

Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power

Lola Olufemi

2020

Pluto Press

ISBN: 9780745340067 Paperback

This is *the* introductory book to contemporary British feminist discussions: from prison abolition to food, art to sex worker rights, transmisogyny to Islamophobia, it covers an amazing breadth of topics. The book is rooted in Black feminist thought, taking the reader through key struggles, ideas, and books in Britain and beyond. For sociologists interested in feminism and looking for a primer for themselves or students, *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* is an excellent and extremely accessible starting point.

Lola Olufemi begins *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* with a discussion of her own coming to feminist thought. She describes feminism as “a political project about what *could be*. It’s always looking forward, invested in futures we can’t quite grasp yet.” (pg. 1), before outlining a genuinely moving imagining of a feminist future (pp. 7-9). Olufemi’s approach is an important mix of imagining forward, chronicling this political moment, and looking back at specific Black feminist histories in Britain. This captures the sense of momentum and energy in contemporary feminist discussions in Britain, with an eye to transnational struggles and solidarity across borders and different experiences.

Chapter 1 outlines histories of feminism, critiquing the waves metaphor for its centring of white middle-class women’s struggles and erasure or side-lining of discussions about race and class. Olufemi highlights the feminist organising of the 1970s and 1980s in Britain, for example the work of the Brixton Black Women’s Group and The Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent. Olufemi discusses interviewing Gail Lewis, a founding member of both organisations, about strategies and issues in these organisations, particularly the side-lining of queer women. This commitment to an honest appraisal of the limitations of all organising is refreshing, as it is treated as a lesson in how to do better this time and next time. Olufemi explains how these Black British feminist groups and others, including the Combahee River Collective in the US, were practising intersectionality prior to Kimberlé Crenshaw’s coining of the term in 1989 (pg. 17), which provides a helpful addition to discussions that are often US-centric. The specificity of Black feminist organising in Britain is important to think through rather than merely applying US arguments to Britain, particularly given the specificity of how Black feminist struggles were and are intertwined with the Marxist, socialist and anti-imperial struggles in Britain and complex discussions around political Blackness.

Chapter 2 looks at the state, highlighting the activism of Sisters Uncut against cuts to domestic abuse support services and austerity policies, alongside critiques of immigration detention centres like Yarl’s Wood, and the murder of Black women in the UK by police and prison staff. While this book’s focus is largely on the British context, there are extensive case studies from elsewhere to draw out transnational connections. For example, Chapter 3 looks at reproductive justice, largely focusing on abortion access across Ireland with a very important critique from the perspective of migrant women and women of colour. Chapter 4 outlines transmisogyny, with a clear overview of the bizarre and terrifying strength of anti-trans activism in Britain, including many of their connections to right-

wing groups. Chapter 5 explores Islamophobia, highlighting how Britishness is raced and gendered in a way that is easily weaponised to either 'save', or, in the case of Shamima Begum, demonise Muslim women, and many feminist activists are complicit in this political discourse. Chapter 6 is a welcome advocacy for art as a central part of social and political struggle and living a life of freedom. Chapter 7 explores how to support sex worker rights, highlighting how decriminalisation is a starting point to ensure safer worker conditions for sex workers. Chapter 8 explores prison abolition, specifically how to deal with sexual violence, outlining the principles of transformative justice. Chapter 9 brings in food as a feminist issue, highlighting fat activism, Wages for Housework, Indigenous land and environmental activism and agricultural workers' struggles. Chapter 10 thinks through how to do solidarity, with wide-ranging contemporary and historical examples from around the world.

The brief conclusion summarises Olufemi's aim – to outline a feminism that aims for liveable lives for everyone, closing a comprehensive synthesis of what is going on in feminist thought in Britain. Overall, the book is an incredibly readable and unashamedly radical critique of an oppressive world, with the focus firmly on institutional and structural problems and collective solutions. And so, while *Feminism Interrupted* does not provide a comprehensive history of feminist struggle in Britain or a survey of feminist debates in academia, despite doing an exceptional job of highlighting key moments and ideas in both, it outlines what feminism is and what it could be. This makes it an excellent book for those wishing to understand the big questions in contemporary feminist debates, particularly in Britain, or for teaching introductory courses on feminism or activism.

Dr. Órla Meadhbh Murray

Centre for Higher Education Research and Scholarship, Imperial College London