

Book Review

Transnational feminist politics, education, and social justice: Post democracy and post truth

Silvia Edling and Sheila Macrine (eds.)
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282 pages

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Transnational feminist politics, education, social justice: Post democracy is an edited book written by public intellectuals, scholars and activists from around the world. Rather than providing dissimilar vignettes on gender or race disparity, the strength in this text is that the authors speak in unison about the struggles of ‘our sisters everywhere’ (p. xii). The text uses the term ‘triangulation’ which goes to the very heart of the text’s *raison d’être*, to help readers understand, criticize, and as the introduction articulates, hopefully, correct how gender operates within the convergences of neoliberal and conservative political projects (p.3). The forward of the book by Antonia Darder commences with an optimistic poem that sums up the spirit of the scholars and activists. I particularly liked the confidence of the opening stanza, ‘We are the

generation of women who ventured beyond boundaries, who embraced the body, who relished passion, who dreamt of justice'(p.xi). Initially, this poem's message seemed to jar against the reality of what I was reading in the weekend newspaper. Some articles first reported on Brittany Higgins' rape trial and announcements by the government to increase parental leave to make it easier for women to juggle work and home life. On turning the page, I then read about the lack of diversity in the ARIA nominations and Victoria University's findings that people of colour are dramatically underrepresented in the ranks of public authors. These topics were all touched on before I had even made it to the World News section and editorial. Clear directives to shatter the culture of silence and overcome the common tendency to view issues evident in my reading of Saturday's paper, one-dimensionally, caused me to regret my initial pessimism.

Sylvia Edling and Sheila Macrine's edited book highlighted the nature of the disparity between gender, race and class, as profoundly interrelated. Despite the battle with a recalcitrant patriarchal system where news is informed through this lens, the promise of transnational feminists, and public intellectuals dedicated to challenging neoliberalism's power was a transformative read.

It is beyond this paper to comment on all chapters however, I will highlight the structure and preview some of the chapters in more detail. Part 1 'Overviews: Challenges and Possibilities' is a confronting read. It cleverly juxtaposes what could initially appear as random examples, Israel and Palestine, Jammu and Kashmir, United States and Mexican border where citizenship remains elusive for the inhabitants of these borderlands. Despite the different histories of colonialism and imperialism, there is a remarkable similarity in the forms of government and their response to the migrant/refugee crisis. What is important about this book is its message of how events are framed. For example, whilst previously commentators may describe Syrian refugees in Europe using humanitarian or religious factors in their narrative, a macro view would use terms such as justice, democracy, or equality of all human beings. Another example of unhelpful labelling is seen in the procedures to establish asylum in many countries are usually based on male perspectives and values. Readers become hopeful, however, when the text highlights that '... shared colonial histories of violence and dispossession; ... can be mobilised to create connectives and resistance

to partitions and walls' (p.37). Cross-border and cross-community coalitions are evident protesting in new and deeply hopeful ways. Chandra Talpade Mohanty commented that 'radical scholars are made (not born!) and that we are forged...' (p.39). The text highlights several ways to combat neoliberal and authoritarian cultures and institutions to nurture radical communities of dissent in and outside the institutional spaces we occupy at any given moment. Angela Davis calls this, 'unlikely coalitions' which I find very encouraging. Her directive that 'radical scholarship and activism are legacies we inherit and must claim' has become even more paramount with protest strikes in Iran reported as solidarity rallies held around the world.

Turning to Part 2 'Contextualizations: Education and the Teacher Profession', this section commences with how the #MeToo movement manifested in Sweden. Given Sweden's reputation for its strong gender equality, it was alarming to read that the movement was described in public debate as a campaign against men or feminism gone too far. As a researcher of Australian women's suffrage campaigns of the 1890s, the context provided on the Swedish women's struggle for the right to vote was enlightening. The study of Sweden resonated for me as an Australian woman, where phrasing such as 'war against the sexes' is unhelpful, while feminist advances can provide awareness of the power of the patriarchy (p.139). As a former secondary school history teacher, and now a lecturer in Education, the chapter titled *Suppression of Teacher's Voices: Agency and Freedom with Neoliberal Masculinist Performativity*, was illuminating. Although the discussion centred on Ireland and Europe, the emphasis on performativity and data-driven, cost-cutting efforts such as closing school libraries are all too familiar in Australia. New politics of principled resistance, for teachers' voices and agency, are provided as a panacea to 'promoting clones of politicians' anaemic ambitions (p.145). The mass exodus from the teaching profession is a reality, however, scholarly writing as shown by this chapter unpacks what is wrong and provides serious solutions to the 'muzzling of teacher voice' (p.152). It is through honest discussion can we hope for change and this chapter is a starting point.

This book invites further contributions from women scholars to analyse the way neoliberalism's politics and policies negatively impact the lives of women and children. It also opens the potential for rich and robust conversation inviting Indigenous women, people with disabilities and

Queer community to discuss the matrix of dominations discussed in the text. I would recommend this text to readers who want to explore new ways of combating assaults and oppression to understand the dangers inherent within the current global political and social climate. I think it is also essential reading for university students studying politics, gender studies or undergraduate modules, such as Education and Humanitarian Aid and Development offered at Deakin University or the different iterations available at other tertiary institutions. This text would appeal to several types of audiences in formal and informal settings. For example, in adult education, I could envisage this text's use as a conversation starter at Neighbourhood House or local library reading groups. Local community organisations who work to help refugee and asylum seekers such as 'Friends of Refugees' may use this text to understand the big picture concepts of people displacement and negative attitudes towards people seeking refuge. As a response to the Victorian **Gender Equality Act 2020** requirement for workplaces to have specific policies in relation to gender equality, this text would be useful as a tool for Gender Equity implementation officers or workshops. Government workplaces often have groups aligned with White Ribbon or alliances for gender equity. These provide a forum in which topics such as feminist politics, social justice and education can be unpacked. These groups would benefit from this text's emphasis that oppression is transnational and demands consideration of multiple factors to understand and consider ways to remedy the phenomenon of racialized and gendered oppression.

The forward by Antonia Darder reminds me to simultaneously read the newspaper more intensely while considering the bold solidarity of scholarship evident in this text's chapters.