits feminist legal scholarship with contemporaneity is precisely the erasure of these earlier texts from its horizon. Yet despite this apparent disregard contemporary feminist legal scholarship rests upon the foundations of a significant corpus of post-war feminist texts; texts whose vital power shaped new, creative, and critical modes of thinking, and opened new paths of understanding and reflection that challenged dominant thought, both inside and outside the Academy. They animated multiple ways of revalorising lived experience and the subject’s embodied nature, and in so doing raised radical questions about women’s social being.

In recognising this, workshop participants were tasked with considering a number of questions exploring the contemporary significance and value of key texts from the period under review. We asked: what is the position and relevance of texts from the 1970s and ’80s with regards to the present? How should we receive and think of these texts today, and how should we position our contemporary thought in relation to them? And, why has feminist legal scholarship not developed a widely recognised feminist canon whilst continuing to revere the work of white male philosophers? In short, should we reconnect with the rich inheritance that feminist thought and practice of the ’70s and ’80s bequeathed us, or continue to acknowledge our disjunction with this heritage as a sign of our contemporaneity?

In addressing these questions we were not intending to establish a transgenerational continuity, but rather celebrate the multivalency of feminist theory and methodology. We hope that the papers in this collection provide a modest, yet valuable contribution to the debate on ‘Generational Feminism’ taking place in the UK and Continental Europe which is examining relationships between contemporary feminists and our feminist foremothers.¹

* Emeritus Professor, Kent Law School, University of Kent, UK. Email m.drakopoulou@kent.ac.uk

** Professor of Socio-Legal Studies and Founding Head of Law, Loughborough Law, Loughborough University, UK. Email r.hunter2@lboro.ac.uk

¹ For example: Iris Van Der Tuin, *Generational Feminism* (London: Lexington Books, 2015); Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthe Nigianni and Fanny Söderbäck (eds.), *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Theory and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Rosi Braidoti, “A Critical Genealogy of Feminist Postmodernism”, *Australian Feminist Studies* (2005) 47: 169-80.
