


BOOK REVIEW

Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women’s Rights

Polly Russell and Margaretta Jolly (editors). Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020 (ISBN: 978-0-275-74758-3)

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Women’s struggle for rights has always been and still is unfinished business; it involves multiple layers and dimensions consisting of both celebration and devastation, oppression and freedom, hope and despair. Despite the accomplishments of the last few decades—which most notably include women’s access to education, sexual rights and freedoms, equality, and representation—there is still room to grow in achieving inclusivity, diversity, and broader implementation of rights. Besides, under rising populism, authoritarianism, and conservatism, women’s rights and freedoms are under constant threat. In this regard, *Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women’s Rights* offers a timely celebration of what has been achieved in feminist activism while providing a well-deserved critique of the challenges and risks ahead. By tracing the archives of the British Museum regarding women’s campaigns in Britain from an interdisciplinary perspective that not only brings together but also deeply synthesizes feminist theory, art, history, and politics, *Unfinished Business* contextualizes feminist philosophy by including reflections from sixteen different contributors. Thereby *Unfinished Business* offers the reader an interesting visual story rooted in feminist philosophy, feminist history, and feminist activism. Under the current situation marked by the global #MeToo movement, the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* in the US, and the protests that followed the death of Mahsa Amini in Iran, *Unfinished Business* reminds us once more of the richness and diversity of women’s rights activism by taking a closer look at the British context since the 1970s. *Unfinished Business* indeed offers a celebration of women’s current and past achievements. Yet, as the book title itself indicates, it also locates what has been missing and what still requires significant attention and emphasis. It is, in this regard, a call for the future of women’s rights activism at the same time. Although *Unfinished Business* is a visually inspiring and thought-provoking read for all readers of *Hypatia*, it is particularly apt for readers who are interested in the progression of feminist activism and its visual representations in art, especially in the United Kingdom. *Unfinished Business* also has remarkable potential as a teaching resource for readers who teach feminist philosophy, feminist histories, and/or gender and politics from an interdisciplinary angle.

Following Polly Russell’s introduction, *Unfinished Business* presents three interrelated themes: body, mind, and voice. Rather than clear-cut boundaries between these themes, the different parts of the book build on one another. The main strength of the book is the boldness and richness of visual data that has been included and carefully situated with respect to the relevant academic literatures and broader debates in feminist histories and philosophies. The intersections of body, mind, and voice are central to

the conceptual locus of the book as different authors inspect distinct features related to these themes by providing examples that date back to the early years of women's activism in Britain. These discussions are further strengthened with the inclusion of related images from current popular culture. Whether it is a newspaper article about female politicians' "leg contest," references to the television series *The Handmaid's Tale* adapted from Margaret Atwood's novel, or a caricature of different body sizes of women, these alternative interconnections drawn between images and everyday life problems and ongoing struggles of women create an important dialogue between the past, the present, and the future of women's activism through the creative lens of feminist art and feminist artists as the authors guide the reader through the British Museum archives.

Unfinished Business starts its exploration with the theme of the body, an important source of "contestation and resistance" in feminist philosophy (18). This section includes themes ranging from gender as a social construct, gender fluidity, women's bodily representation in different forms of media through the image, women's expression and experience of sexual pleasures, and reclamations of sexual preferences. This first section commences with the essay "Framing Women," where Anita Biressi traces the representations of women in the media. Images from beauty contests, newspaper articles, magazines, and outdoor advertisements, in which the transition from the image of women only as "adjuncts to men" to women's self-representations of their own bodily image, have been traced from a critical angle (22–38). Angela Saini's chapter, "Under the Male Microscope," emphasizes the inseparability of culture from gender and the normative consequences of this inseparability in sciences and the lack of women's voice in these discussions during the formative years of scientific research since the Enlightenment (42–52). Continuing the same theme, Juliet Jacques's "On the Malleability of the Body" demonstrates, with the help of images taken from journals, personal diaries, and newspapers, that gender-based categorizations have always shifted and changed without a definite understanding of "male" and "female" shared across space and time (54–61). To conclude this part, Debbie Challis discusses the challenges to women's bodily autonomy (64–75) and Zoe Stimpel's "Liberating Pleasure" traces the history of women's sexual expression and images of (and related to) female pleasure since the mid to late nineteenth century (76–84).

Following the theme of the body, the second part of the book is centered around the theme of the mind and is devoted to debunking the myth of women's "intellectual inferiority" to men (88). In this part, the authors focus on women's activism regarding access to education, women's emancipation, and women's representation as well as the issues that lie behind these, such as the coloniality of gender and women's activism. In "Accessing Equal Education," Laura Carter discusses in detail the paradox of education in women's lives by looking at the case of Britain: despite its centrality to women's struggles, the same hierarchies tend to be reproduced once women are included (92–100). Ann Phoenix takes a closer look at such hierarchies and inequalities in her essay, "Reimagining Education," by including images of reading series and book covers that reinforce racial stereotypes at the intersection of gender and race and by analyzing 1970s Black feminist activism (102–9). Following education, Pamela Cox's "Working Women" shifts the focus toward women's economic emancipation and how women have struggled to achieve their right to work in certain professions as well as women's paid and unpaid work, including racialized structures of care work in Britain since late nineteenth century (112–27). Building Cox's "Working Women," Sumita Mukherjee's "Race, Publicness and Imperial Feminism" provides a more explicit focus on racialized dynamics within the suffragettes in the United Kingdom as they limited their allyship to

the colonial world (130–39). The final discussion, concluding the second part of the book, focuses on women's presence and representation in the public sphere as Caitriona Beaumont takes a closer look at the antisuffragette movement and the representation of the suffragettes as antifeminine, aggressive, and unattractive (140–50).

The final section of *Unfinished Business* is about women's voices, or the efforts of women to speak their truth despite continuous and ongoing attempts to silence them (154). Sasha Roseneil's "Creativity and Invention" provides a study of how women had to come up with creative techniques of protest in order to be heard, including the suffragettes, Reclaim the Night protests, and Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (158–68). Nicholas Owen raises the question of "Men in Feminism" by focusing on John Stuart Mill's writings, Men's League for Women's Suffrage, and the question of men supporting feminism beyond the vote, such as men supporting the Women's Liberation Movement by providing childcare during conferences, most notably by including a picture of Stuart Hall during a Women's Liberation Movement Conference in 1970 (170–79). D.-M. Withers's discussion on "Recovering Traditions, Inspiring Action" dissects how feminist libraries have revisited the archives to uncover women's histories (182–91). From a perspective like Withers's, Mercedes Aguirre goes back to the 1970s and traces the resurfacing of long-lost texts written by women in "Recovering Women's Writing" (192–99). Gabriele Griffin's "Sistahs Doing It for Themselves" contributes to the theme of women taking back control by finding their distinct voices by "holding the means of production" (154–55, 202–11). The final essay of this section is Sheila Rowbotham's "Dreaming and Demanding," which focuses on feminist utopias for the future.

In the final reflection of the book, "Finishing the Business?," Margaretta Jolly brings together the different themes and interdisciplinary reflections in *Unfinished Business* and interlinks the past and the future with a question. In the current world dominated by wars, climate change, rising conservative tendencies, and populist backlashes, how do we ever finish the business and what remains to be done? Suggesting that "the future is in fact now" (223), Jolly provides examples from the past struggles discussed in the book that took place at critical junctures in history in which hope was scarce and hard to sustain. By interlinking feminist debates on the body, mind, and voice of women, *Unfinished Business* not only provides us with an overview of how women's activism has found its voice, including its different voices through the British Museum's archives, but also offers us a larger way of rethinking women's activism in Britain and other contexts at the intersections of art, history, and feminism. This enlarged lens that includes multiple forms of women's artistic expression might instigate a way of making feminist philosophy more accessible to wider audiences. In this regard, *Unfinished Business* also offers a way of remembering and rethinking the past and reimagining the future in more feminist terms, not only in the abstract philosophical sense but also through concrete means and images such as those included in the book and in the earlier exhibition of the same name.

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