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Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, 2019. *Feminism for the 99%: A manifesto*. London: Verso ISBN: 9781788734424

Keywords: Anti-capitalism, Feminism, Marxism, Neoliberalism, Revolution.

*Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* foregrounds recent, global calls to liberate hegemonic feminist thinking and praxis from the shackles of formalist equality in order to authentically support the anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and ecofeminist. Written by three organisers of the International Women’s Strike, the manifesto responds to the moment of change generated by large-scale worldwide challenges to the political elite by advocating for the departure from individualist, neoliberal feminism.

The manifesto addresses the damage engineered by neoliberals in their transformation of feminism as a once distinct discipline commended for challenging capitalism from the perspective of gender and into “capitalism’s handmaiden” (Fraser, 2013). To this end, the authors appeal to us to reorient feminism from its present path which privileges the “meritocratic advancement of the few” to a fresh route unifying the collective as a revolutionary force against hierarchical structures (61). Their overarching objective: to construct the ultimate “majoritarian feminism”, or a “Feminism for the 99%” as coined by Fraser by overthrowing capitalism in its most destructive form – neoliberalism (61 and 6).

The manifesto represents a refreshing alternative to the unfaltering celebration of the ‘She-E-O’ pedalled by the mainstream on the mistaken belief that “more female leadership will lead to fairer treatment for all women” (Sandberg, 2015: 172). The authors undermine the dominant rhetoric that gender parity will be secured by increasing the representation of women within the highest ranks of society. Conversely, they reveal the neoliberal feminist quest to appoint more women CEOs as being antithetical to the aim of securing universal

1 equality. In reality, the authors reveal the neoliberal feminist ideology as the root source  
2 driving the fantasy of a comprehensive equality for the many by privileging the interests of a  
3 few. Simultaneously, the authors identify neoliberal feminist strategies as fostering and  
4 legitimizing systemic inequity within the workplace and beyond.  
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10 Consequently, the manifesto exposes neoliberal feminism as a pernicious strain of  
11 ‘feminism’ disguised by the mainstream under the thinly veiled narrative of “female  
12 empowerment”. The manifesto highlights that the “female empowerment” emblem is used  
13 discursively by the neoliberal feminist agenda to emphasize the role of the individual in  
14 managing their lives. Simultaneously, this emblem validates the state’s laissez-faire approach  
15 towards the plethora of oppressions faced by communities within society. The manifesto  
16 develops recent scholarship by charging the neoliberal feminist agenda with denying the  
17 structural nature of gender injustice (Rottenberg, 2018: 55). To resist these neoliberal  
18 approaches, which misappropriate key feminist tenets to further capitalist, hierarchical  
19 systems, the authors endeavour to “build another feminism: a feminism with a different  
20 definition of what counts as a feminist issue, a different class orientation, and a different  
21 ethos—one that is radical and transformative” (5).  
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39 Increasingly, scholars problematize the convergence between feminism and  
40 neoliberalism. They emphasize the hybrid’s manipulation of liberal feminist concepts as a  
41 means of generating an enterprising, successful, and seemingly progressive subject  
42 (Rottenberg, 2018). Similarly, the authors confront many of the shortcomings of these  
43 corporate-capitalist feminist approaches and show how they privilege meritocracy under the  
44 veneer of universal equality and freedom. Whilst these ideologies purport to “empower” and  
45 “diversify” “talented” women within the workplace, the manifesto holds that in supporting  
46 these strategies, the mainstream are merely “cloaking regressive policies in an aura of  
47 emancipation” (12). This is because the few women who are granted exclusive access to the  
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1 highest ranks are already members of a comparable class, race, sexual orientation, religion,  
2 and or ability. While the select few are permitted the opportunity to “excel” at the top, the  
3 majority are left at the bottom to “clean up the shards” from the glass ceiling (13).  
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7 In exposing the widespread and continuing damage caused by neoliberal feminists in  
8 their counterfeit ‘feminist’ approaches, the authors compel us to “kick-back” on *Lean in*  
9 agendas and to cultivate their “Other” all-encompassing, authentic feminism together (13).  
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11 To this end, this book makes a compelling case not only for the radical, but for the “necessary  
12 and feasible” transformation of feminism. Rather than limiting our aspirations to the  
13 underwhelming calls of neoliberal feminists like Sheryl Sandberg to strive solely for the  
14 “equal” representation of women and men within the public and private spheres, the book  
15 invites the collective to cease their subscription to the pretence of neoliberal feminism and to  
16 pick a side:  
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31 “Will we continue to pursue “equal opportunity domination” while the planet  
32 burns? Or will we reimagine gender justice in an anticapitalist form—one that  
33 leads beyond the present crisis to a new society?” (4).  
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41 The authors beseech us to follow their strategy for the latter. In doing so, the book  
42 boldly advocates for the collective to progress beyond the quest of seeking representation  
43 within the highest-ranks by abolishing hierarchy in its entirety. This is so that we can  
44 centralize the substantive and authentic equality of a holistic society, rather than prioritising  
45 the interests of the 1%. Arguably, until recently this anti-capitalist stance would be dismissed  
46 as Far-left at best. However, it is now positioned as a trendsetter; featuring in Vogue’s “Most  
47 Anticipated Books of 2019” (Vogue, 2019). Clearly, this book features as a timely response  
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1 to the growing mainstream appetite for anti-capitalist strategies to combat gender injustice  
2 and societal crisis of the neoliberal epoch.  
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5 The authors divide their manifesto into 11 central calls to action namely to: reinvent  
6 the strike (Thesis 1); abandon liberal feminism (Thesis 2); adopt anti-capitalist feminism  
7 (Thesis 3); put capitalism to immediate end (Thesis 4); value social reproduction above  
8 production for profit (Thesis 5); tackle all of the gender-based violence perpetuated by  
9 capitalism (Thesis 6); liberate sexuality from regulation (Thesis 7); embrace an all-  
10 encompassing anti-racist, anti-imperialist feminism by rejecting capitalism (Thesis 8);  
11 reverse the destruction of the environment achieved by capitalism (Thesis 9); engrain  
12 feminist internationalism (Thesis 10); form a radical collective alliance in a ‘common anti-  
13 capitalist insurgency’. (Thesis 11)  
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26 In utilising Marx and Engels’ ground breaking *Communist Manifesto* as a theoretical  
27 foundation for the manifesto, the authors demonstrate how feminism can be feasibly  
28 remoulded to respond to the modern forms of “exploitation, domination, and alienation”  
29 arising from the continuation of capitalist regimes (59). They recognize that our  
30 contemporary globalized landscape is greatly divergent from the Europe centred by Marx and  
31 Engels within their manifesto in 1848. Similarly, they are forthcoming that the various  
32 intersectional issues presently facing society extend far beyond the imaginations of this  
33 predecessor. In recognising the various forms of oppression generated by the perpetuation of  
34 capitalist regimes through a Marxist-feminist lens, the authors emphasise the need to respond  
35 to this conjuncture of social, ecological, and political crisis through a “feminist rescue  
36 operation and course correction” (63). In doing so, they reinforce ground-breaking  
37 scholarship by Rowbotham, Seagal, and Wainwright, who centralized their lived experiences  
38 as feminists to collectivize the divided Left following Margaret Thatcher’s period in office  
39 (Rowbotham et al, 2013).  
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1 Advancing the work of Marx and Engels to support the demolition of neoliberal  
2 feminism and capitalism in an increasingly globalized world, the manifesto scrutinises the  
3 relationship between neoliberal feminism and race. The authors illustrate the active and  
4 subtler roles played by feminists in perpetuating racialized violence under the guise of  
5 utilitarianism and empowerment. The manifesto develops Crenshaw's existing intersectional  
6 analyses by demonstrating the homogenization of a range of lived-experiences of gender  
7 injustice under a false universal (Crenshaw, 1989: 144). The manifesto connects the fusion of  
8 these lived-experiences to the broader neoliberal feminist effort to abstract gender, race and  
9 class and to deny the structural and intersectional nature of these issues. Fundamentally, they  
10 reinforce the reciprocal relationship between race and gender, but also the interdependence  
11 between race, imperialism and capitalism. As the authors present, the functioning of racism,  
12 imperialism, and misogyny is contingent on capitalism. Thus, authors condemn the patchy  
13 feminist record on race and proclaim that the authentic emancipation of women is impossible  
14 within a racist, imperialist society. Therefore, the manifesto pledges to break ties with  
15 neoliberal feminist approaches to cease promoting lived-experiences of injustice on falsely  
16 unified terms and to engage genuinely with diverse experiences of oppression.

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39 As part of their collective displacement of neoliberal feminist agenda, the authors call  
40 also upon the collective to reject conventional carceral responses within the context of  
41 gender-based violence (GBV). Although the authors share their sympathy about the  
42 motivations driving the quest for retribution, they declare this an inadequate pathway to  
43 address the structural nature of GBV. Strikingly, the authors seamlessly weave together the  
44 cyclical relationship between the capitalist-carceral nation and the promotion of GBV. They  
45 call on the collective to challenge: "the mistaken assumption that the laws, police, and courts  
46 maintain sufficient autonomy from the capitalist power structure to counter its deep-seated  
47 tendency to generate gender violence" (29).

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In powerfully illustrating the inseparable relationship between the carceral state and capitalism, the authors undermine the almost axiomatic truth that legal responses to GBV are well-intentioned and necessary. While the manifesto builds on existing abolitionist ground cultivated by the likes of Davis, Ritchie, and Wilson-Gilmore, the authors convey the law as orchestrating a war against the most vulnerable members of society, rather than reprimanding culpable “white-collar” individuals because of their societal privilege (Davis, 2003). Skilfully, the authors compel even the most astute feminist readers to reflect on their feminist credentials, particularly if they find themselves guilty of self-ascribing the label “feminist” whilst simultaneously endorsing the use of imprisonment for GBV.

Although the manifesto provides a proficient patchwork of the fundamental cultural, and political issues affecting our global societies, it would have been gratifying to see the manifesto provide a more comprehensive response to the multi-dimensional impact of regulatory capitalist regimes upon LGBTQI+ people. While the manifesto is committed to liberating society from the state regulation of sexuality (Thesis 7) this section falls short of its valiant effort to address a plethora of the complex issues experienced by LGBTQI+ people within one short section. This results in the fusion of many distinct issues arising from the capitalist regulation of sexuality and gender identity. Given the strongly intersectional identity of the Women’s Strike movement and the increasingly hostile environment for transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people socio-economically, politically and culturally, it would have been preferable for the authors to have centred these specific concerns within a separate thesis targeting the state regulation of gender identity. Particularly in these current times of conflict between feminism and queer theory, it would have been valuable for the authors to reinforce the historical feminist commitment to opposing neoliberal strategies of reducing conceptions of gender and sexuality to homogenous and stable constructs (Kapur, 2013: 342).

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Nevertheless, *Feminism for the 99%* is a visionary, relatable and all-encompassing resource valuable both to the collective committed to achieving a feminist informed anti-capitalist society and to those who are yet to be haunted by the spectre (Engels and Marx, 1998). Although the manifesto largely centres on inspiring communities who are yet to harvest the fruits of a non-capitalist society, the text also offers a long-term vision to support those already inhabiting a non-capitalist society. The book joins an increasingly mainstream anti-capitalist body of literature by Rottenberg (2018) and it stands in stark contrast to the best-selling ‘feminist manifestos’ by Sandberg (2015) and Slaughter (2015). The manifesto builds upon calls by Rowbotham to challenge advanced capitalist systems “around their specific experiences as women in the course of revolutionary struggle against capitalism” (77).

Unlike existing critiques of feminist neoliberalism, the manifesto offers a hybrid theoretical-pragmatic approach facilitating the collective transformation of the deepening global political, social, and ecological crisis. It rebuts dominant neoliberal feminist literature professing the importance of increasing the representation of women within the highest ranks of society. Simultaneously, it responds to the inadequacy of existing feminist praxis e.g. GBV which predominantly rely upon an engagement with the carceral state, despite the perpetuation of inequality by agents of the criminal justice system. Its all-inclusive theses transcend the narrow parameters of existing corporate feminist forces, scaling their wide-ranging attack upon the need to sever ties with capitalist-colonial forces to the value of social reproduction. Perhaps most importantly, the presentation of a broad ranging and intersecting subject matter in a rich, vivid manner ensures that the manifesto is accessible.

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