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Radical Feminism and Its Possibilities

Reviewed by Soma Mandal¹

A manifesto is a written document with a political desire to change the present and the immediate future. Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, three leading feminists, come together in *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto* to denounce capitalist imperialism and, subsequently, to include an alternative feminist political directive. Translated into more than twenty languages and still counting, the manifesto has already impacted forging solidarities across transnational communities and, arguably, feminist readership in general. The feminist manifesto makes a declaration "*In the vacuum produced by liberalism's decline, we have a chance to build another feminism with a different definition of what counts as a feminist issue, a different class orientation, and a different ethos—one that is radical and transformative*"(4). As a decisive contemporary feminist manifesto, the book necessitates feminism to move towards a new radical politics of democratic belonging as human subjects in contrast to capitalism's commodification of human lives.

The discussion historicizes the Black Feminist Combahee River Collective movement originated from the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) in reaction to the horrific murder of twelve black lesbian feminists battling racial homophobia and misogyny between 1974-1980 in Boston, Massachusetts. The authors also commemorate the #NiUnaMenos International Women and Feminist Strikers in Poland in October 2016 against the anti-abortion laws and femicide of Lucía Pérez. The action rapidly gained traction across 50 countries in 2017 and 2018, with counter-insurgent radical feminist formations expressing support for resistance and protest against the gradual recession of progressive democratic rights.

The manifesto expresses some of the strongest criticisms of democratic governance, militarization, and the global labor force's dehumanization under neo-liberal power regimes. It challenges Facebook CEO Caryl Sandberg's corporate feminist activism, rejects the nomination of upper-class liberal feminist Hilary Clinton as U.S. presidential nominee, and condemns "*the alliance of the patriarchy and capitalism that wants us to be obedient, submissive and quiet*" (2). It builds on recent feminist action of collective resistance, a vision of the near future that involves course-correction from conventions of neo-liberal conceptions of rights, freedom, and choice to alternative structures of sustainable existence.

Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto is thus, a rejoinder that almost 99 percent of the majority are affected by capitalism, leaving just one percent of the population who make up the political classes unaffected. The discussion appeals to 99 percent of the population to reframe, reshape, and reorient feminist campaigns and struggles. It advocates for the necessity to trace and map new alternative directions that can restore long-lasting stability to crises created by

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the onslaught of capitalism, environmental degradation, climate insecurity, and human enslavement.

Politics of Gendered Capitalism

The manifesto is segmented into eleven theses that are outliers to and signposts for an egalitarian, socialist, and feminist world order that will replace capitalist inconsistencies, neo-(il)liberal democracies, and liberal feminist attitudes that expose gendered and threatened human and non-human relationships. The book is a beacon of hope for feminism to reconnect with anti-racist, environmentalist, anti-capitalist and non-systemic movements that can bring new socio-political structures for radical feminism. For the three feminists, militant feminist activism is the only force that can break the structures and systems of power.

This highlights the first thesis that the manifesto mentions. Neoliberal growth of the political economy, according to the manifesto, betrays the promises of modernity in the garb of temporary economic policies that violate women's fundamental human rights. This also impacts the poor, minority, oppressed, and marginal populations, forcing their lives to border on precarity.

The second thesis addresses a call to national and transnational feminist and women's organizations for a brand of militant feminism to counter the white, upper-middle-class privilege of liberal feminism. Recognizing that economic growth has done more harm, the feminist manifesto in the third thesis declares anti-capitalist feminist democrats and feminist strikes as the route to radical transformation.

For Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, liberal feminism is an obstacle to realizing a more inclusive and progressive feminist agenda, including gender justice, according to thesis five. Gender violence is the hallmark of neoliberal capitalism responsible for regulating sexuality and sexual relations mentioned in thesis six and seven. In other words, the lean-in feminism that aims to reflect and emancipate a few at the detriment of most marginalized women is far from cracking the ceiling and busting the male/dominant expectations. Critics raise its partial popularity as one of the first radical feminist waves in feminism's history for selectively raising the equality and freedom of affluent women while dramatically lowering the bar of justice for others. Sexual authoritarianism, on the other hand, is responsible for stoning the sexual rights of gender minorities. The manifesto considers the utter disregard for not de-establishing the hegemonic interconnected inequality frameworks and not recognizing the shifting conditions of intersectional feminist experience (Crenshaw 1989, Davis 2006) based on "identity politics" of race, ethnicity, community, and faith. The discussion highlights places where a liberal feminist framework is insufficient in thesis eight. By leaning on third-world economics of labor, "micro-credit feminism" (5), and poor women's care jobs, later feminist waves have questioned stereotypical jobs, empowerment concepts, and eco-developmental projects that damage natural and human resources, which is the basis of thesis nine. Finally, from a gender viewpoint, a consumeristic economic development does not fix the wage and employment gap. Thesis ten and eleven make a declaration that feminist internationalism, anti-capitalist insurgency, and radical feminist movements are timely responses to gendered capitalism-imperialism.

Although the authors address gender as the fundamental category to establish and institute power relations and hierarchies, other organizational dimensions of economic and socio-political hierarchies are also needed. National politics determine how gender is factored into profit-making. Gender as an attribute can be responsible for economic segregation and binarisation, which determines capital flows, market exchanges, historical materialization, labor relations – *“for, in a*

capitalist society, the organization of social reproduction rests on gender: it relies on gender roles. It entrenches gender oppression” (22). Therefore, radical feminist militancy is organized to counter the growing delegitimization of women's rights and the political disenfranchisement of the working-class population, which is a by-product of the liberal feminist legacy.

Radical Possibilities: A New Political Economy?

In his political works, including the *Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx's criticism of political economy is that material conditions are mostly inequitable and reflect patriarchal labor relations, eventually leading to fascist totalitarianism is reiterated in the feminist manifesto. Instances justifying liberalism as a political project determine whose equality matters, the nature of equality, for whom justice is administered, which rights are recognized, and those which are made invisible. Gender, as a contentious and contested category, also poses significant challenges to a universal feminist understanding of embodied experiences that differ significantly from the perspective of comparative histories of discrimination and injustice. Therefore, the manifesto rejects the imperialism of categories of – isms, liberalism, capitalism, corporatism, and developmentalism to argue for the decolonization and anti-imperialism of social categories and epistemic traditions.

The manifesto's postface highlights Marx and Engels' support for socialist communism in their 1848 work *Communist Manifesto*. The postface attempts to draw a continuity between the past and current circumstances of a capitalist system's human cost, which will lead to devastating effects of food riots, world wars, and statelessness if not resisted and repealed. Capitalism and authoritarian right-wing fascism are arguably self-destructive, marked by fissures and instabilities from within as *“struggles for decent and meaningful lives also shape the history of capitalism”* (71). The manifesto of Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser envisages the current fourth wave feminist strikers as progressive political actors who can strike different chords of unity and join with the struggle for the rights of the oppressed. The manifesto makes a clarion call for unity that undercuts countries, territories, and borders to free feminism from conventions of capitalist cosmopolitanism.

However, the challenges raised by Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser to conceptualize alternative, progressive conceptions of feminism and feminist activism are monumental, given the restructuring needed to change the system in its entirety. To choose not to work in corporate offices or not attempt to break glass ceilings is also a choice defined and informed by economic liberty in the global North, whose notion of feminism is different from the global South. To this end, the problems for this current version of modern militant feminism seeking new journeys for global emancipation is not without new risks and challenges in addition to pre-existing ones. The authors contend that when associating with related movements such as environmental and pro-democratic movements, which do not generally, see gender as an essential determinant for progress, it is crucial not to make the oppression of women and gender secondary. For 99 percent, feminism will have to be conscious of not homogenizing gender experiences or women's experiences, which are crucial for feminism to address.

Social justice for human rights abuse is one of the central concerns of feminism. Generalization and abstraction are slippery grounds where feminism aims to accommodate minority and marginal interests. As a visionary text, *Feminism for the 99 Percent* critically builds on the current tradition of feminist history, a neo-contemporary claim to an alternative and radical future that seeks to carry the promise of all the persecution and repression we experience to create

an equitable, gender-just society. As observed by *Feminism for 99 Percent*, radical social change is one route to such a vision proposed by the manifesto.

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