

***Burn It Down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution*, edited by Breanne
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Michael Mayne, Denison University, United States

1 Manifestos clarify antagonisms; they articulate points of conflict by exposing opposing forces. Manifestos of feminism – the practice, theory, and movement opposed to patriarchy – reveal the roots of patriarchy and the ways this very long crisis occludes equality. *Burn it Down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution*, edited by Breanne Fahs, accomplishes this by encouraging us to focus our attention beyond the mechanisms of representation and negotiation, and toward the political itself: the dynamics of social power. The arguments here range from the specific to the systemic, representing feminism’s diversity and confirming feminism’s crucial role in all struggles for social justice.

2 Traditional anthologies assemble a genre’s greatest hits that represent a fair cross-section of perspectives, but Fahs has assembled something different. Conflict provides the organizing principle for Fahs’s curation and for the subject of the manifestos themselves. Using Mary Ann Caws’ vocabulary, Fahs names their rhetoric “againstness.” A “feminism of againstness,” Fahs explains, “values complaint, rage, tension, new forms of solidarity, and radical social change” (45). Here, the feminist manifesto “is not only a weapon against patriarchy but a weapon against the worst aspects of feminist politics – it refutes liberal tendencies of moderation and incremental, slow, ‘wait and be patient’ modes of reform” (46). *Burn it Down!* successfully advocates for “a new vision of feminism that poses itself as oppositional and defiant” (45). Reading these otherwise disparate perspectives that collectively reject a liberal paradigm evinces the necessity for a radical transformation, now more than ever.

3 *Burn it Down!* supports Chantal Mouffe’s critique of liberal tendencies that “envisage the field of politics as a neutral terrain in which different groups compete to occupy the positions of power,” a dynamic which always becomes “simply a competition among elites” (*Agonistics* 18). We see the consequences of liberalism in the recent renewal of right-wing populism, which Mouffe traces back to “liberalism’s central deficiency”: “flattening out antagonistic distinctions between political positions in pursuit of a “consensus at the center” (*On The Political* 10, 66). Mouffe defines the object of a genuinely democratic politics as “the confrontation between conflicting hegemonic projects, a confrontation with no possibility of final reconciliation,” which “cannot take

place without defining an adversary” (*Agonistics* 25). Mouffe describes againstness as “the ‘moment of the political,’ the recognition of [the] constitutive character of social division and the ineradicability of antagonism” (25). *Burn it Down!* incites these moments by identifying the content and contours of patriarchy’s roots.

4 Laboria Cuboniks names this social order’s “centrifugal referent” heteronormativity (323), and Emi Koyama calls out the “patriarchal binary gender system” that enforces reverse essentialism, normativity, and the “heterosexist patriarchy” (199, 213). For ACT UP, “every sector of the straight establishment,” including the privileges and images of straight people, are the “enemy” (84, 73). Leanne Betasamosake Simpson points to the “heteropatriarchy of colonial society” (694) and Linda La Rue highlights “sexual colonialism” (672). Radicallesbians focus on the caste system of gender roles and the psychological “cords” of “male-defined response patterns” (109). Betty Dodson writes against “the forces of sex-negativity” (813). Silvia Federici breaks down “capitalist relations” and “capital’s plan for women” (295), while Frances M. Beal and Black Lives Matter conjoin capitalism and racism. Susan Hawthorne targets “dominant culture stupidities” (725) as others name these stupidities more specifically: marriage and funeral rites for He-Yin Zhen, traditional womanhood for Kathie Amatriek Sarachild, the biological family for the Gay Liberation Front and Shulamith Firestone, reducing industries for Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran, “the ill-omened debris of romanticism” for Valentine de Saint-Point (836), and the “twin lies of patriotism and the cult of things” for D. M. D. (338).

5 Collections are always subjectively compiled and I miss a few personal favorites, though their absence does not detract from this collection’s success. Victoria Woodhull announced her candidacy for President of the United States (with Frederick Douglas nominated as Vice President) in 1870 with a challenge to racism, poverty, and the disenfranchisement of women in her “Woodhull Manifesto.” Julia Ward Howe’s 1870 “Mother’s Day Proclamation” and the International Congress of Women’s 1915 “Resolutions” are early examples of a global feminism and both are primarily opposed to war. Carol Hanisch’s 1969 “The Personal is Political” provides a lucid review of second-wave feminists’ mantra, one of the greatest discoveries of the twentieth century. INCITE! are contemporary feminists who fight violence against women of color, and their “Principles of Unity” lists the causes and consequences of this violence.

6 I also miss Julia Serano’s “Transwoman Manifesto,” which would have made a strident companion to the included excerpt from Koyama’s “The Transfeminist Manifesto” and help

further offset a few transphobic slurs in *Burn it Down*: “The Effeminist Manifesto” considers “the recent androgyny fad” to be part of “our oppression which The Man has foisted upon us” and trans women to be “an insult to women since they overtly parody female oppression and pose as object lessons in servility” (172, 171), while Valerie Solanas imagines that a trans woman “loses his [*sic*] desire to screw...and gets his [*sic*] dick chopped off in hopes of deriving a continuous, diffuse sexual feeling from ‘being a woman’” (468-9). Transgender identities and experiences have never supported any of the villains arraigned in the rest of these manifestos, but Trans-Exclusionary Reactionary Feminists (TERFs) keep insisting they do. I use ‘Reactionary’ instead of the more popular ‘Radical’ because all the reactionary movements I know of are transphobic and because TERFs’ tenets are classically reactionary. As Serano points out, the logic designating some women as fake “require[s] one to give different names, meanings, and values to the same behaviors depending on whether the person in question was born with a female or male body. . . . In other words, they require one to be sexist” (52). The concept of feminism may be large enough to include TERFs, but they are the opposite of radical.

7 Ultimately, the benefit of this collection is the combination of radical perspectives it encourages our minds to synthesize. These perspectives identify points of conflict from all over the social terrain, which helps us understand the ways social subordination and subjugation work. We are not capable of comprehending, let alone anthologizing, the social itself, but surveys like *Burn it Down* help map its antagonisms. Hegemonic regimes like patriarchy are complicated and this complexity allows lots of opportunities for ignorance and confusion about what it does and how to recognize its effects. Radical perspectives clarify these regimes. The root of the word ‘radical’ is the word ‘root’ itself, and *Burn it Down* identifies the most important roots of patriarchy, providing those who struggle against it the direction for its extirpation.

Works Cited

- Fahs, Breanne, editor. *Burn It Down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution*. e-book, Verso, 2020.
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