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Anti-Feminist Backlash and Gender-Relevant Crime Initiatives in the Global Context

As we move further into the new millennium, feminist criminologists have found themselves in the midst of a volatile and politicized challenge, the challenge of sustaining the gains of second wave feminism in the face of neoconservative politics and the strength of global capitalism. From the 1990s onward, a body of research has emerged on ways feminist successes appear to be ricocheting back with an ever meaner or harsher twist. One example is the changed landscape of crime and justice for women in the United States—where women are treated “equally” to their male counterparts in the criminal justice system, no matter how (in)appropriate and (ir)rational such equal treatment is—a development Chesney-Lind (2006) poignantly named “vengeful equity” in her contribution to the inaugural issue of *Feminist Criminology*. A second example is the ways an Internet-linked international men’s rights movement is reshaping domestic violence and family law discourse and policy to constitute men as equally or indeed more victimized than women in domestic “conflict,” resulting in increases in dual-arrests and the erosion of funding for women’s anti-domestic violence advocacy and services in Canada and other jurisdictions (Mann, 2008; Miller & Meloy, 2006).

These are but two examples of antifeminist backlash and the very real impacts this backlash is having on policies relevant to female victimization and offending in jurisdictions across the globe. From America to Australia, Britain, Columbia, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine, Pakistan, Portugal, South Africa, Canada, Hong Kong, and beyond, criminal justice sanctions increasingly target, without adequately protecting, women caught up in poverty, crime, and domestic violence, while responsibility for preventing crime and victimization is (re)privatized (Chunn, Boyd, & Lessard, 2007; Joe Laidler, Petersen, & Emerton, 2007; Mann, 2008; Sudbury, 2005).

The papers that follow demonstrate the complexities of the two key concepts that inspired the call for papers for this special issue, *backlash* and *globalization*. In particular, they demonstrate the ways antifeminist actions and feminists’ counteractions interact with other factors and discourses in jurisdictionally discrete but globally linked policy contexts. Indeed, as others have pointed out, globalization and backlash are diverse and contradictory rather than unitary or unilateral processes (Chunn et al., 2007). Thus, the “global lockdown” (Sudbury, 2005) on marginalized women and men is indeed an aspect of global capitalism, but it also reflects realities at play that are far more complex. In recent decades, the movement and migration of people

and information has become far more fluid, momentary, and unstable than in the recent past. Paradoxically, this movement and migration are simultaneously liberating and more subject to regulation through technologies of surveillance and control. The same information technologies that render information and disinformation accessible, at a click, to governments and corporations also inform the increasingly sophisticated multilingual publics whose sensibilities shape policy responses across our globe. Antifeminist groups are among a host of entities that vie for influence in this globalized forum, as do feminists and other progressive, religious, reactionary, and a myriad of other voices or forces.

Feminist criminologists must actively engage in this activity through research and analysis focused on gender-relevant policies and the organizations tasked with carrying out these policies at local, national, and international levels. Although we had many excellent submissions, the articles appearing in this special issue were selected with this in mind. In the first paper, Shana Maier addresses efforts by feminists to preserve supports for women in the face of populist concurrence with explicit antifeminist sentiments, by playing down feminism and its core goals in a rape crisis center in the United States. Through qualitative interviews with workers, volunteers and directors, Maier explores how the center became more cautious and tentative both in presenting and in seeing itself as "feminist." Gillian Balfour, in the second article, examines the disproportionate increase in both the violent victimization and the imprisonment of aboriginal women in Canada. Her analysis focuses on a clash between sentencing reforms based on restorative justice for aboriginal communities and the retributive policies aimed at mandatory and rigorous prosecution of domestic violence. This article is important in showing how two nominally progressive policies have increased the pain of violence and victimization for Canada's most marginalized female constituency. In the third article, Molly Dragiewicz focuses on fathers' rights Web site discourses against the American Violence Against Women Act. Dragiewicz uses discourse on this policy gleaned from a broad sample of internationally linked fathers' rights groups to demonstrate how antifeminist sentiment is mobilized and broadly disseminated to undermine supports for women victims in the United States and internationally. The final article by Sally Cole and Lynne Phillips explores alliances forged among feminists and other social justice coalitions to address violence against women in Latin America, alliances that draw on United Nations developments forged by second wave feminism. This last piece reminds us that gender sensitive policies and practices that draw on feminist successes are still being forged, and that backlash is not a uniform global development against which we are powerless.

For this special issue we sought papers on efforts to counter antifeminist action oriented towards discrediting and reversing gender-sensitive policies for women victims and offenders. Our aim was to build understandings of how backlash operates, in the hope of contributing to efforts to counter its impacts. Having worked side by side

on this as an international partnership, from Canada to Hong Kong, it is our hope that this issue will stimulate further research that will open possibilities for thinking about and acting on backlash so as to preserve and build upon feminist efforts to further gender equity and justice for women and men in local and global contexts.

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