



## *Book Review Symposium*

**Brenda Parker**, *Masculinities and Markets: Raced and Gendered Urban Politics in Milwaukee*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8203-3511-7 (cloth); ISBN: 978-0-8203-5032-5 (paper)

### **The Politics of Patience: A Response to Reviews of *Masculinities and Markets***

Just as the research and publication of *Masculinities and Markets* was built on the contributions of community members, research participants, and academics, so too are the critique and lessons we might extract from it. I am grateful to Heather McLean, Winifred Curran, Leslie Kern and Ebru Ustundag for taking the time to write these reviews and to raise critical and thoughtful questions. I am humbled by the positive feedback and (still, always) vexed by the broader questions about where we go from here. In the following paragraphs, I want to reflect upon some of the themes raised by the reviewers and place some of the issues raised in the book in the contemporary moment. In the spirit of my work with urban feminist colleagues from across the world, these comments walk the tightrope between hope and despair.

#### *On Violence and Silence*

In *Masculinities and Markets*, I commented on the everyday and structural practices of violence that shape women's lives in cities like Milwaukee. The range of violence I described was wide, from being excluded or silenced in city hall meetings, to being physically abused, to experiencing intergenerational trauma rooted in slavery, dispossession, segregation, and poverty. To me, this violence was compounded by silence. Especially when I started my research, in academic and public spheres, there was too little said about and by women in cities, especially women of color. With some exceptions, urban gendered and intersectional violences and

exclusions went uncommented upon, and the collective power of urban feminism lie a bit fallow. As Carolyn Whitzman (2007) aptly named her article, feminists working on urban governance and urban safety issues faced “the loneliness of the long-distance runner”. As I first argued in 2006, gender, and even race, were but quiet chimes in the cacophony of writings about urban neoliberalism and the nefarious nature of capitalism. Arguably, we were still reeling from and experiencing the backlashes against feminism and antiracism energies that rose to prominence in the 1980s alongside and intertwined with neoliberalism.

During the *longue durée* of writing this book and after its release, the quiet chime began to grow louder. I also became a better listener, reader and observer of many types of resistance and burgeoning social movements all around me. I became active in longstanding anti-incarceration efforts. “Black Lives Matter” and “MeToo” exploded, academic geography began to pay more sustained attention to racism inside and outside of the academy, and feminist and queer collectives plodded on and blossomed. So now there is still violence, but much less silence. Even mainstream newspapers like *USA Today* feature articles about transgender rights and *intersectional feminism*. This is not nothing, because, while visibility doesn’t necessarily lead to accountability, it is hard to tackle a problem that people refuse to see. So greater visibility is a type of hope, as are the social movements all around us, even if some of them were motivated by seemingly crude politics of despair that reign in the US and elsewhere.

### *On Feminist World Making In and Outside of the Academy*

In their reviews, McLean and Ustundag, both exemplar scholar-activists, ask how we might continue to document, participate in, and perhaps even take the lead in feminist world making in and outside of the academy. In researching and writing this book, I realized what may have been obvious to other scholars but had not been clear to me: powerful, visible feminist uprisings or even steady but obvious power gains by women in US cities and across the country nearly always are followed by a backlash. As I wrote in *Masculinities and Markets*, a clamping down of

masculine power followed the outgrowth of women's urban political leadership in the early 1900s and their eventual success with suffrage in the United States. Similarly, autonomy achieved by women and LGBT communities during World War II was seceded by a narrow vision of "moral", masculine, and marketized cities. In my opinion, this recent round of neoliberal capital accumulation was not an incidental but an integral part of a backlash against feminist and civil rights organizing in the 1970s.

So, a sense of informed despair suggests to me that the backlash is imminent, and the unabashed hope in me says let us seize the current moment and continue to engage madly and steadily in feminist world making. Feminism and female leadership in cities is flourishing: 2017 was named "the year of the black female mayor" in the United States; and worldwide more women were won electoral seats than in previous years. A feminist socialist Latina candidate toppled a powerful Democrat in New York's 14<sup>th</sup> congressional district on a campaign that refused corporate donations, and Mexico elected its first female Indigenous mayor in 2017. In addition, there is renewed attention to gender initiatives in large cities after years of relative ennui on the topic. For example, the Mayor of London just launched a program to address the lack of women leaders, and grassroots urban feminist endeavors are proliferating. So we must persist. Not all worlds get unmade, no matter how furious the backlash. And, of course, feminist world making has always gone on, quietly and tenaciously as we heal from and reject abuse; engage in radical and regular acts of homemaking (Isoke 2017); resist and reshape academic practices, meetings and courses; transform communities through activism and practices of care; and take leadership in public office and institutions.

As McLean astutely notes, feminist world making in research and in neoliberal academic institutions via slow, careful scholarship and connection is no simple feat, especially for junior scholars. She asks, what are the roadblocks to practising thoughtful, humble and detailed research within heteropatriarchal institutions imposing neoliberal logics? And how can feminists work collectively to contest enclosures within our own places of work? A brilliant and now well-

cited article on slow scholarship written by a feminist collective summarizes several important strategies, including making time to write differently; organizing for and supporting slow scholarship; and caring for self and others in the academy. For those with increasing influence in the academy, as tenured or full professors, advisors, and administrators, we can work to transform academic institutions through modelling and enabling slow, careful scholarship. We can write and research collectively with scholars and activists not simply to increase our “output” but because it brings us joy, strengthens our commitments, extends our learning, and produces better research (Kern et al. 2014; McLean 2017; Moss et al. 1999).

We can, at times, step aside, not because we are afraid to lean in or because we know that leaning in is never really enough in heteropatriarchal societies and institutions, but because it makes sense to lean back in order to raise the visibility of other scholars, students, or activists – eschewing the individualistic model of academic success that still prevails. As a quiet rather than self-promotional decolonizing act, those of us with racial, gender, or other privilege can purposely resource and elevate community research endeavors and the work of activists, non-white scholars and others.

Relatedly, as feminists we can commit to engaging with and citing work that we wish to see emulated and that contributes to the genealogy of feminist and antiracism research (Ahmed 2017). This may mean carefully tracing work to its source, or multiplicity of sources. Since research suggests that men tend to cite men more than they cite women (Maliniak et al. 2013), this may be particularly important for female-identifying researchers that engage in slow scholarship, and for scholars of color who still remain vastly undercited in academic institutions. We can also (as Curran [2018] does) choose not to cite known abusers or the institution of white men (Ahmed 2017), or otherwise affirm misogynist and racist practices in academia and elsewhere. We should carry out what Mott and Cockayne (2017) have labeled a “conscientious engagement” with the politics of citation that neither reifies neoliberal bean counting nor denies the heteropatriarchal hierarchies of knowledge production.

*On Poetry, Patience, and Imperfection*

In response to the reviewers' comments and my own experiences and struggles, I want to end by commenting briefly on poetry, politics, and patience. I have already discussed the obstacles to publishing slow scholarship and flourishing as feminist scholars in heteropatriarchal and neoliberal institutions. But I want to pursue a couple of more threads, drawn from art and science, which are obviously not as separate as we would believe. Michael Longley, a prolific Irish poet and public intellectual who both documented and helped Ireland grapple with and move forward from violent conflict, noted in a recent interview: "...I had a decade when I wrote hardly anything in my 40s, and I thought I was finished. And lo and behold, I started to write again" (quoted in Tippett 2017). And I recall years ago when an academic mentor of mine, in her 50s at the time, stating "I don't know why we ask junior faculty to publish so much. I have been conducting research for 20 years and it is only now that I really have some new and important things to say". Both of these statements articulate what I have experienced in my own life. There are seasons and cycles in our inspiration, our output, and in our ability to contribute something even close to profound. Many of us can regularly put pen to paper (but frankly, there may be long stretches that we do not or cannot), but it is less often that we can offer wisdom. And our interstices may eventually translate into our most meaningful scholarship. And, for those who have been subjected to deep racial and misogynist violences and exclusions, caring for oneself is "not self indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde 2017: 130). When we turn to "science", via the vast research on productivity, we find studies that suggest that more rest, fewer work hours per week, and time for thinking can be associated with improved overall cognition, more creativity, and better health (Kajitani et al. 2016). In this way, by attending to our overall well-being, we are not shirking from responsibilities, but perhaps in the end committing to them more fully and wholly.

Finally, we might accept and honor imperfection or “good enough research”, which is not the same as a lack of rigor. It means learning from and trying not to obscure the flaws in our own research and work (Mountz et al. 2016). It suggests acknowledging the context in which they occurred and trying to do better. For example, in *Masculinities and Markets*, I wanted to chart multiple aspects of urban politics; I wanted to be a savvy inside critic and analyst of urban politics; I aspired also to be an activist researcher transforming injustices in the city – and I was trying to ensure my infant and toddler children and partnership were thriving while starting a new tenure track job. In reality, each of these things suffered. I was not able to translate my research toward making a meaningful, sustained on-the-ground difference in Milwaukee; I did not highlight black feminist research as much as I would have liked nor connect enough to feminist urban politics in other parts of the world. There are other silences, simplifications and absent elaborations, as the reviewers indicate. Look closely and I am sure you will find some grammatical errors as well – despite an excellent editor. All kinds of small and big things happened along the way. I accidentally erased an important interview audio file that I then could never use, my pregnancies were difficult, and I spent much time paralyzed by self-doubt when it came to writing up and publishing my research.

It is tempting to disguise the imperfections and the shame and stress that so often haunt academics, not least because the academy “venerates particular masculinist performances of self that are competitive, confident, and authoritative” (Parizeau et al. 2016: 196). And as Boyd (2016) has written, “[w]hen we privatize our failures and publicize our successes, we weave the collective lie that moments of self-doubt, error, and foolhardiness are the result of weak, undeserving minds”. Which doesn’t feel very feminist to me. But if I acknowledge my reality as a scholar, as an always, already “work in progress” with radical vulnerability, I can see different paths I might have taken, and what growth is still needed. This has driven me, for example, to conduct more finely scaled research, to restructure the ways that I organize and conduct interviews, to explore new theoretical approaches and more collaborations, to be more humble

and patient with my research agenda, and to help graduate students plan for and carry out their research in do-able ways. It inspires me with gratitude to continually look to the work of other scholars and activists for answers, suggestions, and strategies, and to explore works in queer studies and critical disability studies among others. And it enables me to see that it is not just the strengths, but also the flaws in *Masculinities and Markets* that may contribute to sharper, more inclusive and care-full feminist urban scholarship.

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