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Book Review

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Book Reviews

DEMOGRAPHY AND DEMOCRACY: ESSAYS ON NATIONALISM, GENDER, AND IDEOLOGY

Himani Bannerji. Canadian Scholars' Press, Toronto, 2011, 272 pages.

My decision to review Himani Bannerji's 2011 collection of essays for this special issue was driven by two ongoing struggles in my classrooms at the University of Toronto: first, complete fatigue with the state of public discourses on feminism, and second, complete bewilderment at the uncritical ways in which these discourses are taken up. These public rhetorics continually emerge in classroom discussions of the politics of social change, particularly as feminism becomes closely aligned with the project of international development, debatably even appropriated by this neo-colonial project. As I write this review, the UN campaign He For She (UN Women, 2014) is circulating through social media. To its credit, the campaign attempts to address anti-feminism among younger generations. A young British actress, Emma Watson, who seemingly represents those young women who have most easily shunned feminism (that is, young, bourgeois, and white), recently launched the effort. In her speech to the UN she humbly "invited" men to take up the cause of gender equality through a "solidarity movement." In her speech she gave feminism a new start, one in which you don't have to hate men to be a feminist because "gender inequality," as she put it, also oppresses men in its formations of masculinity. Gender inequality, whatever that is, is something everyone can be free of if we accept her argument and move forward in our collective consciousness. This pursuit for gender equality is sponsored by two of the largest financial institutions in the world: Barclays and JPMorgan & Chase.

While a mainstream feminist body applauds the campaign, feminists of colour, queer feminists, and people with some sense of the history of feminism have reacted boldly, calling a spade a spade. The He For She campaign performs all sorts of ideological tricks to remind us that feminism is not about dismantling patriarchy, transforming social relations of power, or confronting violence and exploitation in the lives of women, queer, and trans people (McKenzie, 2014). I could post a blog on Facebook or retweet, if I used Twitter, one of the many articulate pushbacks that have emerged in recent days to the UN's appropriation of feminism, but my most pressing question as an educator will go unaddressed by these efforts: How do I help my students to think critically about the politics of social change

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being offered up to them through the smiling face of an actress and the tech/media-savvy campaigns of youth-oriented marketing. To take up this pedagogical task, I need help from feminists who have done the work that the UN will not—that is, to connect the dots between the specificity of local experience and the universal reality of patriarchy as a social relation of power formed through its relations to racism and capitalism.

Demography and Democracy takes up nationalism and the functionality of patriarchy on local and global scales. The seven essays that make up this volume were written in the first decade of the 21st century, and a key strength is the historical continuity Bannerji is able to present in her discussion of the *then* of colonialism and the *now* of imperialism. Her consistent attention to the problem of nationalism stretches across the text, taking up the question of not just then/now, but also here/there. She works diligently to demonstrate for readers the interrelations between patriarchy, nationalism, and imperialism, but also the spatial and geographic elaborations of these phenomena across constructs of tradition/modernity and East/West. Patriarchy, nationalism, and imperialism in Western Europe, North America, the Middle East, and South Asia are elaborated through their relations to one another. In this way, as readers we are forced into a conversation with ourselves and cannot assume the distance that colonialism has provided to look at these problems as over there. In this way, I have found this text to be extremely helpful in the classroom, confronting students on the grounds of their own constructs and pushing them beyond their allegiance to notions of gender and sex as purely cultural or discursive problems rather than seeing them as the foundation of our material relations. Scholars of critical adult education will find much to take up by way of Bannerji's articulation of Marxist feminism and her use of Marx as well as Gramsci, civil society, democracy, and ideology. The subjects include genocide (Chapter 1), the making of identity and subjectivity (Chapters 1, 3, and 5), the development project (Chapter 6), and a critique of subaltern studies (Chapter 5). The collection ends with the exceedingly valuable "The Tradition of Sociology and the Sociology of Tradition," in which Bannerji puts Dorothy Smith, Karl Marx, and Edward Said into conversation with one another and situates a critique of ideology and knowledge production. I have taught this chapter in my own courses and find it tremendously useful for situating the question of research in relation to many important ethical, theoretical, and methodological dilemmas of adult education.

To be frank, feminism without a critique of capitalism is largely responsible for the problems I confront in discussing patriarchy and racism with my students, but it is too easy to blame the most blatant bourgeois feminisms for the reduction to questions of choice, expression, and identity. This de-historicized, de-socialized theorization of feminism disperses violence and power in the wind. The strength of Bannerji's text is its ability to tie the objects of feminist theory—that is, the social relations of gender and sexuality—back to their actual ground in the historical emergence of the world we live in. This is a world that is characterized by not only questions of choice, but also the problems of nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism. It is also characterized by ongoing attempts to understand the struggle for social change. This problem of making a different world is theoretical and practical; it is a praxis that remains, in my opinion, underdeveloped due to our reliance on the imagination of bourgeois democracy. Bannerji's text is extremely useful on this point, elaborating the ways in which liberal constructions of citizenship and democracy cannot help us to emerge from a social formation characterized by such extreme violence. In an era in which feminism is re-branded as a chic choice, but only insofar as one's personal

freedom is foregrounded, Bannerji's text provides the needed reality that feminism and feminist education must always have a broader horizon of social change in mind. While the personal is political, the self is insufficient; we must endeavour to understand the totality of social relations.

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