

Review for BJSE.

Miriam David: *A Feminist Manifesto for Education*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2016

Julie McLeod, University of Melbourne, jemcleod@unimelb.edu.au

At the heart of this rousing book is a call not to forget the gains and legacies of earlier feminist reforms while recognising the work that still needs to be done in new social and political circumstances and in response to obdurate problems of gender-related violence. As Miriam David reflects in her closing chapter, ‘I want to ensure that the demands of the WLM or second-wave feminism remain of strategic importance for dealing with VAWG [violence against women and girls] and GRV [gender-related violence] (David 2016, p.178). Comprising six chapters that could also work as stand-alone pieces, the book’s account of education feminism is framed by commentary on the contemporary social and political climate, and the predominance of neo-liberal imaginaries and marketised education that threatens democratic and feminist agendas. Critique alone, however, is not the endgame; the manifesto trope moves toward action, re-construction and a multi-pronged reinvigoration of feminist engagement in education, building upon an evident resurgence of education feminist activism and scholarship. Many important issues are canvassed across this book: of particular interest for me were some of the larger issues the discussion raised regarding situated and transnational histories of (recent) feminism and generational narratives and memories of feminism.

While features of feminist movements across the twentieth and into the twenty-first century are considered, the formative work of second-wave Anglo-American education feminism is a prominent focus. The concerns of more recent feminist activity, often characterised under the name of third- or fourth-wave feminism, are also addressed in some detail, particularly in relation to the changing worlds signified in the rise and reach of social media and digital cultures. The strong thread holding together the six chapters is the possibilities and indeed responsibility for feminist education to promote fairer and respectful social relations. David describes this book as ‘a plea for better and more critical forms of education and schooling to make gender and sexual relations central to forms of schooling for gender and young people’ (p.2). Her discussion of gender-related violence and interventions serves as one powerful example of the urgency and complexity of this challenge.

The book is prompted in part by, but speaks beyond, a European Union project on challenging gender-related violence ‘amongst children and young people by working with educators and trainers’ (p.1). An overall aim was to promote greater awareness and understanding among such professional workers, and to develop or provide strategies that could in turn be employed in working with young people to inform them about and address gender-related violence and its causes and consequences. Research for this project was undertaken in four EU countries – Britain, Ireland, Italy and Spain – by

co-researchers Miriam David, Pam Aldred and Barbara Biglia. While these programs shared some fundamental feminist principals in understanding gender violence within (neo)patriarchal and heteronormative regimes, there were significant national differences in how such violence was conceptualised (gender-related, gender-based, for example) and in the design and process for delivering – via youth workers, teachers, health workers, community-based police.

Reflections on these projects are found throughout the book, with a focussed account in Chapter 5 ‘Challenging Gender Violence for Children and Young People through Education’ (pp.126-157), which describes the essential features and challenges encountered in each of the national settings. For example, in Ireland, a training course was developed for youth and community workers for delivery in pre-service education programs in university courses. The preferred nomenclature was gender-based violence, ‘to emphasise that this violence is *based* on gender and gender stereotyping, not simply related to it’ and it was located within a ‘continuum of sexism’ (p.132). In Italy, the training course was called ‘Against Gender-Related Violence: Gender Violence against (and by) Children and Young People: Training for Practitioners’ and its participants included qualified educators and health workers who were in regular contact with children and young people (pp.132-33). One of the sponsoring organisations was the Maurice Association on LGBTQi and the other a health care service that supported victims of violence. The preferred term here was ‘gender-related violence’ to underscore the range of ‘sexist, sexualizing or norm-driven bullying and harassment and bullying behaviours’ (p.133). The preference for this term also spoke to the dilemma encountered in developing a course that did not limit gender violence to violence against women and tried ‘to address issues of discrimination against women and discrimination against LGBTQi people on the same debate’ (p.134).

As David acknowledges, there is much more to say about these individual projects as well as about the overall ambitions of the umbrella study. The important issues raised in Chapter 5 follow a series of wide-ranging chapters that survey aspects of the history of feminist scholarship and activism towards gender equality and education, and precede the final chapter that realises the intent of the book to provide a feminist manifesto for education. Organisationally, the former offers a necessary backdrop to the analysis of training programs to counter violence against women and girls, and the latter outlines a political vision and educational goals to redress such violence. Yet, at times the detail and significance of the national cases studies developed in Chapter 5, which I see as constituting pivotal contributions to feminist activist scholarship, risk being over shadowed by the surrounding discussions. That is, the richness of these national case studies invites further elaboration; they illuminate diverse ways of addressing gender violence and also point to different genealogies of

feminist activism and to the significant impact of national political and cultural histories in how such activism takes root.

Additionally, the national differences that are brought to the surface in this chapter are revealing beyond the specificities of these programs. I see them as speaking to the challenge and importance of writing transnational histories of feminism and education. Much has been written on the merits of the ‘transnational turn’, both within and outside the history of education (Bagchi, Fuchs, and Rousmanière 2014). The limitations of confining histories of education within a national frame are particularly marked in an era of accelerating globalization, when ideas, policies and practices travel as if without a home or point of origin and return. Yet, noting the global flows of ideas does not remove the task of building situated histories that are attentive to local and regional circumstances, including the mediation and re-contextualisation of ‘international’ movements and ideas. This encompasses the situated histories of feminism, be they located in the so-called global north or global south, in the metropolitan hub with its imperial gaze or in settler-colonial and de-colonising worlds beyond the centre. A transnational angle onto the history of feminism in education could well be productive for tracing points of convergence and divergence in the periodization and character of feminist activism (did the ‘waves’ happen at the same time, have the same concerns and strategies across diverse regions?); and in, this case, understanding forms and strategies to address gender related violence. The case studies presented in this book offer a valuable basis for such work. They point the way for further developing transnational accounts of second-wave feminism that do not simply repeat the nationalism of forms of comparative education nor the grand and sometimes unanchored claims of an international or global feminism.

This feminist manifesto is also a generational story, mapping waves of feminist activism and aspirations, largely but not only in relation to education. The waves metaphor, as David and others have also noted (Laughlin, Gallagher, and Cobbler 2010), is somewhat overused but also retains some utility in registering the different social climate in which feminism has gained ground and the types of educational interventions that have developed. For example, as David observes the second-wave attention to changing consciousness, curriculum and understandings of gender roles and more recent sustained recognition of LGBTQi experiences in relation to schooling and intensified practices of sexualisation via social media. Generational motifs are evident also in how David positions her own earlier and current work, in discussions of a study she previously undertook on waves of feminism in higher education (Chapter 4, ‘Changing political landscapes of feminism: waves and educational values’, pp.89-125), and in the framing of her analysis of gender violence and educational programs to counter its incidence and effects; this is especially so in discussions of arguably new forms of gender

related violence in the current era (sexting, cyber-bullying, for example) which demand in turn new types of feminist strategies and educational programs to address.

A generational story emerges in other powerful ways too, and in how the second wave of feminism and its achievements are represented. More than two decades ago, the US feminist historian Antoinette Burton observed that ‘most feminists recognize that history is not simply what happened in the past, but more pointedly, the kinds of *knowledge* about the past that we are *made aware of*’ (Burton 1992, p.26). She further argued that ‘Historical narratives of feminist movements cannot be taken at face value. The narrativization of our history – how we end up with the stories about historical feminism upon which we rely – needs to be continuously revealed as the historical process it is’. Two decades later, and a pronounced focus on historicizing the claims and narratives of feminism and its history has emerged (e.g. Roper 2010; Morgan 2009). In part at least, this can be seen as an artefact of generational and demographic movement, as influential scholars seek to make sense of their intellectual journeys and legacies, and newer scholars seek to position themselves and their agendas into a larger narrative (for further discussion see McLeod 2017). This is evident in Joan Scott’s recent reflections on her influential 1980s discussions of gender as a category of historical analysis (for its influence in feminist histories of education see (Spencer 2010).

In her book *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Scott 2011), Scott reflects on her earlier approach to ‘gender’ as a social category as having ‘little to do with unconscious processes’ (p.3) and of her then (1980s) still operating within dualistic conceptions of public/private and reductive accounts of ‘cultural construction’. It is not possible here to elaborate Scott’s re-assessment of feminist history and her turn towards psycho-analysis. The point to take, however, from these sketchy remarks is to locate this feminist manifesto in relation to a more widespread remembering and stocktake of feminism, particularly the revisiting and re-assessment of second-wave feminism and its impact on the academy and beyond. Within histories of recent feminism and education, a similar sense of stocktake is well underway, with broad overviews as well as more regionally focussed assessments (Skelton and Frances 2009; Tinkler and Allan 2015; Gannon 2016). Within the history of education, comprehensive reviews of the historiography of gender, feminism and education (Goodman 2012; Watts 2005) provide valuable points of comparison and guidance for extending critical and transnational histories of education feminism as it is remade and remembered across generations. As Burton’s comments above remind us, histories of feminism can tell us as much about the present times in which they are told as they do about the past times they seek to represent.

Articulating a feminist manifesto education recalls the radical impulses of second-wave feminism, and a desire to shake-up education with a comprehensive vision of how social and gender relations might

be otherwise. The manifesto Miriam David offers us talks across generations of feminism, drawing from the substance and style of second-wave feminism and re-articulating what a feminist agenda could and should encompass in the present. The book is thus a compelling reminder of the importance of not forgetting earlier feminist work while acknowledging what remains to be done, and the new directions education feminism must head towards in the rapidly changing, polarising and indeed violent times of the present. As she observes, ‘we, as feminists, have achieved a great deal in terms of our thinking, knowledge, learning and insights... we should celebrate the fact that our arguments are on the global agenda... But gender equality cannot have been achieved, if violence against women and girls [VAWG] and gender-related violence [GRV] remain unresolved questions’ (p.158). Confronting and keeping visible these challenges for contemporary feminism, in the context of documenting its history of activism, is a key achievement of this fine book. In traversing generational narratives it also shows the value of looking comparatively and transnationally at the different inflections of feminist theory and practice.

References

- Bagchi, Barnita, Eckhardt Fuchs, and Kate Rousmanière, eds. 2014. *Connecting Histories of Education: Transnational and Cross-Cultural Exchanges in (Post)colonial Education*. New York: Berghahn.
- Burton, Antoinette. 1992. “‘History’ Is Now: Feminist Theory and the Production of Historical feminisms¹”. *Women’s History Review* 1 (1): 25–39.
- David, Miriam E. 2016. *A Feminist Manifesto for Education*. Cambridge UK: Polity Press.
- Gannon, Susanne. 2016. ‘Kairos and the Time of Gender Equity Policy in Australian Schooling’. *Gender and Education* 28 (3): 330–42. doi:10.1080/09540253.2016.1175783.
- Goodman, Joyce. 2012. ‘The Gendered Politics of Historical Writing in History of Education’. *History of Education* 41 (1): 9–24.
- Laughlin, Kathleen, A, Julie Gallager, and Dorothy Sue Cobbler. 2010. ‘Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor’. *Feminist Formations* 22 (1): 76–135.
- Morgan, Sue. 2009. ‘Theorising Feminist History: A Thirty-Year Retrospective’. *Women’s History Review* 18 (3): 381–407.
- Roper, Lyndal. 2010. ‘Beyond Discourse Theory’. *Women’s History Review* 19 (2): 307–19.
- Scott, J. 2011. *The Fantasy of Feminist History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Skelton, Christine, and Becky Frances. 2009. *Feminism and the Schooling Scandal*. London: Routledge.
- Spencer, Stephanie. 2010. ‘Educational Administration, History and “gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis”’. *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 42 (2): 105–13.
- Tinkler, Penny, and Alexandra Allan. 2015. ‘Taking Stock: A Framework’. *Gender and Education* 27 (7): 733–43.
- Watts, Ruth. 2005. ‘Gendering the Story: Change in the History of Education’. *History of Education* 34 (3): 225–41.