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Book Review Essay: Revolutionary Feminisms: Conversation on Collective Action and Radical Thought¹

By Lorena Di Cresce²

The text *Revolutionary Feminisms: Conversation on Collective Action and Radical Thought*, edited by Bhandar and Ziadah, features a diverse set of scholars. Each contributor begins by explaining their major theoretical influences, most of them citing thinkers such as Foucault, Marx, and Dorothy Smith. In the first chapter “Diaspora/Migration/Empire”, Avtar Brah, author of *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996), begins the section (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 33). Brah discusses her experiences and understanding of diaspora, as well as its link to ideas of intersectional disparities for women in a capitalist world. Psychotherapist, Gail Lewis, discusses racial and ethnic inequalities of women in the context of migration (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 55). Lewis speaks to personal home experiences in an autoethnographic nature, touching on issues of racism, imperialism and migration. Vron Ware, professor of Sociology at Kingston University in London, speaks on war and empire (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 73). Ware recalls her own educational experiences during the postwar era, including a focus on racial inequalities and whiteness.

Chapter two, “Colonialism/Capitalism/Resistance”, begins with York University professor, Himani Bannerj’s discussion of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist ideas (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 95). Bannerj recalls her experiences leaving India for Canada, and analyzes the connections between patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism, as well as its assimilative effects. Activist and cofounder of the Gay Liberation against the Right Everywhere organization (GLARE), Gary Kinsman, draws on his influences including that of Bannerj. Kinsman elaborates on the relations between the concept of capitalism, and social aspects of sex, gender and race (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 119). Indigenous scholar, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, focuses on the topic of resistance of capitalist and colonial forms through the discussion of her Indigenous culture and knowledge (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 139). Silvia Federici, University professor in New York, concludes the chapter with a focus on resisting problematic gender norms, arguing for the value of unpaid care work (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 149).

The third chapter, “Abolition Feminism” begins with Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 161). The New York scholar uses a geographical lens to focus on prison abolition projects across different communities. Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Avery F. Gordon’s discussion of abolition emphasizes the need to eliminate the socio-economic and political factors that contribute to intersectional injustices (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 179). Angela Y. Davis, a renowned scholar, professor, and activist (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 203), elaborates on the representation of race among feminisms as well as her understanding of abolition. Finally, Lisa Lowe ends the text with the “Afterward”.

¹ Reviewed Book: Bhandar, B. & Ziadah, R. (2020). *Revolutionary Feminisms: Conversation on Collective Action and Radical Thought*. New York, New York: Verso Books.

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Bhandar and Ziadah's methodology consists of interviews with scholars and experts in their fields. The method the editors use is significant in this text, as it employs primary sources of evidence as the major source of data. The discussions themselves are based on academic expertise on the intricacies and complexities of the inequalities that women have faced in the past and continue to struggle with today. The interviews do, however, take place mainly between academics from Europe, the US and the UK (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 2). Notably, the interviewees could have been more racially representative and diverse.

Further, the common methodology among the feminist scholars is historical materialism. According to Bhandar and Ziadah (2020, pp. 13), historical materialism refers to, "a form of critique that situates itself within social relations". This gives rise to the discussion anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist themes (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 1). The main discourses of interest throughout the text include Black feminism, Indigenous feminism, communism, Third World feminism, Marxist (socialist) feminism as well as Queer feminism (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 2). These themes and discourses foster an intersectional lens, considering multiple socio-economic aspects that contribute to the inequalities of racialized and struggling women (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 13). These elements contribute to the praxis that the editors ground their scholarship in and place a heavy emphasis on. In the introduction of the text, Bhandar and Ziadah (2020, pp. 2) claim, "our aim... is to explore the collective memory and histories of struggle that shape the very possibilities of radical change in our present and near future". This suggests that the goal of this work is to analyze historical struggles in order to enact radical feminist societal changes.

The theoretical perspectives and goals of *Revolutionary Feminisms* overlap with those of other scholarly textbooks within its field. Within the text, the experts discuss their own familial experiences and how it inspired them in their scholarship and activism, recognizing the family as a legitimate institution of analysis. Amber Gazso and Karen Kobayashi's *Continuity and Innovation: Canadian Families in the New Millennium* discusses similar themes and ideas seen in *Revolutionary Feminisms*. These ideas include the socio-economic and political influences of patriarchy, gender roles/norms, and paid and unpaid labour, in the context of the family. Further, this text takes a feminist perspective and places a heavy emphasis on intersectionality. The contributors of each chapter are composed of racially diverse authors, including Indigenous and African American scholars. Both texts recognize the importance of "continuities", or historical patterns and practices that evolve over time, by looking at both the past and present (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 3; Gazso & Kobayashi, 2018, pp. 6). *Continuity and Innovation*, however, is set up like a typical textbook with illustrations and graphs, which makes learning the concepts easier to grasp. For this reason, I feel this text is geared toward an academic audience and students who are learning this content anew. Therefore, this text breaks down the concepts and theories found in *Revolutionary Feminisms* in a less abstract way.

Margaret Hobbes and Carla Rice's *Gender and Women's Studies Critical Terrain* 2nd Ed, an introductory textbook to the discipline of Gender and Women's Studies, also shares similarities with *Revolutionary Feminisms*. Much like *Continuity and Innovation*, this text differs from the work under review due to its illustrative pages. Yet, Hobbes and Rice's (2018, pp. 17-19) work is a feminist text, focusing on intersectional inequalities produced by patriarchy and sexism, as well as social change. In this text, each chapter is also authored by scholars of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds, including bell hooks, mentioned as a prominent figure and influence on all of the scholars in *Revolutionary Feminisms*. This text too is less abstract than *Revolutionary Feminisms*,

providing more direct, fixed definitions and explanations of theoretical terms and concepts. Therefore, in a sea of feminist scholarship, *Revolutionary Feminisms* stands alone.

The layout is innovative and unique to this text, as I have never read another textbook written entirely in an interview-based, question-answer format. I feel that the dialogical nature of the text is in keeping with the values held by many feminists, which is to ensure that those who are privileged do not talk about the experiences of others in ignorance in order to avoid “cultural relativism” (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 16). The scholars draw mostly from personal encounters, which allows them to discuss concepts regarding their own experiences rather than those of individuals they cannot identify with. Additionally, this method allows for the thoughts and ideas of the scholars to be accurately and thoroughly expressed. If the editors had teased out information and paraphrased much of the transcript, the full meaning and significance of what each scholar had to contribute would have been lost. I also found the format allowed for an enjoyable read and a different page layout than what is typically expected. The book, however, lacks in ways similar to that of others in the field of sociology.

The way in which this book addresses the topic of racialized inequalities of women is with a hyper focus on Black and Indigenous women, while lacking insight into Latina and Asian ethnicities. Most of the feminist scholars focus their discussions around the injustices that Black and Indigenous women have and continue to face, but their discussion of race is incomplete. That is not to say, however, that other ethnicities and races are excluded entirely from the discussion. On one occasion that the disparities of Asians were considered, it was brief. When Brah discusses the struggles of Black individuals, she says; “I’ll use the term ‘Black’ for the moment, including Asians” (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, pp. 36). The reference of “Asians” embedded in the discussion of the Black community is brief and homogenizes them in the discussion of racial struggle. This exemplifies one of the weaknesses of this work.

Further, I believe it is imperative that experiences of inequality and injustice be understood and studied in order to find ways to combat all forms of discrimination and to enact social change. Most textbooks, however, fail to highlight any positivity in discussions regarding social injustice, and instead focus on ways in which to change current conditions. Despite this, I feel it is also important to discuss and celebrate the positive aspects of struggling groups, such as the healing effects of music in Indigenous cultures. These insights would actively engage the reader in an appreciation for diverse cultures and struggles. To shed light on some positive insights about struggling groups, rather than only solely analyzing them in a negative light would bring a new, innovative dimension to the text. Regardless of these gaps, *Revolutionary Feminisms* still stands as a text that breaks new ground in its field.

References

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