

The FLAK seminar: Mixing feminism, legality and knowledge

Feminist Legal Studies @ Queen Mary, University of London 30 June – 1 July 2016

Feminist Legal Studies invites participants to gather at QMUL and consider anew the relationship between feminism, legality and knowledge. In anticipation of *FLS*'s 25th birthday in 2017, we would like to think with others about the kind of 'kitchen table' that *FLS* might provide into the future. We are delighted that the Institute of Feminist Legal Studies at Osgoode will join us as co-host.

How might feminist legal studies - the approach and the journal - best use its food, equipment, techniques, time, space, mood, energy and commitment? How shall *FLS* scholars and associates make the most of what we have in a room that can sometimes be confining and confusing, yet also exciting and sustaining? How do others engage with the processes and products of our kitchen table? In considering such questions and more, we propose to draw reflexively on feminist legacies of praxis, internationalism and openness, as we stock-up and critically reflect on decolonizing techniques, know-how, protest and publishing practices.

1. Stocking up with decolonizing techniques.

We will begin by thinking about processes of stocking up as we consider decolonizing techniques of knowledge. Feminist commitment has lived with a critique for some time, a critique that emphasises the unevenness of the legal terrain occupied by feminists with others. One thread of that critical conversation addresses whether *FLS* should be more explicit in engaging across disciplines and knowledges by opening up the category of 'legality'. *FLS* has a significant legacy of opening up key categories such as gender and sexuality, and feminism has long sustained itself by working through a mixture of methods and disciplinary approaches.

Does '*FLS* at the kitchen table' offer the potential of a methodology for capturing the interactive, multi-perspectival, situated processes of knowing and making legality, without losing an appreciation for the particular vernacular of legal officialdom? Do science and technology studies and live art approaches to cycles of practice, reflection, experimentation and routinisation, with their labs, workshops, hubs and long tables, offer interesting parallels for kitchen tables?

Decolonizing perspectives offer a lot to this conversation precisely because they have developed extensive expertise in making themselves heard on their own terms while speaking to pluralities and universalisms. Therefore this session will address how best to stock up the *FLS* kitchen table by focusing on different ways in which decolonizing techniques have been mobilized, and the feminist knowledge gained along the way.

2. Doing legal know-how.

Feminists have a long and inventive history of finding, generating and adapting legal know-how. Women's centres and LGBT phonedines, among others, became expert at translating information about life and law in response to everyday problems from a lack of housing to living with violence. These processes of taking hold of information, deploying it to improve life, while keeping an eye out for translational potential, have something to tell us about successes and failures in *making law listen*.

At the same time, the boundaries between different elements of know-how - information, advice, listening ears and resonant voices - thicken and thin out in tension with legal aid cuts or non-provision, professional and research governance, and promotion of voluntarism and civic activism. And yet activists, students, women's groups, trade unions, pro-bono professionals, clinics and advice-centres continue to find ways of providing know-how and supporting engagement with legal processes as people make and remake their lives. What can we learn from these creative and routine deployments of legal knowledge?

3. Enacting dissent.

Protest is one significant way in which feminists have mobilized knowledge of law's effects towards its critique and change. Marches, hunger strikes, knicker-bombing, graffiti, slow handclaps and even silence have been among the many techniques used to register disagreement with legal conditions. These different forms of protest invite us to consider not only the timespace which generates the urge to step out and turn the legal gaze back on itself, but also the knowing ways in which protests name legal problems and suggest solutions.

Overtly feminist forms of protest – slutwalks, chaddi campaigns, SistersUncut, Speakingofmelta - draw attention to protest's diverse forms of self-differentiation and adaptation. Protest makes use of legal knowledge and intervenes into legal relations in the same moment that it pulls away from legal capture. Policing of protest generates particular challenges for critical engagement as spaces are closed down and brutalizing power extinguishes life. In considering different processes, performances and genres of protest, we hope to think more about how different moments - boiling, simmering, steaming - of dissent work knowingly through and against legality.

4. Getting the word out.

'Getting the word out' motivates all kinds of publishing activities as we strive to communicate ideas, findings, reflections and even hunches. *FLS*, in common with many academic journals, publishes a mix of original articles, interviews, commentaries and book reviews, accessible largely via institutional subscription with some limited open access content. We aim for diversity in content so as to reflect the different stages of academic knowledge production as writers share their reading, document their exchanges, and provide considered critical analyses. Feminism has long recognized that some of the deepest learning happens on the street, or in the kitchen, rather than in the university. At the same time, academia, including academic journals, provides an important set of tools and spaces for making the most of that learning.

As colleagues and friends experiment with open access media, how should *FLS*, as an established subscription-based journal, best maintain and develop existing knowledge-distribution networks while encouraging engagement with the '*FLS* collection' and the rapid on-site responses of social media? In considering this, we would like to open our kitchen-table up to insights about archival and curatorial practices, experimental and alternative publishing, sustainability within corporate and university structures, feminist engagements with copyright, critical editing practices and creative dissemination in the age of social media.