

transforming academies, global genealogies

This special issue brings together two themed sections with rather different objects and frames of inquiry. One is focused on changes in the fortunes of Australian academic feminism over the last 15 years; the other rethinks the history of feminist social movements from a transnational perspective. Yet what the two sets of articles share is a commitment to thinking about the importance of history for feminist politics, the significance of location for how we understand feminism, and the value of critical academic tools for interrogating and making possible transformations in the social world. Further, both sets of articles explore the relationship between the global and the local, writing and action, complicity and transformation as significant for 'genealogy', that is, the uncovering of counter-hegemonic practices and their folding back into (in order to transform) dominant histories of the present. Taken together these pieces represent a set of reflections on the importance of memory and its analysis in any political endeavour, and the responsibility that feminist writers have for what they remember and speak about in the present. They also foreground several issues that the collective editors of *Feminist Review* are only too familiar with, namely the contested nature of historical accounts even within a relatively small timeframe, and the problems of a transnational approach to knowledge production and its analysis. In the first place, accounts of even *Feminist Review's* history differ according to which threads one traces and who is speaking (see our roundtable in Issue 80, 'Reflections on 25 Years'). In the second, the desire for an inclusive (or even open) feminist theory and politics will always bring one back to, rather than help us finally to escape, geography. A confrontation with location marks most battles within the journal over the last 30 years, and continues to structure the Collective's uneasy desire for an 'international' journal.

The first themed section, 'Theorizing the "First Wave" Globally', introduced and edited by Pamela Caughie, brings together three pieces that challenge dominant approaches to feminist history to include global knowledges and experiences. More than merely adding in these perspectives, each piece offers a critique of existing teleologies that tend to conceive of feminist history in waves, or in terms of progress and loss over (linear) time. Kanika Batra's article, for example, explores the cyclical nature of feminist politics in India through her discussion of Ismat Chughtai's novels: how ideas come and go, changing intensity over time, remembered differently, reverberating in the present and at different times in the past. For Batra, linear versions of

history (not necessarily 'Western') cannot do justice to the ebbs and flows of social movements and the re-intensification of older political demands in new moments. Further, each article in this section asks us to think about what it is that we are doing – including and excluding, validating or sidelining – when we write a history of feminism. Such a reflexive approach means accepting that we may not like what is included in a more expansive feminist history, as Leah Rosenberg indicates in her discussion of the neglected work of women nationalist writers in Jamaican feminist history. Indeed, to critique linear models and to insist on the importance of the historian's desires in shaping accounts will transform not just how we write history, but the sense of what is included in social movements at all (or indeed how to recognise one when we see it). The three pieces thus insist on location as important to *all histories*, not just non-Western ones, and suggest – persuasively in my view – that feminist political histories are always productive as well as descriptive.

The articles in this theme offer their challenge to rethinking feminist history in global perspective in specific disciplinary vein. William Spurlin's critique of hegemonic Western feminist histories of same-sex desire is a case in point, as he reads first- and third-person narratives of South African women's sexuality against dominant modes, introducing the question of which sources as well as interpretations are privileged in dominant accounts of feminist history. In each article the deconstruction of feminist historical hegemonies occurs through both a geographical, located (and in Rosenberg's case comparative) perspective, and also through an insistence of the significance of literature as foregrounding a different kind of politics. Literature is, you might say, a place in its own right in these pieces: a place where women (sometimes) have their say when the ability to negotiate a public/private social divide is constrained; a place where memory and fantasy become the very stuff of political resistance. This disciplinary muddling of history is also important in light of the second themed set of articles 'Mainstream or Muzzled?' where the increasing instrumentalisation of higher education in Australia demands that intellectual outcomes be measurable in ways that privilege policy and social science application over the humanities. If there is a link between interdisciplinarity and transnational openness, one may well wonder what kinds of histories of feminism will or can be produced under such restricted new global intellectual agendas.

The second themed section in this special issue, 'Mainstream or Muzzled? Australian Academic Feminism', introduced and edited by Ann Genovese, brings together a selection of articles presented at a conference of the same name, and revisits debates posed in the 1996 issue of *Feminist Review* 'The World Upside Down: Feminisms in the Antipodes'. These articles explore the impact of shifts in the social, political and educational landscape under John Howard and beyond, asking after the conditions under which feminist thinking and transformation are possible within the academy. The articles are framed by Genovese's introduction

and an afterward by 'The World Turned Upside Down' editor Ann Curthoys, and both emphasise the importance of sustained reflections on feminist history from within a single context. For Genovese in particular, one of the tricks of globalisation in a neo-liberal frame is that it deflects attention from the strengthened role of the (national) state in moving policy to the right. A conventional 'transnational' rather than localised perspective, in her view, is likely to miss the specifics of how power operates.

One consistent theme here is that of post-feminism, an unexplored part of the history of feminism in the first section, although the importance of thinking about emergent feminisms that might not look as we expect (or might not even use the name) does mark a distinct continuity. Zora Simic's article articulates an unusual view on young women's rejection of the term 'feminism', reading it as a sense of inadequacy in relation to feminist history and its foremothers, rather than necessarily as an apolitical, individualist certainty. Simic's article stands in contrast to Margaret Thornton's reflections, and consideration of these two together draws out some important disagreements about the contemporary state of feminist consciousness. Thornton laments the lack of a historical sensibility among a post-feminist generation, indicating that it is precisely this lack of memory and competency that undoes the critical and epistemological achievements of feminist labour in the past. This debate indicates the ways in which feminist history is not in the control of feminists at all points in time or in all places. In 'Mainstream or Muzzled?' post-feminists write a second wave past in ways few self-identified feminists would understand as accurate. Indeed at its most aggressive, post-feminist discourse articulates the final achievement of feminist history in the West, such that we don't need it here any longer, though we do of course – as Anuradha Needham critically points out in the first section – need it 'over there'.

This is perhaps another reason for considering this special issue as a whole, namely that the 'Theorizing ... Globally' of the first part can offer a direct challenge to histories of feminism that swallow the binary myths of modernity and regurgitate them in the most damaging ways. Here too, in 'Mainstreamed or Muzzled?' we see the importance of not assuming that 'Western' feminisms are uniform, and certainly that they are not uniformly institutionalised. Within Australia, as Barbara Baird's and Mary Spongberg's accounts make plain, academic feminism has fared unevenly in relation to transformed academies under neo-liberalism. We need to map these differences in order better to be accountable for them, perhaps, and so that the relative successes can also be thought through as part of an accountable feminist history. It may not be only post-feminist histories we want to question, but the successful mainstreaming of gender into Higher Education, and domestic and foreign policy. Again, the link between the two sections is clear, I think: that we have to be able to write histories of feminism in ways that do not bracket off those

aspects we would prefer not to be included. We cannot 'clean up' the past of feminism if we are to have any chance of mobilising it in inclusive ways, of 'Transforming Academies' in the future.

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