

BOOK REVIEW: *FEMINISM, ADULT  
EDUCATION AND CREATIVE POSSIBILITY:  
IMAGINATIVE RESPONSES*

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## **BOOK REVIEW: FEMINISM, ADULT EDUCATION AND CREATIVE POSSIBILITY: IMAGINATIVE RESPONSES**

Darlene E. Clover, Kathy Sanford and Karry Harman (Eds.). (2022). *Feminism, adult education and creative possibility: Imaginative responses*. Bloomsbury. 248 pages.

We are witnessing greater anti-women, anti-trans, anti-LGBTQ and settler discourse across the globe. Conservative and fascist governments in the West are not only on the rise, but they are boldened to enact policies that target migrants, impoverish the working class and the poor, oppress gender non-confirming people, on top of sanctioning hate speech and acts. In this worsening context for human rights in general, alternatives that allow a different world to exist, and to be imagined, are more than welcomed, they are necessary.

It is in this polarized context that Darlene E. Clover, Kathy Sanford and Karry Harman offer us their edited collection of “Imaginative Responses”, in *Feminism, Adult Education and Creative Possibility*. Clover and Sanford are longtime collaborators who have edited several other books and journal issues on the convergence of feminist art and adult education in the last decade. This book aims to explore this convergence, under the added critical thread of what the authors conceived as the ‘feminist imaginary’, that is, “the ability to think what was unthinkable, to hear voices previously dismissed as noise, to rupture and unsettle, to act upon the unactionable, to anchor with pragmatism yet roam with imagination.”(p.1) The book seeks to answer the question “How do feminist adult educators, researchers and activists encourage an imagination adequate to our current dangers and possibilities?”(p.2) The authors introduce the volume by asserting their belief of “the powerful role that art, creative practices, the imagination and aesthetic rupture can play to change history, the present and the future.”(p.2) To them, it is through expanding our collective social imaginary that we can thwart the patriarchal, classist and colonial ways of conceiving the world.

To achieve this, the book presents seventeen chapters divided in four parts. Part one, titled “Visualizing and the Feminist Imaginary” consists of five chapters that explore the power of representations and how that either reflect power imbalances, or challenge them by offering images that meanings that disrupt norms. Chapter 2’s use of visual maps to illustrate the gendered and racial experience of migrant women’s daily lives in Chile as part of a feminist ethnographic study provides a glimpse of the breadth of feminist research methods that the book’s authors draw on. The images of the women’s drawings are particularly affecting, as are most of the varied and communicative images included in this book. Part two, “Storying and the Feminist Imaginary” also comprises of five chapters that focus on the healing power of forging our own stories. Chapter 7 is

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an auto/biographical narrative of queer resilience where author Ivan Kirchgaesser draws on a life-threatening experience of homophobic violence to offer an essential reflection, especially in the current climate, on "how queer people make life worth living, how they create beauty, relationships and art in a world where their safety and flourishing of this community cannot be taken for granted." (p.103) In the volume's third part, "Decolonizing and the Feminist Imaginary", three chapters address decolonization through Indigenous artistic practices. I discovered the seven principles of *Uy'skwuluwun* in Chapter 11, a framework of cultural safety that the author and facilitator Dorothea Harris grounds her community work on. As an adult educator myself, these principles, such as *tthihwum twiyuneem*: please listen, about the practice of deep listening, and *nuts'a'maat*: we are all one, about relationality and responsibility in a collective, informed my own practice. The fourth and last part of this volume, "Caring and the Feminist Imaginary", comprises four chapters that contribute to the aesthetic rupture with knowledge that has been historically valued by patriarchal institutions such as academia. Chapter 15's account of a feminist mad aesthetic through research-based theatre expanded the scope of critical pedagogies featured in this book by introducing estrangement pedagogy. It also challenged the concept of destigmatization of mental illness, as the author Lauren Spring invites us to focus instead on dismantling 'sanism', rather than stigma (p. 211). The book unfortunately does not include a conclusion. A final text by the editors that weaves in all these chapters, with concluding remarks about the imaginary and its possibilities, would have been key, especially if the book invites us to look ahead and reimagine feminist futures.

Among this book's undeniable merits is the diversity of practitioners, subjects, fields, research methods and settings that are included. The book centres the voices of artist activist educators, who demonstrated impeccably that they, too, have substantial contributions to make to the field of feminist adult education, while redefining it. Their research is situated in non-profit organizations, collectives, community centres, communities, universities, museums, among others. Their media encompasses art installations, exhibitions, crafts, drawings, vlogs, poetry, fiction. Their research methods range from photovoice, to fiction-based research, to auto/biographical. In sum, the book is a collection of shorts works that read sometimes as stories and others, as research papers. The wide range of topics addressed through a pedagogical lens means any adult educator can enrich their practice by reading this book. The shortness of each chapter also supports the discovery of new disciplines, new ways of doing feminist research, without a large commitment.

One of the book's shortcomings is the lack of educators or researchers based in the Global South, probably due to the editors being based in Canada and the UK. Perhaps if they sought an additional editor from the Global South, it would have widened the scope of authors and perspectives, thus widening our imagination. Although there were important perspectives from activists and researchers of colour, as well as decolonizing perspectives and Indigenous voices, in this ever-more interconnected world, including more voices and practices from the South would contribute to the editors' aim of challenging colonial ways of knowing and conceiving the world. Along those same lines, the editors dedicated a section of the book to decolonial and Indigenous approaches; these approaches and perspectives could be integrated in many of the themes addressed in the other parts of the book, in a transversal manner. I understand that this is a way of assigning them more importance, but I am concerned whether this editing practice further sets aside Indigenous knowledge and practices. Two of the book's editors, Clover and Harman, are co-editing, along with

others, a CJSOE Special Issue due to be published later this year titled *Feminist adult education and the imagination: Creative and art-based practices*. Perhaps these shortcomings will be avoided in the special issue. Regardless, if this book is any indication of the wealth of feminist research and knowledge that can be featured in the issue, adult education and research will continue to flourish.

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