

Embodied Marks of Patriarchal Capitalism

Tarana Jafarova

1. University at Albany, State University of New York

Abstract:

The essay talks about how neoliberal economy and globalization that enabled women to participate in the labor force to become economically independent of men, reinforced gender inequality and new hegemonic projects. produced new forms of gender segregating and exploiting conditions and environment. Neoliberal economy does not only commodify women's labor, bodily experience but also their basic humanist needs. The traits such as individualism approach brought in by the neoliberal economy with that removal of social policy and programs, deprives women from opportunity to exercise their basic humanist and reproductive rights, bond with their children and family, fulfill their personal and professional aspirations, claim equal pay and promotion for the same job as men, equal division of labor at work and family, combat exploitation of their sexual, economic, physical and emotional labor. Capitalism together with patriarchy reinforce oppression of women which both need to be challenged and fought. Contemporary feminism and social movements should reinforce their struggle against social injustice and gender inequality growing drastically as a result of free market economy and patriarchal system in society, address the worsened social and economic conditions of people, especially those of the most disadvantaged women and mothers, challenge the ethnic and racial supremacy, class, and sexual divide and strive to build a society where everyone fits in and fulfill the failed promises of second wave feminism.

My essay focuses on women's embodied experience of patriarchy and neoliberal economy, women's struggle for sustenance and survival in globalized neo-liberal society. The emergence of globalization and free market economy have broadened patriarchal relations, sharpened gender, racial and class divide and fragmentation. In his article "Gender, sexuality and heterosexuality", Stevi Jackson notes that heteronormativity is mobilized and reproduced in everyday life not only through social interactions, but also through pattern of activities in which gender, sexuality and heterosexuality constitute each other. Women in their daily lives are defined and evaluated based on their sexual availability/attractiveness to men and their presumed place within patriarchal relationship as wives and mothers (Jackson 2006).

Surprisingly, until the eighteenth century, Western philosophers and scientists thought there was only one sex and that there was no anatomical difference between men and women, both shared similar sex organs, therefore were viewed as one sex based on presumed similarity of their biology. Current Western thinking is that women and men are two physically different species, two distinguishable genders "women" and "men".

According to Lorber, the bodies have not been changed over these years but what has changed is justifications for gender inequality. Once gender category is determined, the attributes, values and practices of the person are also gendered. "Gendered people do not emerge from physiology or hormones but from the exigencies of the social order" (Lorber 1993). Based on their gender category, men and women are defined completely opposing roles, gendered roles, where men are the provider for the family and women are seen as the caretakers of both the home and the

family. Simone de Beauvoir contends that woman has always been men's dependent and the two sexes have never been equal. And even today when gender relations have improved to some extent, it is still a world belongs to men (Beauvoir 1957). In her article "Compulsory Heterosexuality" Adrienne Rich lists methods about how male power manifests itself and enforces heteronormativity, methods which are more recognizable than others currently in various social institutions such as: to deny women sexuality or force heterosexuality upon them; exploit their reproductive labor and productive labor; punish them physically and prevent their movement; use them as objects for emotionally comfort and entertain men; restrict and immobilize women's self-fulfillment to motherhood and marriage; exclude women's participation in science, technology and other "masculine" field of work and science (Rich 1980).

Catherine McKinnon draws attention to the presence of heteronormativity in completely different conditions, the compulsory heterosexuality in the economy. She argues that under capitalism, women mostly occupy low-status and low-paid jobs and that male employers often do not hire qualified women, even if they could pay them less than men for the same work. She argues that the goal of this practice of gender segregation is more complex than the market interest in profits, and that "woman's sexualization" is used to make women sexually accessible and available to men, "men's control over women's sexuality and capital's control over employees work lives" (Rich 1980). Regardless which position they hold, economically disadvantaged women endure sexual harassment to keep their jobs and comply with heterosexual norms of manner, movement and appearance as defined for their gender category in order to qualify for employment (Rich 1980).

According to Rich, the primary need of male control over women's sexually or "eroticization of women's subordination" through everyday practices and norms stems from the "male fear of women" to lose control and be restrained when commodifying the reproductive, emotional and sexual work of women and male access to women only on women's terms (Rich 1980). The heterosexual normativity over women was prevailing especially in the mid '60s US society, when suburban women would drop out the college to get a husband, have a successful marriage, take care of household, children, husband and perform all duties for "good wife and mother" at the same time to always look feminine and loving wife (Friedan 1963).

The definition of an ideal suburban housewife was healthy, educated, beautiful woman concerned only about her husband, children and home. It is interesting to learn from Friedan's account of suburban femininity that there was an understanding that qualities such as higher education or qualifications would be an obstacle for women to create an ideal heterosexual family or find a suitable heterosexual man, and if they did not live up to the hopes placed in them, the duties of a wife and mother, society would place the blame on their upbringing. It affirms the timelessness of male control and dominance over the use of women's labor, oppression over women's reproductive labor, body, sexual division of labor, women's desire and self- fulfillment. Even in our time, the expectation of males as well as patriarchal society is that women should be able to provide care, emotional, economic and reproductive labor needed for the family rather than men also sharing the roles, despite the fact that they both work with the same work schedule and contribute equally to the family budget. Women, especially working women, are expected to work with two shifts, earn money for the family as well as perform their household chores. Through the performative, repeated pattern of acts as such, gender binary, gender division of labor, hierarchy of authority is enacted, reinforced and internalized as if it should be so.

Economic transformation is another arena that creates, reinforces gender inequality and new hegemonic projects. The most striking features of contemporary global capitalism is the growing commodification of intimate labor of women. Previously, women would not be paid for their caring, sexual, domestic and emotional work they fulfilled at home for their family members but with the increasing demand and pressure for sustenance under the harsh conditions of neoliberal economy, their intimate labor became commodified in return of money, care becomes a special kind of work in the economy (Ayers et al 2011). With the advent of neoliberalism, social policies, social security programs, and services have declined and curbed. Intimate labor has become a source of livelihood, maintenance of daily work and a need that people and society need to survive and develop. This new social transformation has increased the responsibilities of women both at home and work, especially increased demand for their intimate labor that included sex, domestic and care works. In an article on intimate labor, Ayers concludes that when intimacy becomes a paid job, it is no longer love labor that women used to serve their dependents, but is considered devalued, unskilled work that anyone can perform on the basis that women have done so without payment for a long time (Ayers et al 2011). This type of work is racialized and classed as those who perform such paid jobs are of lower class, people of color and immigrants.

Neoliberal economy that enabled women to participate in the labor force to become economically independent of men, drew many women into paid labor that that has been taken for granted for a long time, challenged patriarchal relations in families and created the conditions for more egalitarian gender relations to some extent and enabled women to participate in transnational labor force. But at the same time, it has brought new challenges and struggles for women, produced new forms of gender segregating and exploiting conditions and environment. "Commodification is so intense in this era. Everything that can be commodified is commodified" noted by Linda E. Carty Black, feminist scholar-activist (Feminist Freedom 2018).

Neoliberal economy does not only commodify women's labor, bodily experience but also their basic humanist needs. Women, especially working women, in today's patriarchal neoliberal society are like caged birds. The hardships of life, the high demand in the job market, the pressure of ideal worker expectations and, on top of that, the pressure of conforming to the norms of femininity in a heteropatriarchal society, women are trapped in a bind to balance their time, presence and commitment between work and family. The traits such as individualism approach brought in by the neoliberal economy with that removal of social policy and programs, deprives women from opportunity to exercise their basic humanist and reproductive rights, bond with their children and family, fulfill their personal and professional aspirations, claim equal pay and promotion for the same job as men, equal division of labor at work and family, combat exploitation of their sexual, economic, physical and emotional labor.

Capitalism together with patriarchy reinforce oppression of women which both need to be challenged and fought. Contemporary feminism and social movements should reinforce their struggle against social injustice and gender inequality growing drastically as a result of free market economy and patriarchal system in society, address the worsened social and economic conditions of people, especially those of the most disadvantaged women and mothers, challenge the ethnic and racial supremacy, class, and sexual divide and strive to build a society where everyone fits in and fulfill the failed promises of second wave feminism with gender equality and social justice for all regardless of gender, sexuality and race.

REFERENCES

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. New York: Knopf, 1957.

Jackson, Stevi. "Interchanges: Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality: The Complexity (and Limits) of Heteronormativity." *Feminist Theory* 7, no. 1 (April 2006): 105–121.

Lorber, Judith. "Believing is Seeing: Biology as Ideology." *Gender & Society* 7, no. 4 (December 1993): 568–581.

Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs* 5, no. 4 (July 1, 1980): 631–660.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963.

Feminist Freedom Warriors Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2018.

Ayers, Gillian, Boris, Eileen, Salazarparrenas, Rhacel, and Ayers, Gillian. "Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care." *Canadian Review of Sociology*, November 1, 2011.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1024211989/>.