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Revolutionary Feminisms

Sara Carpenter

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BOOK REVIEW

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
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REVOLUTIONARY FEMINISMS

Brenna Bhandar & Rafeef Ziadah (Eds.). Verso Books, 2020, 240 pages.

Revolutionary Feminisms is an important edited collection from Brenna Bhandar, of SOAS/ University of London, and Rafeef Ziadah, noted Palestinian-Canadian poet and scholar of the Middle East. This collection is unique in its composition, consisting of ten interviews with feminist activists and scholars from the UK, Canada, and the United States, many of whom are living within, and writing about, broader diasporas. Organized in three sections, the format of interviews provides an accessible discussion to a number of crucial conceptual issues in feminist theory and offers both new students and seasoned scholars much to think through. What is of particular value is that these interviewees recount their personal histories of activism and organizing as well as the ways in which research and theory building emerge out of those histories. As a case in social movement learning alone, there are important dimensions here for the study of the emergence of feminist praxis. The volume has great relevance to scholars and practitioners of adult education, so much so that I would suggest it is a thought-provoking text to teach in any course on critical or feminist adult education, social movement learning, or social theory in adult education.

The first section, entitled ‘Diaspora/Migration/Empire,’ includes interviews from UK-based scholars Avtar Brah, Gail Lewis, and Vron Ware. These three scholars build themes of identity, place, knowledge, and affect, while consistently articulating these terms on the terrain of the social relations of capitalism, thus emphasizing the mutuality of subject-social relations. Knowledge is not an individual project in any form, always coming to be through history, social relations, and social processes. The second section, entitled ‘Colonialism/Capitalism/Resistance,’ includes interviews from Himani Bannerji, Gary Kinsman, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Silvia Federici. These contributors are likely more familiar to a Canadian audience as Bannerji, Kinsman, and Simpson, in particular, are major contributors to Canadian critiques of the nation-state, with particular extension to questions of race, gender, sexuality, capitalism, and colonialism. Italian scholar Federici’s work on social reproduction has been central to internationalist feminist organizing for almost five decades. While the first section of the text steeps the reader in the lived reality of capitalist social relations, the second section continues this and begins to build an articulation of what is necessary for a revolutionary critique of these social relations, emphasizing the role of ideology, history, social practice, and a critical perspective on epistemology. The third section, entitled ‘Abolition Feminism,’ highlights a tradition of struggle emerging from the United States, in particular the Black American experience, and includes interviews with Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Avery F. Gordon, and Angela Y. Davis. Across these final three interviews, the conceptual terrain of ‘abolition,’ recently taken up in education by Bettina

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Love (2019), is elaborated and grounded historically, but also presented as a strategy for building revolutionary resistance against, and as a possible transformation of, capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Key here is a deepening of the well tread debate between reform and revolution. These interviews are concluded with an afterword from Lisa Lowe, drawing primarily on the analytical framework from her book *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015).

The scope of *Revolutionary Feminisms* is ambitious. In their expansive introduction, the editors argue up front that there is no unifying theoretical framework that unites the included scholars as 'revolutionary.' In other words, while they all take inspiration from a lineage of revolutionary thinkers grounded in multiple traditions, they do not share or advocate a singular understanding of what it means to be 'revolutionary.' Rather, those included are responsible for some of the conceptual terms we use today to understand the possibilities and limitations of revolutions against capitalism, fascism, patriarchy, white supremacy, settler colonialism, and empire. If they are not necessarily united by theory, they are united in their commitment to the idea that feminist theory and activism must, in this historical moment, be anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist. In attempting to build some of the conceptual tools necessary to concretize this orientation in feminist theory, the editors focus much of their attention on asking the interviewees to elucidate their particular theoretical contributions to what Bhandar and Ziadah argue constitutes the necessary base of a revolutionary articulation of feminism. In this way, their elaboration of theory is grounded in a shared belief "that the individual is, at a fundamental level, constituted through relations with others and that this entails an ethical and political responsibility, which is the basis for solidarity; and that radical feminist thought and praxis must necessarily be internationalist in its solidarities, alliances, and outlook" (p. 5).

This internationalist and dialectical commitment, which is ontological, epistemological, and axiological, echoes much of what Shahrzad Mojab and I have argued in our elaboration of Marxist feminist approaches in adult education. There is great value in this collection in helping adult educators to understand the dialectical constitution of the individual-social relation and the limitations of understandings of learning that at worst utterly abstract the individual from a social context and at best under theorize the relationality between consciousness and praxis. There is also a great deal of clarity elaborated here around core issues of feminist theory that are taken up by adult educators, including discourse, materiality, ideology, affect, identity, and intersectionality. Finally, I will also say that there is great value in the effort by most of these scholars to centre relationality in their thinking. While we continue to learn lessons in relational epistemologies from First Nations scholars, this collection elaborates the ways in which terms of relationality are also key to sophisticated feminist theorizing that has the capacity to address the global realities of capitalism today. I recommend this text to any student or scholar of adult education who is pursuing a deeper understanding of the contributions of feminist theory to our discipline.

Sara Carpenter
University of Alberta

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