

Women of the World, Unite!: An Interview with Nancy Fraser

By: Christopher Helali



Women's March on Versailles, 5-6 October 1789. Source: *Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF)*.

Nancy Fraser is Henry A. and Louise Loeb Professor at the New School for Social Research, Visiting Research Professor at Dartmouth College, and international research chair at the Collège d'études mondiales, Paris. World renowned as a philosopher and feminist, focusing in critical social theory and political philosophy, her work has been translated into over twenty languages and has been cited twice by the Brazilian Supreme Court. Her latest book, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, co-authored with Rahel Jaeggi, was published by Polity Press in 2018. Her essays have appeared in *New Left Review*, *Critical Historical Studies*, and newspapers like *The Guardian*. Other books include *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (Verso 2013); *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere* (Polity Press 2014); *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (Columbia University Press 2008); *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, with Axel Honneth (Verso 2003); *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (Routledge 1997); and *Unruly Practices: Power,*

Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory (University of Minnesota Press 1989).

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In the summer of 2018, I visited Nancy Fraser at her home to conduct an interview on the various social, economic, and political struggles of our day. From the fight against neoliberalism to the movements challenging the far-right, Fraser analyzes our contemporary situation, remaining firmly rooted in the Marxist tradition. Central to Fraser's theoretical work is the concept of social reproduction, the sphere of capitalism associated with women. Her help in theorizing and organizing a "Feminism for the 99%," opposed to what Fraser calls "progressive neoliberalism," provides activists with both theoretical and practical tools for challenging the gender asymmetry inherent in the capitalist system. The following is an introduction to the thinking of Nancy Fraser, outlining her critiques of the capitalist system, her theoretical insights into social reproduction, and her articulation of the urgent need for a Feminism for the 99%.

CH: What does the militant feminist struggle look like under the Trump presidency, during a time of resurgent right-wing populism and fascism?

NF: Well, that's in a way the question that has yet to be fully decided. We are at a fork in the road and there are two possible paths; one of which would be a disaster and the other would be very promising. The path that's a disaster is the ideologically very light amorphous resistance, like the pink pussy hats worn at the march the day after Trump's inauguration. A sort of general anger at Trump, perfectly justified anger at his misogyny and so on. But this is a kind of empty opposition that doesn't have real political direction. The reason this would be a disaster is that it is very likely to be, let's say, recuperated or colonized by the attempts of liberals to reestablish the hegemony of what I've called "progressive neoliberalism." That would be like the Hillary Clinton wing or what's left of it in the Democratic Party. Unless feminist anger and feminist militancy really strikes out to develop a more

left-wing and radical direction, it will just get sucked back into this kind of Clintonite Democratic Party, which I think created the conditions for Trump in the first place. So I think that going back to that is no good.

Now there is another possible path to take. I am part of a network of left-wing feminists who have tried to articulate the alternative. We call it “Feminism for the 99%.” If the Clintonite feminism is “lean in,” “crack the glass ceiling” feminism, its principal beneficiaries are women of the professional managerial strata, educated women, women who are trying to move up the corporate ladder and the ranks of the military and so on. In contrast, Feminism for the 99% is a feminism that primarily focuses on the situation and needs of working class women, women of color, migrant women, and by extension, women who are less privileged in class terms. This is a feminism that puts the idea of social equality front and center, whereas “lean in” feminism is focused not on equality but meritocracy: letting the talented few rise to the top by removing barriers while everybody else is stuck in the basement. “Lean in” feminism does not have any structural critique of capitalist society, does not understand why, how, and where gender asymmetry is hardwired into capitalist society.

Feminism for the 99% makes a structural critique focused on the separation within capitalism of activity that is considered part of social reproduction from activity that is considered productive or oriented to profit-making through the production and sale of commodities. To me, that separation in capitalism, which is a gendered separation, with the first sphere associated with women, the second associated with men, is a real, deep structural feature of capitalism. It was not part of earlier societies. It entrenches gender asymmetry into capitalism. If we don't get a feminism that focuses on changing that, then all of these efforts to get women to the top of the corporate hierarchy are doomed to fail. They might work for a few, but they are doomed to fail the overwhelming majority of women. In fact, those who can succeed by “leaning in,” as Sheryl Sandberg put it at the corporate board table, do so only because they are leaning on the social reproductive work, very poorly paid, precarious work, of low-waged migrant women, women of color, who are taking care of their kids, their aging parents, cleaning

their houses, and so on. This class and color asymmetry is built into the forms of feminism that have become dominant in the United States during the last 25 years.

The interesting thing about the present moment, including the Trump moment, is that the first kind of feminism I mentioned is in crisis. The defeat of Hillary Clinton was a huge wake up call and a crisis for contemporary feminism as it was for progressive neoliberalism more broadly. That means we actually have an opportunity now to really develop and strike out in a different direction. That's what I mean by the fork in the road. Either we try to put humpty dumpty back together again and recreate this liberal feminism which is allied with neoliberalism or we say “basta, enough of that” and we develop a new left-wing feminism of the sort I've described. The name we've given to the second, drawing on the language of Occupy Wall Street, is Feminism for the 99%.



"What the October Revolution has given to women workers and peasants." This 1920 poster from the Russian Soviet Republic shows a woman gesturing towards a library, workers' club, cafeteria, school for adults, kindergarten, and home for mothers and children. Source: Public Domain (Wikimedia).

CH: In what ways can anti-capitalist-, socialist-, Marxist-, and anarchist-feminisms build power and challenge the corporate, “lean in” feminism that is promulgated by both Republicans and Democrats in the United States?

NF: I can tell you about what we've been doing so far. This idea of a feminism for the 99% emerged in the attempt to organize what was called then, “International Women's Strike” around March 8th, International Women's Day. In 2015 and 2016, there were very militant, grass-roots, mass feminist movements developing in Poland around abortion and reproductive rights and in Latin America, especially in Argentina, around violence against women called “Ni una menos” or “Not one [woman] less.” This spirit of a new kind of militant feminism began to spread, especially in Latin America, and in Southern Europe, Italy and Spain. By the time it got to the United States, Trump had been elected. There were huge, mass demonstrations in many cities of the United States on the day after his inauguration, January 21st, 2017. This was almost a spontaneous outpouring. It was put together by a small number of women who had virtually no political experience or in-depth understanding of what they were doing. The network that I belong to said, “Okay, this is an interesting moment, let's see if we can articulate a perspective.”

We published a call for an international women's strike in the name of Feminism for the 99% in *The Guardian*. The uptake was quite important, nothing like the massive demonstrations of January 21st. We got a lot of significant uptake and were able, in the United States, to put together a pretty impressive coalition of immigrant women's groups, black feminist groups, latinx groups, women's caucuses within trade unions, socialist feminist groups, and so on. We began doing more and more of this work around the idea of a women's strike, sort of like the strikes around immigration that were meant to show how central the immigrant labor is in this country: If we stay home or if we go into the streets instead of going to our jobs, then you'll see. We tried something similar. We're not going to go shopping for food or anything. We're not going to clean our houses. Those who can stay away from a

paid job without endangering themselves are going to do that. We're not going to smile. We're not going to do all of the things that are a part of the work of social reproduction. This was connected with a whole set of demands about violence against women, against people of color more broadly, for labor rights, for a \$15 minimum wage, for healthcare and so on. These kinds of women marches have been developing elsewhere, and they got even bigger the following year.

This past year [2018], in Madrid, Spain, under the banner of “International Women's Strike: Feminism for the 99%,” 200,000 people marched in Madrid, including a lot of men. The march was organized as a feminist march with a lot of gender content, but it was arguing for a much broader anti-capitalist perspective. What happened, which was so interesting, is that the march became the vehicle through which people all over the city could articulate their opposition to austerity and neoliberalism more broadly. Neoliberal austerity demands that governments slash all social spending and puts the interest of bond holders above those of everybody else. This demand for austerity is killing people all over the world, in Greece as well as Spain, through the shutting down of hospitals. The idea of the march was that the demand for austerity is really an assault on social reproduction, in other words, the energies available in society to care for other people in the family, neighborhood, community, or civil society more broadly. The ability to raise healthy children, to keep others healthy. The ability to have healthy food, safe and pleasant places to live, safe and functional public transportation.

The ability to have all that social infrastructure depends on the time and energy of human beings to invest in that. It depends on the support of governments to fund the infrastructure side of it, which means education, schools, healthcare, clean water, and so on and so forth. Historically, in capitalist society, social reproduction has been mainly, although not exclusively, the responsibility of women. That goes back to the split between production and reproduction, with men going “out to work,” and women being responsible for the home front. Social reproduction is associated with women, and even when it becomes a public job, whether in government agencies, or for-profit nursing homes, hospitals and so on, it's still overwhelmingly women who do that work. This is stereotyped as

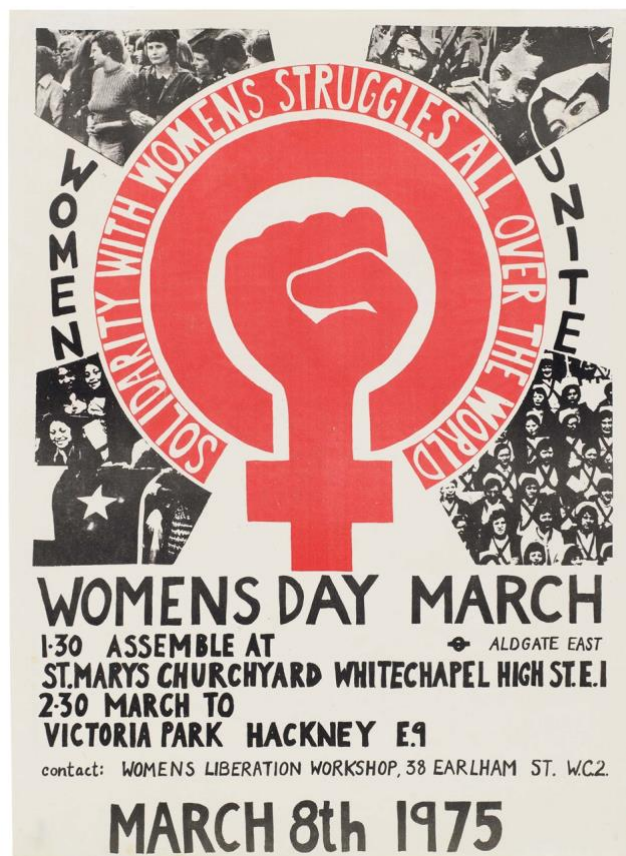
women's work. There is a sense in which an assault on social reproduction is an especially pressing issue for women. On the other hand, it harms everybody.

Neoliberalism is assaulting our ability to reproduce our social life, our social bonds, our solidarities, our social relations, to reproduce human beings in a human and decent way by two main mechanisms. One, it is conscripting women into low-wage, precarious-wage work. It is reducing male wages, making it impossible to support a family on one income so now, not just men but women have to work too. This was done by essentially trashing labor rights of the historically privileged sectors of the working class in unionized manufacturing. It has degraded the conditions of labor for everybody so that now work is precarious, low paid, and it doesn't carry benefits. Many people have to work at more than one job. The numbers of hours needed per household to support a household, to reproduce it, is skyrocketing. The time that women used to have to devote to the care work, the maintenance of the household, and the community beyond the household, is really being diminished. At the same time, investors and central banks demand that states slash social spending, which means that that support is being removed. It's like a pincer movement. This is why we say it's an assault on social reproduction.

One key demand of a socialist, anti-capitalist or even an anti-neoliberal movement is to defend, and not merely defend, but transform social reproduction and its relation to production. That focus is the key theoretical idea of Feminism for the 99%. There is a theoretical development called social reproduction feminism that elaborates this way of thinking and draws a lot on earlier Marxism-feminism and socialist-feminism which I have also, in my long career, been a part of. That's the theoretical perspective. Now more than ever this theoretical perspective is really pertinent. It's got its finger on the core issues that are animating and mobilizing people in many parts of the world. Anti-capitalist struggle today is not only, or even primarily, literal struggles over wages, hours, and working conditions in the factory. That will be true for sure in the new industrializing countries like China. But in the parts of the world where we're located, anti-capitalist struggle is largely centered on social reproduction. I don't mean to suggest that labor struggles are not important, and I think that we should

be trying to unionize people today in order to change the balance of class power with respect to labor, but I would say that the center right now is social reproduction: The defense of it and the transformation of it.

Right now I am in the process of putting the finishing touches on a manifesto for the Feminism for the 99% which I am co-authoring with two terrific left-wing feminists, Cinzia Arruzza, who is Italian and works at the New School with me in New York and, Tithi Bhattacharya, who is a British feminist of Indian descent and is also teaching in the United States now at Purdue.¹ We're trying to get out there with a document that summarizes this perspective, what its demands are, how it views the key issues of the time, but in a form that is very accessible and can be used by militants on the ground and those interested in theory.



Women's Day March 8th 1975 poster from the Women's Liberation Workshop in London. Source: Wikimedia/See Red Women's Workshop: Feminist Posters 1974-1990.

¹Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (New York: Verso, 2019).

CH: I'm interested in the connection between “Feminism for the 99%” and the ongoing crisis in neoliberalism as well as its symptoms, namely the rise in right-wing populism and fascism. Is this crisis now in a permanent state?

NF: That's a really hard question to answer. You would sort of need a crystal ball. I don't feel confident making predictions. What I can tell you is how I think about it. First of all, I would distinguish between a crisis of neoliberalism in a narrow sense as a regime of capital accumulation. I would say that from the standpoint of capital, neoliberalism is doing just fine. They're not in a crisis. They are racking it up big time. But, you could talk about a couple of other senses in which neoliberalism could be in a crisis. One is to think about how that rapacious, all-consuming economic engine that is neoliberalism, that is just sucking up everything, treating everything as a profit center, is more and more finding that it can increase profits maximally not through producing anything but just through financial speculation. My preferred term for this kind of capitalism is not neoliberalism, but financialized capitalism.

In most forms of capitalism, finance is a sector that supplies credit, lends money to industrialists, or would-be industrialists, so that they can innovate and so on and so forth. That's not the role that finance is playing today. Finance is the driver of the whole economy. It's not an auxiliary, helping another more dominant form of capital like industrial capital or even agricultural capital. Rather, it's everywhere. It's got its tentacles into everything. It's not even a separate sector anymore. For example, in the US auto industry, or what's left of it, the real profit center is not in the making and selling of automobiles, but in the financing of them. General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC), Ford, each of the auto companies has a financing division which loans people the money to buy the cars. That's where their profit is, not in the actual making of the car. That's an example of finance colonizing something else.

Back to the main point, I would talk about a crisis of financialized capitalism understood not just as an economy, but as an entire social order. Then we could get back to things like the crisis of

social reproduction. We could also talk about the ecological crisis as a strand of the crisis of this form of capitalism. We can talk about the political crisis of our time as a strand of this. In each case, it's not the kind of crisis that some Marxists have talked about traditionally, which is that capital is having trouble making profits and is going bankrupt and so on. There might be moments like that. Obviously, 2007-2008 was such a moment, and that might come back. But there is a different kind of crisis going on now, which is that this financial dynamo is vampirizing social reproduction. It's vampirizing the political system. It's hollowing out public power. It's hollowing out rights so that people can't use them. Except for the repressive arm of the state, which is doing quite well, it's the strategy of budget cuts. Of astronomical sovereign debt so that governments have to pay more and more of their tax revenue to the bond holders and have little left to spend on genuinely public things. Finance is destroying public power as a possible thing that we can use to do something about this. It's destroying social reproduction. It's destroying the earth's capacity to replenish what we take from it in order to live our lives. There is a crisis if you expand what you mean by crisis. It's not a crisis of the neoliberal economy but of the social order that houses this economy.

There is also a crisis of political hegemony. I'm using hegemony in Gramsci's sense to talk about the importance of a certain level of legitimacy of a system where enough people think it's okay, don't think there are any alternatives, or are just too busy worrying about their own lives. There is enough acceptance of the system's legitimacy, whether it is active or passive acceptance—or some combination thereof. There is a kind of narrative that justifies the system that has enough credibility, what Gramsci called a “common sense.” This is the kind of common sense that the ruling class disseminates and uses to construct what Gramsci called a “hegemonic bloc,” an alliance of political and social forces that is broad enough to appear to represent a critical mass. Enough people that the system can claim to be democratic, that people go out and vote, and so on and so forth. Throughout the history of capitalism in its different phases, the capitalist class manages to assemble such a hegemony more or less. It lasts for a number of decades, and then you get to a crisis point where all the different types of

crises I just mentioned assert themselves. The hegemony frays. It's not credible anymore. It's not convincing. That's when things get really interesting because then you have a lot of people jumping in to a political vacuum. The established political parties are demoralized. They have a lot of problems generating any enthusiasm. Then you get proposals for different directions, new projects, and a different way to organize things.

Feminism for the 99% is one project that is being proposed now to jump into the current political vacuum. Trumpism and right-wing populism form another rather powerful and nasty brew that's being concocted as one alternative to the previous hegemony. We also have some left or progressive populist alternatives here and there. The Bernie Sanders campaign represented a left-wing populism. It was quite interesting to see in the 2016 election, including the primary season as well as the general election, that between the Trump forces and the Sanders forces you had something like a critical mass of US voters saying they had had enough of what had been the reigning hegemonic political orientation which I call "progressive neoliberalism," or we can even say neoliberalism in its reactionary forms.

The UK is another fascinating example. On the one hand you have Brexit which was centered in the decaying industrial north, which is the equivalent of our upper midwest here. Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, all these historic industrial cities that had been clobbered by their version of financialization and deindustrialization. All of the wealth has flowed to London and the south of England and it's all in finance and services. That was one kind of working class revolt. Now you have this huge shift in direction in the Labour Party around Jeremy Corbyn, which is another working class revolt, or it's actually an alliance of working class and more educated middle class people who are fed up with the direction of Tony Blair's New Labour. That's kind of their version of what we are experiencing. Then we had the very interesting election in France with the surprising strength of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who was a left populist alternative. We have Podemos in Spain. In the early days, we had SYRIZA in Greece before they turned tail.

These are all examples, both from the left and right, of people saying “We are not going to continue in the same old way. We are looking for a new project, a new political set of forces that will do something different.” I believe that this financialization that is destroying social reproduction, destroying labor rights, destroying the standard of living of anybody who has managed to get some level of stability and relatively decent living conditions under the social-democratic forms of capitalism that preceded the financialized forms, those people have lost out so badly, are being clobbered so badly that they've really rejected the current system.

Now in the United States what they rejected was “progressive neoliberalism.” As an economic policy, we know what neoliberalism is. It's this financialization where the interest of investors and bond holders, who are centered on debt, student debt, credit card debt, payday loans, government debt and so on, dominate. If you pay people so little that they actually can't buy enough to keep your economy humming, then what do you do? You lend them money so they can buy more, and they borrow against future wages eventually getting deeper and deeper into debt. So this crisis wrought by financialization, in all the various areas we have been talking about, that's what neoliberal economics is doing. But what a lot of people don't understand is that neoliberal economics can combine, does combine, and has combined with a variety of different “politics of recognition,” as I call it.

To use a shorthand, you've got politics of distribution and production, that's the economic side of political life. It's very important. It has to do with what is the balance between labor and capital and so on. But there is also the politics of recognition. That's about respect, esteem, prestige, who really counts as a member. Who is looked down upon and degraded. Who is not able to claim ordinary rights of citizenship. Who is subject to racial profiling and police violence. Who is subject to harassment and sexual assault at work and elsewhere. Who is trashed for not being a “real American” by virtue of color, immigration status, or national origin and so on. All of these forms of Islamophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, all of these are part of the politics of recognition.

Now, what was dominant in this country was a strange alliance between Wall Street, Hollywood, and Silicon Valley. These are the powerhouses of the financial sector, the symbolic capitalism, the non-manufacturing capital, and the dominant liberal currents of the recognition movements, liberal feminism, liberal anti-racism, green capitalism and so on. This is all progressive but in a very limited sense. A sense that can be made perfectly compatible with Goldman Sachs's agenda. It's really Bill Clinton. This is what Clintonism did in the Democratic Party. It's exactly analogous to what Blair did in the British Labour Party. What Schröder did in the German SPD. Hollande was really too weak to do much of anything but was trying to do it in France. Some countries just had reactionary neoliberal governments.

In a country like the United States which has such a strong history of support for the New Deal and of progressivism, you couldn't gain power by running on a program to just give everything to the rich. You had to dress it up. You had to make it look like it was some kind of new progressive, emancipatory move. They figured out a way. They dressed up this predatory economic policy with the progressive politics of recognition. That's where you got this type of lean-in feminism. You have versions of it in every progressive social movement. That's what collapsed in the United States in this election in the rejection of Clinton. She was the perfect poster girl for this progressive neoliberalism. Writing books about "it takes a village" and then giving these six figure speeches behind closed doors on Wall Street, showing them that she was completely on board with their program. I mean you couldn't ask for a better representative of this kind of stuff. That's what's in crisis at the hegemonic level. People don't believe in it anymore. The Trump supporters, they took the whole thing as a package and rejected all of it. They rejected not only the economic policy but what they thought was feminism, anti-racism, environmentalism. They're very strong climate change deniers. They associated all of environmentalism, all of feminism, all of anti-racism with neoliberalism and said, "We don't want it." Now, what made that possible was the weakness of left-wing feminism, left-wing environmentalism, left-wing anti-racism in this country, which could have spoken to those people.

Could have connected itself to the animating issues of declining living standards for the working class, of labor rights, of all sorts of things, and maybe still could do that.

This is why I can't make a prediction. I really think everything depends on what we do. On whether enough of us figure out how to constitute a progressive populist alternative today that would unite the feminism for the 99%, the environmentalism for the 99%, the anti-racism for the 99%. In other words, a movement that could take a lot. I don't want to romanticize or idealize the Sanders campaign, there are plenty of things one could criticize in it, but it was the beginning of an alliance of the sort I'm thinking about. Then you would have a real struggle between right-wing populism and left-wing populism. I believe that we could actually win a substantial chunk of people who are now drawn to right-wing populism. Trump got his margin of victory in states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, which had been very hard hit by deindustrialization, financialization, and neoliberalization. States in which Hillary Clinton, to the extent that she bothered to campaign at all, was a non-starter. But the interesting thing about these states is that they are states that Obama won twice and where Sanders did very well. Sanders won both the Michigan and Wisconsin primaries. Approximately 8.5 million people who voted for Trump in 2016 also voted for Obama in 2012. That's a margin of victory.

What does that show? It shows that those voters, who are not all of Trump's supporters, are not principled racists. They are what we could call opportunistic racists. Meaning they will vote for a racist if the guy is saying other things that they like and if nobody else who is not a racist is around to also say those things. If a Sanders is around to say things like that, "the economy is rigged," "the political system is broken," etc., they don't have to go with the racist. In the past, they have not. That's a hopeful sign in my opinion. I think it's really awful to do, this brings us back to your first question, to conceive of the "resistance" to Trump as a way of drawing a line between the morally good people and the bad "deplorables" as Hillary Clinton called the racists over there. It's not that at all. It should be a class line. It should be the division between those who are benefiting from a progressive neoliberalism, from that combination of predatory economics and elitist meritocratic forms of "progressive recognition," versus

those who are on the short end of the stick. That's, I think, where the line should be drawn. I think we could combine a progressive politics of distribution with a progressive politics of recognition. That's my definition of left-wing populism.

Having said that, I want to add one more point. Trump campaigned as a reactionary populist. He was proposing to combine reactionary recognition with some kind of progressive politics of distribution which would have infrastructure spending to create jobs, aid manufacturing, and so on and so forth. He has not actually governed in that way. He has really abandoned anything like a populist economic politics. He is just another neoliberal on that front which is why the mainstream Republican Party will hold their noses and put up with him. But he's combined that with what I now think we need to call a hyper-reactionary politics of recognition. This is not just garden variety, boilerplate Republican dog whistles. No, this is real hard edged misogyny, racism, transphobia. He's governing as a hyper-reactionary neoliberal, and that's something new that we haven't had in this country before. That's another sense in which the neoliberalism part of things is continuing. The stock market is doing pretty great, it might have a bad day here and there, but it's basically going great. The investors are happy so the mainstream Republicans are putting up with it all. But the country is still polarized. I can't say for sure, but I think there is at least a chance that the people who voted for Trump expecting and wanting populist distribution politics will, at a certain point, figure out that they have been had. That this is a bait-and-switch. If so, let's have another alternative ready for them to go to.

CH: How will the capitalist system, as it promotes austerity measures like slashing social spending, lowering wages, and attacking social reproduction, continue? Are we moving towards a long-term struggle? What's beyond neoliberalism today?

Can neoliberalism as an accumulation strategy continue? Well, until the planet can't support life anymore, perhaps. Until the workforce is so malnourished and unhealthy that they can't produce anything anymore that they get profit from. Until the state powers are so hollowed out that the

infrastructure they need collapses. These are things that could throw a monkey wrench into things, but they are pretty far off. I think the only thing that could stop it is politics, not a mechanical breakdown of the system. Although, the conditions, the derivatives, that created the 2007-2008 financial crisis have not been fixed.

CH: They are still there.

NF: They are chugging along very nicely. So I wouldn't rule out that kind of thing either. A repeat of that, possibly even on a more serious and larger scale. But we on the left cannot put our hopes in the breakdown theory of capitalism. We have to actually be thinking politically and programmatically about how to construct a counter-hegemony. This is a moment of opportunity. This is one of those rare moments in the history of capitalism where you have a general crisis, where many different forms of crises are converging. Other people are jumping into the breach and proposing alternatives, and we need to do the same.



“Capitalism Also Depends on Domestic Labour.” Source: *See Red Women's Workshop: Feminist Posters 1974-1990.*

CH: I want to turn to neocolonialism and the ongoing liberation struggles in the Global South. For example, the struggles in Kurdistan and Palestine. How do we in the United States build radical internationalism and solidarity across borders?

NF: Let me try to answer this by describing a new structural feature about this form of capitalism which might offer conditions for more successful attempts at these alliances than in the past. Every left-wing movement talks about international solidarity, wants to do it, and it often doesn't pass beyond lip service. There have even been some criminal moments when the working class just turns nationalist and supports imperialism. It's a long standing problem in the history of the left and of social struggle. Here is my take on it. I believe that, and here I am close to David Harvey, capitalism has always relied on essentially two streams of value in order to accumulate and expand capital, which is the *raison d'être* of the system after all. It's dependent on the process that Marx wrote about eloquently; the exploitation of labor. Of free, citizen workers who sell their labor power through a labor market and who receive in return the supposed average socially necessary cost of their own reproduction while the capitalist takes the surplus. That's what I think of as the front story of capitalism. But there is also a back story.

That is what I would call expropriation. So we have not just exploitation but expropriation. That means the brute confiscation and seizure of land, bodies that labor, mineral wealth, other natural resources, people's animals, their tools, their reproductive capacities, their children, everything they have. Capitalism has always depended on this. Whether we're talking about New World slavery, direct rule colonialism, post-colonial neoimperialist ways of siphoning value, or expropriation within the core, not just in the periphery, like in the United States, with the expropriation of native and enslaved people's, and even after abolition, of freed men who were turned into debt peons through the sharecropping system.

Exploitation and expropriation have always been intertwined. There is a line that I like very much by an eco-Marxist named Jason Moore who says "behind Manchester stands Mississippi." What

he means is that the great industrial breakthrough of first world manufacturing, where labor was exploited to produce profit, was only possible because you had the input of cheap raw materials. This textile production in Manchester is enabled by the cheap cotton from the Mississippi plantations. It's a way in which these two things are entwined. If you don't have those cheap inputs including, cheap coffee, sugar, tea, corn, or grain, you have to pay the free workers more in order to pay for their reproduction. But if you can steal all this stuff from unfree people, who are generally people of color, and get it really cheap, then you can pay the workers in Manchester a lot less. These things go together, exploitation and expropriation.

Historically, it's been two different populations, one here and one over there; one white, European and the other natives, slaves, browns, blacks, yellows and so on. The very structure of capitalism was set up to play off these populations against one another. It was not just a moral failing on the part of the relatively privileged people. There were also real structural divisions that entwined their fate with the expropriated, unfree or subjugated peoples elsewhere but in a way that posed them as antithetical. What is interesting about today is that this sharp division between the exploited and expropriated is breaking down. Take the relocation of manufacturing to the BRICS countries.² We now have exploitation there on a very large scale and with deindustrialization and all the changes in the labor regime in the first world core countries, even people who are employed are paid too little to cover the cost of their own reproduction. So they're expropriated over and above their exploitation whether it's through debt or these other things we've talked about. I think that a critical mass of people everywhere is being exploited and expropriated simultaneously.

From a structural point of view at least, it looks like we're in a position where more and more people might be able to understand that you can't actually solve the problem of exploitation unless you also address the problem of expropriation and vice-versa. Although we are located differently and those differences matter, from a structural point of view some of what created the appearance of real

²Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

antithesis is not functioning in the same way anymore. I don't know whether this can be translated into an actual world-view that could be persuasively explained to organize international solidarity, coalitions, and movements, but I think there is at least a possibility. As bad as things are, and they really are terrible, I'm seeing some glimmers of possibility and that's one of them.



“Hail To the Working and Struggling Women of the World.” Published by the Iranian Students Association in the U.S. (Berkeley, CA). Circa 1979. Source: The Palestine Poster Project Archives (PPPA).

