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Feminism, Interrupted? A review of Lola Olufemi's feminist primer

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Olufemi, L. (2020). *Feminism, interrupted: Disrupting power*. Pluto Press. 148 pp. \$7.47 paperback. ISBN: 9780745340067.

Alex Watkins

In a culture where a quick stroll through any big box store yields a veritable smorgasbord of t-shirts, wine glasses, and notebooks to demonstrate your #girlboss #feminist status, Lola Olufemi's (2020) primer to radical, intersectional, Marxist feminism, *Feminism, interrupted: Disrupting power*, is a welcome relief. In the TikTok age, students often come to undergraduate classes with some exposure to traditional feminist ideals, but frequently, these conceptions are tainted by a corporatized white feminism, bleeding the ideals dry of their transformative, intersectional, action-oriented power. As Olufemi writes, "Feminism has the potential to transform the way we live, but first, it must be untied from the neo-liberalism that blunts our imaginative faculties" (p. 144). To demonstrate how burgeoning feminists can transform society through radical feminism without reifying systems of power or relying on esoteric theory, Olufemi proposes splitting, or "untying" (p. 1), feminism from capitalist discourses. This "untying" serves as the book's lodestar, with Olufemi running through the greatest hits of feminist thought, including gender identity, transmisogyny, reproductive justice, consent, and abolitionist justice.

For Olufemi, the titular "interrupting feminism" means diverging from the neoliberal, punitive, and theoretical scripts inherent in "mainstream feminism" in favor of the radical, transformative, and action-oriented intersectional perspective that she argues that all feminists should adopt. Olufemi argues that neoliberalism and exclusion are at the heart of white feminism, and suggests instead that her audience imagine feminism as "a doing word," and feminists as those who creatively imagine practical solutions that encompass the global experiences and perspectives of those in marginalized positions. Olufemi consistently defines both the traditional, neo-liberal, theoretical positions as well as radical, action-oriented feminisms as they relate to each of her examples. This project is evident from the first chapter, "Know your history," wherein the foundational "wave" theory of feminist development is roundly dismissed as eliminating the racial and class struggles and tensions particularly championed by Black feminists. The reframing project continues in the second chapter, "The sexist state," as Olufemi critiques the inherent turn to the state to provide reprieves from issues that are created by the state, a theme that is echoed in the examples of reproductive justice (Chapter 3, "The fight for reproductive justice"), Islamophobia (Chapter 4, "The saviour complex: Muslim women and gendered Islamophobia"), sex work (Chapter 7, "Complicating consent: How to support sex workers"), and punishment for sexual violence (Chapter 8, "The answer to sexual violence is not more prisons). Too often, Olufemi argues, feminist movements turn to systems of power, like the state, to "solve" these issues, even as they promote power differentials in reproductive right restrictions, Islamophobia, and policing and punishment of the most vulnerable members of society. In contrast, Olufemi notes, "only work that seeks to shake and unsettle the very foundations of the sexist state is feminist work" (p. 35). In the place of this feminism that seeks to grab power, Olufemi offers her own, radical feminism, which seeks true, inclusive solidarity, which "looks beyond borders and nations, and finds subversive ways to link the work of oppressed people across the world" (p. 17), and which does inclusive "justice work" (p. 5) that improves the material realities of the most marginalized among us. This, then, is feminism interrupted: the mainstream scripts interrupted by a new cadre of feminists who work against the reliance on the state to punish and enforce human rights, who consider global

perspectives not as sticking points in a monolithic agenda but as fundamental components of feminist work, and who creatively work in solidarity to propose an imagined, restored society that embraces and lifts up marginalized people.

As a teaching tool, this book offers a brief overview of intersectional, Marxist Feminism and Black Feminism, and is well suited for introductory gender and feminism courses. As a whole, the book reads like an anthology, so the individual chapters are suitable for assigning individually or to bring in as a counterpoint to traditional feminist values. For example, Chapter 4, “Transmisogyny: Who wins?,” would serve as an excellent primer for gender identity as construction, including an accessible introduction to Butlerian gender theory and rebuttal to trans-exclusionary radical feminism ideologies. Similarly, Chapter 9, “Feminism and food,” offers a significant overview of the feminist relationship with food, injecting the traditional feminist script of the harmful media and its influence, as well as the “food as neutral” riposte popular among white feminists with an understanding of the labor behind food and the potential for food to provide joy and pleasure. Some of the chapters, including Chapter 7, “Complicating consent: How to support sex workers,” and Chapter 8, “The answer to sexual violence is not more prisons,” would serve as provocative starting points for discussion points for upper-level students considering the implications of neoliberal feminism turning to the state and legislation for redress from structural issues, rather than turning their eyes towards activism, radical social overthrow, and utopia. The book asks us, in the words of Hazel Carby, to ask white feminists, “what exactly do you mean when you say ‘we’?” (p.141), a question that not only students but also their professors would do well to ask as they embark on a feminist pedagogy.