



Gender, Justice and Social Transformation: Grand Challenges and Good Trouble

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INTRODUCTION

Speak up, speak out, get in the way . . . when you see something that is not right, not fair, do not just say something, do something. Get in trouble, good trouble, necessary trouble . . .

(John Lewis, June 2018, American civil rights activist and statesman, 1940–2020).

Gender, Justice and Social Transformation is an international feminist journal that advances inter- and trans-disciplinary research in the area of law, gender and sexuality, and from an intersectional perspective. As editors we know that we are standing on the shoulders of giants whose ambitions and imperatives for a better, more equitable world for *all* has shaped our field today (Smart 1977; Mohanty 1984; Hill; Collins 1986; hooks 1989; Butler 1990). Ultimately, it is their commitment to protest, dissent and social transformation that inspires us. As the *Gender, Justice and Social Transformation* editorial team, what, then, does ‘good trouble’ mean for us?

First, it reflects our feminist commitment to addressing the forms of inequality, injustice and violence that impact upon people’s lives at a variety of times and scales (Freedman 2016). And yet, it is more than that.

Secondly and because of this, it means that we will strive to create new conceptual and methodological approaches to our research and practice that can advance knowledge in the field and inform activism through social justice (Tinsley and MacDonald 2011; Carline et al., 2020; FitzGerald et al., 2020).

Taking these two objectives as our mission statement, we commit ourselves to a feminist ‘politics of doing’ research and practice (Bacchi and Everline 2010: 2) such that the ‘doings’ of our writing become ‘opportunities for delivering social transformation and justice for all’ (FitzGerald and McGarry 2018: xvii).

It is impossible, however, to map out *Gender, Justice and Social Transformation* intellectual and political scope without first reflecting upon its ideological and political heritage within the feminist movement.

OUR FEMINIST HINTERLAND

While we acknowledge that when we cut into any epoch in feminist politics, then we exclude automatically other important times, events and perspectives. These limitations notwithstanding, it is beyond question that the social and political transformations of the 1960s and 1970s are core to any understanding of how the field of law, gender and sexuality research has evolved.

As the world attempted to transcend the violence of two world wars and other regional conflicts in the mid-twentieth century, various social movements strove to create a better world globally. Key was the international feminist movement that lobbied at the domestic and international levels for social

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change around women's status. Across the various feminist communities and jurisdictions, activists and academics championed issues of women's equality, their reproductive rights and sexual autonomy and for legal protections against *de facto* and official legal inequality in the workplace around racialised class and gender based discrimination (Davis 1971; Millet 1971; Rowbotham 1973; Lorde 1984).

Similarly, the LGB social movements (later LGBTQ) challenged dominant constructions of masculinity, femininity, homophobia and the primacy of heteronormativity (Plummer 1981; Robson 1998). Like their feminist counterparts, they sought sexual equality through changing laws and policies to gain new rights, benefits and protections from harm (Thomas 2005). Although many of those involved in this movement disagreed about the meaning of sexuality and gender and the best ways to achieve their political and legal goals; what united them was their commitment to political dissent and social transformation through full recognition of their identities and citizenship rights (Stychin 1995).

Today within LGBTQ communities considerable unevenness continues to exist in the spread and adoption of policies fostering legal, social and economic equality globally (Corrales 2015). Indeed, change around equal treatment for all remains concentrated in the Global North (Batisai 2015). Today, we have a situation in which the few gains that we have made around rights, equality, justice and recognition for all remain under threat or are in retreat altogether (Spade 2011). This demands immediate attention and the situation prompts us to ask: What is the current political 'moment' of the wider law, gender and sexuality field?

OUR POLITICAL 'MOMENT'

A cursory glance at contemporary feminist research in the field reveals that we have created a sophisticated and conceptually rich field of enquiry (Crenshaw 1990; Williams 1991; Cornell 1995; Currah et al., 2006; Munro and Stychin 2007; Scoular 2015; Sharpe 2020). As researchers look beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries to enrich their work, they have been able to challenge the limitations of doctrinal thinking by implementing new analytical frameworks to advance new modes of knowledge transfer. Drawing on new insights from social theory, they have foreground new methodological approaches to the current challenges in the field (O'Neill, 2010, Carline et al., 2020). For example, in the past two decades it is possible to trace the effects of their work in key areas such as law, culture and rights (Marshall 2014; Rizzo 2015). This commitment has paved the way for further analyses of issues as diverse as criminalised sexualities (Mattson 2016), gender-based

violence (McMillian 2018), asylum and refugees (Freedman 2017), emotional labour, law and rape (Gunby and Carline 2020) and sex trafficking and sex work (FitzGerald 2016).

Although we have made incursions on these issues in the past fifty years, intolerance, xenophobia, misogyny and homophobia are on the increase globally. The more recent incarnation of the *#MeToo movement* shows that patriarchy, and the attendant institutional values that accept and normalise sexual assault and rape and facilitate a culture of white, male entitlement are, in the words of the World Health Organization, 'devastatingly pervasive' (WHO 2018). Women remain under threat of violence and death (Dawson 2016). Furthermore, in many jurisdictions teaching about gender is prohibited and the ways in which we can teach it are constrained in others. Perhaps most indicative of the contested nature of contemporary feminism and gender politics, is that a schism has emerged around 'how' and 'who' can manifest and express 'gender' in particular ways.

OUR GRAND CHALLENGE

We see that our grand challenge going forward lies in keeping the feminist space open for the work of critique, contestation and challenge to injustice and inequality. We cannot claim that we live in a post-feminist world when violence against women and other minorities is at epidemic proportions (Valverde 2014). Our work is incomplete when people are subjected to gender-based violence based on who they love (Cowan 2021). At the time of writing, certain European Union Member States have introduced legislation that bans the 'display and promotion of homosexuality' and denies women's reproductive rights. We need a critical feminist politics to intervene when the laws and policies that are intended to 'protect' us perpetuate other forms of violence and re-traumatise us (Velooso 2016; Iliadis et al., 2021). To the extent that institutions such as state law and the police have the power to determine 'whose life matters', there is good reason for us to tackle how categories of 'race', ethnicity, class, sexuality and gender delimit our access to justice (Pilcher 2016; Florêncio, 2020). The challenge, then, for *Gender, Justice and Social Transformation* is to continue to push the intellectual, political, legal and cultural boundaries in the pursuit of knowledge and in the name of social justice.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SF and AC wrote this Grand Challenge together as Specialty Chief Editors of *Society and Social Change*.

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