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*Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* is a nuanced, bold, and rich radical Black feminist critique of neoliberal feminism and a vision to achieve universally more liveable worlds. It is a dynamic account of feminist possibility that is formed in view of a variety of lived experiences and historical, contemporary, and future intersecting challenges within a UK context. Author, Lola Olufemi calls on us all to abandon neoliberal self-improvement “lean in” narratives (Sandberg, 2013: 26), to transcend the parameters of the knowable, and to embrace the complexities and contradictions involved in crafting new worlds that respond effectively to multi-layered violence and oppression (4, 108, 121, 144). By inviting readers to reconceptualise “feminist work as justice work”, she exposes the limitations of neoliberal feminist agendas that merely prioritise the individual acquisition of power and the appointment of cis, white, middle-class women to positions of authority within existing systems of oppression (4-5). Olufemi encourages us all, especially young feminists to actively participate in the radical work of dismantling harmful power structures rather than assimilating with them (4-5). Simultaneously, she reignites the urgency of “reimagining the world we live in and working towards a liberated future for all” (6).

Olufemi establishes the pace of the book by inviting readers to share in her revolutionary reimagination of society in which borders, the police, prisons, detention centres, work and the nuclear family no longer exist, where we are emancipated from coercive relationships and the “strangling grip” of the gender binary; and where education, transport, mental health, and community care are made freely and universally accessible under a radical redistribution of wealth (8-9):

“Imagine this: A world where the quality of life is not determined by how much money you have. You do not have to sell your labour to survive. Labour is not tied to capitalism, profit or wage...We have freedom to, not just freedom from” (8-9).
Olufemi ensures that this more substantively equitable outlook of society is not restricted to the realm of desire. Rather, she encourages readers that these visions are materially achievable: “now imagine this vision not as utopian, but as something well within our reach.” (9). She urges that we must begin together with our shared imaginations and engage with the various limitations and tensions accompanying our ideas as we progress along the trail for universal justice and liberation (9). By confronting and offering visions to surpass the confines of neoliberal feminist thinking, she speaks truth to power more broadly, but importantly to pervasive and hegemonic feminisms too. As such, Olufemi breathes new life into feminism as a “lived, shared and held” theoretical model, transformative mode of praxis, and tool for “radical compassion” which engages deeply with the “pain of others” (7, 5).

Olufemi provides a full-scale radical feminist critique of widespread injustices and mainstream feminist approaches in a UK context. She divides the book into 10 central chapters: Know your history (chapter 1); The sexist state (chapter 2); The fight for reproductive justice (chapter 3); Transmisogyny: Who wins? (chapter 4); The saviour complex: Muslim women and gendered Islamophobia (chapter 5); Art for art’s sake (chapter 6); Complicating consent: How to support sex workers (chapter 7); The answer to sexual violence is not more prisons (chapter 8); Feminism and food (chapter 9); and Solidarity is a doing word (chapter 10). Olufemi incorporates a selection of poignant testimonials, theoretical excerpts, case examples, and statistics that elucidate her core arguments. By utilising Black feminism as her theoretical framework, Olufemi illuminates the potential for the collective to remould mainstream feminism from its present focus on promoting “boss girls” into a critical tool that engages deeply with the myriad of intersectional issues experienced by women and non-binary people in the UK (3).

The expansive nature of Olufemi’s thesis echoes Julia Oparah’s and bell hook’s feminist approaches as it “resists… the artificial prioritisation of one dominance over another” (Oparah 1998, 237) because “feminist politics ends domination to free us to be who we are — to live lives where we love justice, where we can live in peace. Feminism is for everybody” (hooks 2000, 118). In reflecting the spectrum of contemporary concerns and material realities experienced by women and non-binary people, Olufemi concretises the limits of neoliberal feminism (4). Similarly, she conveys the erasure of Black histories and radical feminist organising by these mainstream feminist agendas. By employing a
Black feminist lens, she reignites the urgency for us all to reclaim the feminist movement by embracing a radical politics that rejects the celebration of surface-level wins and participation in factional infighting that plays directly into the hands of capitalism. She compels us all to tune in to the promise of collectivity and to abandon strategies that merely facilitate the continuation of the status quo in order to establish fairer societies for all: “we need each other to survive…where we can make interventions we should and that only work that seeks to shake and unsettle the very foundations of the sexist state is feminist work” (35). Ultimately, Olufemi contributes an additional layer to the cogent case against neoliberal feminist approaches by centring an array of contemporary issues experienced by many through a Black feminist lens. Subsequently, *Feminism, Interrupted* stages a distinct intervention in the mainstream UK feminist movement and shares important lessons that resonate far beyond this immediate context.

Rather than attempting to encapsulate the richness of the entire book, this review will focus on two central areas in the text and timely areas within broader feminist discourse: transmisogyny and prison abolition.

Olufemi launches a poignant challenge against hegemonic systems of classification in her chapter “Transmisogyny: Who Wins?”. She builds on the foundations established by Judith Butler (1990) and Sandy Stone (1991) to revive the transformative power of our sex and gender lived experiences in subverting these systems, which confer power on “gatekeepers” to accommodate those who are deemed “right” and exclude those who fall outside of these standards (Stone 1992, 295-298). As part of her critique, she skilfully addresses an increasingly prominent obstacle in our contemporary feminist work– exclusionary ‘feminism’. Subsequently, she incorporates transfeminist perspectives to support her in calling time on the fierce policing of the gender binary and the construction of a false dichotomy between cis and transgender women especially in the UK (52, 62). Olufemi unveils the true agenda of those who profess to be “protecting women” when simultaneously problematising transgender women’s identities (60): “the aim is to legislate queerness, transness, anything that upsets the binary out of existence” (58). She pinpoints the fatal consequences of assimilating with these historical classification systems whilst refusing to embrace the fluid and shifting nature of sex and gender:
“Daily people die because they challenge, subvert, and threaten the visual script dictated by
the gender binary… when feminists adopt a binary understanding of gender and an essentialist
idea that biology is destiny, they put transgender women at risk” (53-54).

She reminds those who direct unrelenting and intersecting forms of abuse towards transgender
people while masquerading under the label ‘feminist’ that: “trans life is fundamental to our collective
liberation” (66). Importantly, she reinforces the notion that ‘feminist’ thinking which neglects the
violence imposed by these structures of regulation and excludes already marginalised people is
fundamentally incompatible with radical feminist praxis (Crenshaw 1989, 140).

Furthermore, Olufemi develops the terrain established by abolition feminists such as Angela Davis
by discussing the limitations of and harm promoted by carceral responses to sexual and gendered
violence (Davis et al 2014, 45). For example, she highlights that the carceral paradigm merely reacts to
violence on an individual level after harm is committed by “locat[ing] the problem in the body of the
‘bad’ person rather than connecting patterns of harm to the conditions in which we live” (111-112). In
this process, she highlights that there is “no effort to reshape the logic of sexual and gendered violence,
nor does it signal that the act itself was of injustice” (113). On the contrary, she demonstrates that
employing additional modes of criminalisation often places survivors, particularly people of colour at
greater risk of enduring further forms of suffering; such as incarceration and re-traumatisation during
the criminal legal process (113, 120). Olufemi clarifies that a radical feminist vision of society is one
in which gendered violence and prisons do not exist. To eradicate these strains of violence from our
communities, Olufemi urges us to proactively respond to harm by practicing community accountability
to “disrupt normative masculinity and the systems it is predicated on before they become cemented in
the bodies of individuals” (113). She illustrates what these acts of “transformative justice” may look
like in practice:

“A group of friends, a church, an organisation come together and design a process to hold
an individual account without sending them away. This process might look like: community
service, reflective practice, reaffirming commitment to values and practices, mediation, finding methods to cope with rage and shame, therapy, mental health support and trauma centred programmes designed to identify the root causes of behaviour” (120).

Although the text effectively centres future feminist responses to harm, it would have been fascinating to observe a more in-depth discussion about some of the contemporary initiatives practising community accountability and how they navigate issues such as power dynamics and hierarchy within these contexts. Nevertheless, Olufemi conveys the promise of transformative justice to facilitate more multidimensional and bespoke responses to harm in our complex interpersonal and public relationships (120). By advocating for a shift towards transformative justice, Olufemi joins abolitionists in opposing additional forms of criminalisation and the expansion of the carceral net. She reaffirms that we must take steps to depart from carceral systems of violence that are predicated on suffering in order to authentically reduce and prevent harm and to realise a truly universal feminist praxis because “justice means everyone” (121).

Olufemi contributes to a growing body of critical feminist scholarship which aims to reinstate feminism as a radical and collective political, social, and cultural strategy that resists violence, reinvigorates the meaning of justice, and constructs fresh worlds. She develops recent work by authors such as Rottenberg (2018) and Arruzza et al (2020) whose works seek to reinject hope, possibility, and imagination back into feminism by liberating it from the clutches of neoliberalism. Olufemi makes a powerful addition to this contemporary landscape — a lens to critique the relationship between feminism, neoliberalism, justice, and intersectional struggles in the UK and a call to re-direct feminist focus and action towards the root causes of our oppression(s) (5). She invites us to embrace the complexities and differences involved in this work as strengthening the transformative potential of feminism, which builds on the foundations laid by black feminists such as Audre Lorde (Lorde 1979, 111-112):

“Black feminist writers have always understood the importance of difference and tension… Writers and thinkers from the global south challenging Western Hegemony and domination;
those who are and have always been the wrong kind of woman… they have cleared a space for us to understand the political possibilities that feminism offers us. We only have to listen for it to reveal itself” (147).

*Feminism, Interrupted* is a pioneering, compelling, and palpably optimistic text whose valuable insights transcend disciplines and support long-standing and global organising efforts (21). Olufemi strengthens our knowledge of the convergence between neoliberalism and feminism as exclusionary, deceptive, and as extending limited opportunities to those granted access under the label ‘Woman’. By bringing to the fore a range of perspectives that have been historically marginalised by neoliberal feminism, she underlines the importance of reorienting mainstream feminist praxis to enrich the world for everybody. Similarly, she reinforces the necessity of redesigning not only our relationships with the state, but the meaning of ‘state’ itself. Not only does she prompt us all to reflect on: “what kind of a world would we like to live in?”, but she encourages us to actualise our dreams (121).

*Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* underlines the past and present as mutually constitutive factors that shape the direction of our future organising efforts:

“knowing our history matters, it reminds us of the myriad of ways that we can begin to instrumentalise feminist thought and practice to make changes where we are. It helps us improve our own strategies and succeed where other movements did not” (21).

By foregrounding our historical experiences in our theoretical and practical feminist journeys, Olufemi echoes work by scholars such as (Ahmed 2016, 8). By inviting us to centre our histories in our efforts to transform our worlds, she also galvanises a younger audience to join forces and “to rediscover the histories that have been purposefully withheld from us because it is the voices that speak to us from the past that help shape our vision for the future” (20-21). A truly inspiring and important book that provides a meaningful interruption within mainstream feminist discourse and a vision to revolutionise our societies during a contemporary age punctuated by multi-layered trauma and pain.
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