French Feminism Before and After the DSK Affair

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The DSK affair, which erupted in New York City in May 2011, revolved around accusations of sexual assault by a Guinean employee of the Sofitel Hotel. The alleged predator was Dominique Strauss-Kahn, head of the International Monetary Fund and a favored presidential candidate of the French Socialist party for the 2012 election. DSK was staunchly defended by many of his colleagues in the political establishment, especially men. Though the prosecution's case against him was eventually dropped and conspiracy theories mushroomed that he was set-up, the show of support for DSK—"a seducer, possibly a rapist, never"—breathed new life into French feminisms. Debates raged around sexism, sexual consensus, the ritual codes of loving consent "between equals" as a model of relation between citizen-subjects, and the strategic compact that emerged between feminism and conservative anti-Islamists where secular mores were concerned.

This course will examine these debates in a context of "before and after" DSK. Key works by Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Catherine, Catherine Malabou, Marie N'Diaye, Elsa Dorlin and Nacira Guénif will be analyzed alongside those of select Anglophone counterparts, among them Toril Moi, Judith Butler and Joan Scott. We will focus on how long-standing and important feminist problematics - sexual difference, the problem of violence against women, the problem of "being" woman, sexual consent, courtship and seduction, sexual citizenship, sex, race and immigration, and the situation of women in politics and the media - have been redefined in the wake of the DSK scandal.

Students will have the option of a reading journal or two 6-page papers. Course conducted in English with some readings in French (Intermediate-level knowledge of French required).

Texts:

Edward Epstein, *Three Days in May: Sex, Surveillance and DSK* (Amazon.com).


Fassin, “The symbolic politics of DSKgate” rdian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/may/23/dominique-strauss-kahn-race

Kathy Davis, “‘Stand by Your Man’: or: How feminism was framed in the DSK affair” The European Journal of Women’s Studies Feb. 2012 19

Mona Ozouf, Women’s Words: Essay on French Singularity


Nacira Guénif-Souilamas, “Une étrange défaite, une leçon de civilisation,” blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/nacira-guenif/240911/une-etrange-defaite-une-lecon-de-civilisation (Translation my own).

Marie Ndiaye, Rosie Carpe

Simone de Beauvoir, selections from The Second Sex

Hélène Cixous, The Laugh of the Medusa
Judith Butler, selections from Gender Trouble, (and translation into French), Undoing Gender


Catherine Malabou, Changing Difference
Joan Wallach Scott, The Fantasy of Feminist History

Entries on Sex and Gender from Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon

Danièle Kergoat, Se battre, disent-elles (Paris: La Dispute, 2012).

General Reference/Extra Reading:

Linda Fairstein, Nightwatch
Michel Taubman, Affaires DSK: La Contre-enquête
Elsa Dorlin ed. Sexe, Race, Classe: Pour une épistémologie de la domination
Penelope Deutscher, A Politics of Impossible Difference (2002) and Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction and the History of Philosophy (1997)


Sofi Oksanen, Purge (influential in France, receives the Prix Fémina in 2010).
Stella Sandford, *Plato and Sex*