

## CARE AND LABOUR

Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019), 96 p. ISBN 9781788734424

In the midst of a global pandemic, increased unemployment, international uprisings against police brutality, an environmental crisis, and the rise of nationalist extremism, the need for a movement which goes beyond notions of “individual responsibility” and “equal opportunity” popularized by neoliberalism is critical. Ideology which stresses the responsibility of the individual, “equality,” and “free choice” not only conceals systemic inequalities embedded in policies and in institutions which unevenly distribute access to resources and opportunities, but also conceals the social and economic value of reproductive labour and care work, which includes engaging in meaningful paid and unpaid care both for the self and for others. The precariousness of participating in care work has only become more profound as a result of the COVID-19 crisis as care workers are required to put their mental, physical, and emotional health, and perhaps even their lives, as well as the health and lives of those they come in contact with, in danger simply in order to do their jobs; yet, they lack necessary protections both physically and economically. Neoliberal ideologies have created an easy pathway for the COVID-19 crisis to exacerbate the crisis of care not only for those who participate in paid care work but also for every single individual as isolationism, financial anxiety, grief, job and housing loss/instability, and countless other forms of precariousness have disastrously and avoidably become even more commonplace. As our current global crises impact countless individuals at various intersecting degrees, it is not, and never was, fruitful to demand that individuals “work harder,” simply “get a new job,” or just smile and be more optimistic in order to improve their lives. It is also not effective – on the contrary, it is exceptionally hazardous – to forgo all protective COVID-19 measures for the sake of so-called “normalcy.” What is required, instead, is a movement that recognizes the ways in which the challenges we face, both on a national and an international scale, are not meaningfully combated through “individual responsibility,” but rather through collective action and the transformation of society and labour relations.

The manifesto *Feminism for the 99%*, written by authors and scholars Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, calls for transformation by outlining a movement that seeks to combat sexism, racism, capitalism, neoliberalism, and authoritarianism,

while offering a vision of feminism which places the working class at the centre of its analysis, is inclusive of all genders, and is eco-socialist. The manifesto opposes neoliberal feminism, an approach espoused by those such as Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and author of *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, which suggests that women simply need to “lean in” at their corporate workplaces, “break the glass ceiling,” and climb the corporate and governmental ladder as a means of social change and equality. The manifesto instead responds to and advocates for women’s movements which recognize capitalism as the root cause of the crises we face in our society – from unemployment and poverty to the carceral system and environmental destruction.

The authors contrast neoliberal feminism with *huelga feminista*, the International Women’s Strike, a strike that took place on March 8, 2018 in which participants ceased to engage in productive and reproductive activity as a means to oppose poor working conditions and unequal wages. In opposition to the ideology of “equal opportunity” and “personal responsibility,” the purpose of the International Women’s Strike is to oppose capitalistic and patriarchal norms by rejecting the corporatization of International Women’s Day and by bringing awareness to paid and unpaid productive and reproductive gendered labour that is the backbone of society, yet has been economically and socially devalued. Through this example, *Feminism for the 99%* offers an alternative and transformative vision of society which moves away from ideologies of individualism and “upward mobility” by seeking to challenge and dismantle all intersecting forms of exploitation and oppression – from racism, capitalism, and sexism to the destruction of our planet.

The manifesto understands strikes as fundamental in the effort toward an anti-racist eco-socialist feminist society as it lays out how new forms of feminist strikes have expanded the understanding of what is considered to be labour by including both productive and reproductive work and waged and unwaged labour. According to *Feminism for the 99%*, strikes are not only useful in demanding fair working conditions and wages, but also in revealing how so-called “private” matters, seemingly unrelated to work, are in fact political and entangled in working and labour relations. These matters include sexual harassment and assault, a lack of access to reproductive justice, and all forms of gendered unpaid work such as smiles, emotional labour, and housework. They argue how what is considered “work” should not only be limited to what takes place in the workplace nor to the actions which result in capital. With an expanded definition of what is considered work, a new class struggle arises which seeks to stand for all subjected to a disproportionately disadvantaged status as a result of processes of colonialism, heteronormativity, gender binarism, the patriarchy, and capitalism. Thus, *Feminism for the 99%* expands upon traditional labour movements which have sought to protect workers and workers’ rights by validating the labour involved in social reproduction and care work, while also challenging the isolationism and individualism of neoliberal feminism which expects individuals to simply “lean in” and “work harder” in order to achieve equality as the manifesto advocates and calls for solidarity, collectivity, and transformation.

At a time when many working parents have less access to paid work time as they are expected to stay home and participate in unpaid domestic labour in order for their children to attend school online, a time when nurses, grocery workers, delivery service workers, teachers, and all who participate in care work such as elderly care workers and health care workers are considered “essential” yet continue to be undervalued, underpaid, and underprotected, and at a time when the means to care for oneself, mentally, physically, and emotionally has become ever more inaccessible, the necessity of a movement which materially values social reproduction and care work is imperative. There is an incredible demand for care in our current society, yet presently this demand is made without recognition of the emotional, physical, and mental costs of the labour involved in caring both for oneself and for others. Cooking and cleaning is work, child-rearing is work, having to defend oneself as an immigrant, a person of colour, a woman, or as a trans, queer, or non-binary person is work; smiling simply in order to appease colleagues, students, customers, family, clients, and friends is work, and all other forms of emotional labour is work, coping with grief, mental health struggles, and illnesses is work, managing to survive whilst in a precarious economic situation is work, and the effort to simply find the time and means for leisure is also work as the accessibility to leisure time and means of leisure is unevenly distributed.

Yet, in a system which bases the “health” of a country on the production of goods and services, as opposed to the accessibility to care, community, and physical, mental, and emotional well being, the labour involved in care work and social reproduction remains invisible. And while the transformative vision of feminist strikes presented in the manifesto is essential in targeting, exposing, and transforming the way in which unpaid reproductive labour and care work is employed for the purpose of capital at the expense of the 99%, it’s also essential to ask how we, as anti-racist eco-socialist feminists, can engage *both* in meaningful strikes and in *revitalizing* work in the vital effort to radically transform society. The manifesto clearly lays out and expresses the importance and the need for feminist strikes as a way to make invisible labour visible, and to then make space to demand material and structural validation for social reproduction and care work and thus transform society through inclusivity, redistribution, just wages and living conditions, access to health care, public transportation, and education. The manifesto also clearly lays out what *Feminism for the 99%* opposes: the current status quo of neoliberal feminism. However, the manifesto would greatly benefit from the inclusion of what work and labour relations would look like in an anti-racist eco-socialist feminist society, and would also benefit from centering both capitalism as the root cause of all oppression *and* centering not only strikes, but also seeking care, community, joy, and revitalising work and working relations as a means of progressive protest.

As prominent feminist, activist, and writer Audre Lorde wrote in *A Burst of Light and Other Essays*, “caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” Caring for oneself and for another is not simply a natural

ability to be exploited for the purpose of capital. Nor is it a luxury, or just a secondary need, but is rather politically and structurally foundational to the indispensable health and wellbeing of every society. Therefore, it can be useful for anti-racist eco-socialist feminists who center the working class in their analysis to continue the work of traditional labour movements by seeking fair wages and safe working conditions, to engage in feminist strikes to expand definitions of work and contribute to the recognition and material validation of the social reproduction, emotional labour and care work as proposed in *Feminism for the 99%*, and to seek and call for accessibility to restorative care and radical joy as a form of protest.

It's essential to note that the call for restorative care and radical joy maintains the critical opposition to neoliberal feminist ideology as anti-racist eco-socialist feminist care and joy is not measured in wealth, goods, consumption, production, nor productivity which neoliberal ideology thrives on. Anti-racist eco-socialist feminist care and joy is, instead, measured by each individual's ability to access to care, community, health, education, housing, safety, compassion, and leisure time without the fear of falling through the cracks. Anti-racist eco-socialist feminist care and joy is also measured by access to community care which opposes the carceral system, to a non-exploitive, non-extractive, and inclusive relationship with nature which enables all to connect with nature in an ecologically-minded manner, and by access to work which substantially serves our planet, our communities, and ourselves in a manner that provides sustenance and connection. Overall, we can see that *Feminism for the 99%* focuses on strikes to highlight unpaid, undervalued gendered work and actively opposes neoliberal feminism. *Feminism for the 99%* also seeks to promote awareness of working-class gendered work in a manner that is inspired by the way in which traditional labour unions sought and continue to seek to promote awareness of unfair working conditions. What *Feminism for the 99%* does not highlight is that care, radical joy, and restorative work beyond capitalist consumption and productivity is also a form of opposition. This form of opposition is especially valuable and critical during times of crises where striking is not always possible as livelihoods are on the line, and during a time in which there is a great demand for care, community, health, safety, and connection. In this way, the arguments made in *Feminism for the 99%* are both validated and expanded upon for further relevance in our current context as the accessibility and validation of care becomes ever more crucial.

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