What’s “Radical” about [Feminist] Radical Political Economy?

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Abstract
This article offers an analysis of seven articles from the Review of Radical Political Economics’ series “What 'Radical' Means in the 21st Century.” Without reference to feminism, the authors’ definitions of “radical” hinge critically on insight from feminist radical political economy. Instead of feminist radical political economy fitting under a broader body of political economy that coheres around radicalism, it is in feminist insight that radical political economy finds roots: according to the series’ authors, it is what makes radical political economy radical. Yet although the Union for Radical Political Economics hosted the development of the building blocks of feminist theory in economics between 1968 and 1991, feminist contributions remain largely unacknowledged. I offer strategies for repositioning feminism not as a side project but as a critical source of insight for radical political economy.

JEL Classification: B54, B51, B24

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feminist economics, radical economics, gender and economics

1. Introduction: “What You Want... Baby, I Got It...”
Feminist radical political economy offers a feminist perspective from which to critically examine capitalism and alternative modes of production. It aims to make central to radical economic thought the process of social reproduction, the gendered and raced work it entails, and the inequalities it may generate or reinforce. This body of work grows out of earlier feminist debates about the (in)separability of a “productive sphere” and a “reproductive sphere,” and efforts to develop a single, unitary, or holistic, framework through which to understand the economy and women’s oppression (Hartmann and Markusen 1980; Vogel 2014).

In economics, the concept of social reproduction appears in Marxism, feminist economics, and feminist political economy. For Marxists, social reproduction refers to the “perpetuation of entire social systems” (Laslett and Brenner 1989: 383; Marx 1967) that, in capitalism, enable...
capital accumulation and transmit inequalities. This usage of the term reproduction comes from Marx (1867 [1967: chap. 24 §2]) who uses “simple reproduction” and “reproduction on a progressively increasing scale” to describe the continuous process of production and capital accumulation in capitalism.

Feminists are critical of Marx’s productivism because it obscures the gendered work required to reproduce human beings. Feminist theorists include in social reproduction the day-to-day work required to “maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation” through a gendered division of labor in which women are disproportionately tasked with this typically unpaid or poorly paid work (Laslett and Brenner 1989: 383). While some social reproduction theorists, therefore, suggest renaming the Marxist concept “societal reproduction” (Laslett and Brenner 1989: 383), Marxist-feminists who developed the term as an analytical category (Mutari 2001) were among the first to describe the ways in which these two aspects of social reproduction are structurally and intimately related in capitalism: without the day-to-day work of social reproduction, entire social systems could not be reproduced. Capital accumulation is contingent upon the reproduction of labor power. In other words, production depends on reproduction; the (direct) exploitation of paid workers depends on the (indirect) superexploitation of unpaid workers.

The term superexploitation may concern some theorists due to the Marxist conceptualization of exploitation, which restricts surplus appropriation to the wage relation. I lack the space to explore the question of surplus in social reproduction or domestic labor debates, but the particular issue of surplus appropriation does not undermine the basic arguments in this article. I use the term superexploitation because it offers insight into dependence of paid work on unpaid work in class economies, has been used historically, and remains relevant.

Superexploitation captures two related theorizations, both important for developing a unitary framework. Rosa Luxemburg (1913 [1951]) first theorized superexploitation in Accumulation of Capital. Bond (2013: 267) writes, “This notion, derived from Rosa Luxemburg’s thinking a century ago, focuses on... how capitalism’s extra-economic coercive capacities loot mutual aid systems and commons facilities, families (women especially), the land, all forms of nature, and the shrinking state.” Similarly, Mies (1986) uses the term to describe the dependence of production on reproduction. She argues that the “general production of life,” typically the burden of nonwage workers, is the process through which wage workers are reproduced and is, therefore, a necessary condition for their exploitation. The work is, “not compensated for by a wage, the size of which is calculated on the ‘necessary’ reproduction costs of the labourer, but is mainly determined by force or coercive institutions” (Mies 1986: 48). Superexploitation highlights the dependence of direct appropriation of surplus labor in production on the performance of unpaid labor in the household and beyond. It articulates the unique relationship between the work of reproducing labor power, the production of commodities, and capitalism: unpaid reproductive work is a prerequisite for the appropriation of surplus labor and, therefore, for capital accumulation.

Critically, what Mies and other feminists make clear is that this unpaid labor is gendered and raced through coercive institutions such as colonization, slavery, and marriage. In linking superexploitation to oppressive social structures, gender and race oppressions join class as crucial components of a holistic analysis.

Despite the dependence of production on reproduction, in capitalism, the ends of production—capital accumulation—dominate the ends of reproduction: human subsistence. Capital accumulation takes priority instead of/over/rather than meeting people’s needs or ensuring that people have “access to the necessary conditions for reproduction” (Gimenez 2005: 21). That subordination contributes to the over-valorization of production in capitalism—and in economics—and obscures those two most fundamental insights of feminist work: that people are a produced input, and that capitalism relies on women’s unpaid work.

The subordination of reproduction to production is evident in the economics literature, even in radical economics, which has tended to ignore the household and other spaces of reproductive
work. Engels recognized the twofold nature of production: of things and humans. But for Marx, the process of reproduction depended only on workers’ consumption of commodities and paid work (labor embodied) of producing those commodities. Federici (2009) and Quick (1977) criticize Marx for reducing reproduction to workers’ consumption. The accounting ignores the unpaid time and effort expended in converting the items from the butcher, the brewer, and the baker from exchange-values into consumable use-values. Moreover, it neglects to value the gendered mental, physical, and emotional work required to reproduce the worker such that they are able to return to work the following day—and that a future generation of workers are able to work in coming years.

Historically, (male) economists, neoclassical and heterodox, have primarily focused attention on production while assuming the reproductive work it relies on is automatic or is a function of the “natural” world. Somehow many economists seem to remain largely oblivious that labor has origins, even though that childbearing process is itself called labor. Although production relies on having a steady supply of well-socialized, disciplined workers, if one pages through almost any economics journal, they are unlikely to find research on reproduction or the gendered and racialized work it entails.

The increasingly pressing ecological devastation and precarious jobs people depend on for subsistence—to remain in existence—render this a timely moment for revisiting social reproduction, which seeks to better understand the contradictory conditions under which people attempt to meet their needs. In particular, it is attendant to the contradiction between reproduction and a capitalist system of production designed to achieve capital accumulation, not the continuation of human life (Gimenez 2005; Nelson 1993; Quick 2004). The near silence about social reproduction is almost surreal given the very real difficulties people confront, which are typically about their own reproduction.

In summary, some key findings from research in feminist radical political economy are as follows:

1. People are produced in a process of social reproduction. Production takes place through a gendered division of labor in which people, typically women, combine labor and commodities to produce use-values.
2. Capitalism is not a system of coerced paid work but rather a system of coerced paid work dependent upon unpaid work. The concept of superexploitation can help capture the ways in which unpaid reproductive work is a prerequisite for the appropriation of surplus labor and, therefore, for capital accumulation.
3. The ends of production—capital accumulation—dominate the ends of reproduction: human subsistence.
4. Productivism is pervasive in economic thought and in the economics profession, in which thought translates into publications.

The next section examines the definitions of “radical” in the series launched in 2012 in the Review of Radical Political Economics (RRPE), the Union for Radical Political Economics’ (URPE’s) journal, titled “What ‘Radical’ Means in the 21st Century.”

2. “What You Need. . . Do You Know I Got It?”

a convenient starting point for considering how radical is defined in radical political economy and for looking for feminism in existing discussions of the term.\footnote{Dean Baker’s (2012) piece, “Getting Radical with Markets” and Doug Dowd’s (2011) “What Is Coming Around the Corner?” do not use the word radical in the body of their articles. Since they do not offer a definition of the term, their contributions enter the analysis later in this article.}

Fine (2012a: 102) defines the word directly: “radicalism must involve close, or surely token, attention to issues of power, class, conflict, capital, capitalism, and the latter’s history and dynamic.” This definition appears concrete yet leaves much up in the air. The definition could imply social reproduction, but it is left unstated. Also, what kinds of power? Fine may include oppressive social structures but does not necessarily, in contrast to, for example, bell hooks’ language of “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks 1997: 7). To be sure, gender and race analyses are part of Fine’s (1992) impressive scholarship, which includes a book titled Women’s Employment and the Capitalist Family, but that makes their exclusion from his definition more, rather than less, surprising.

There is more traction among Carroll, Amin, Sherman, and Bond, who each define radical in relation to “liberal.” In Carroll, Amin, and Sherman, the distinction is holism: for radicals, capitalism is a single system composed of multiple integrated processes, and therefore, approaching problems individually/separately is doomed to fail. For Bond, radicalism is (or was) linked to the concept of superexploitation. Bond (2011: 355) writes:

Earlier, visionary social theorists took a longer view of economic and social relations, and the various South African traditions of radical political economy were always infused with concern about race, geography, and also increasingly gender and environment. All came together in studies of superexploitative capital-labor relations that underpinned apartheid (emphasis in original).

Fierce debates between radicals and liberals... motivated 1960s–1970s political economic studies, drawing upon long-standing concerns within Marxism about superexploitation.

If it is fair to read “underpinned” as “reproduced,” Bond seems to say that apartheid-era production depended on the superexploitation of people of color, rural areas, women, and the environment. The interpretation is confirmed by Bond (2000: 6): “South Africa and its Bantustan labour reserves are illustrative, given the super-exploited role of rural women in nurturing workers during their youth, and caring for them in their retirement and during illness (hence allowing urban capitalists a lower wage floor, relatively devoid of educational, medical and pension expenditure).”

Bond makes two claims relevant to the current analysis. First, superexploitation was a point of agreement among Marxists, and second, concerns about superexploitation distinguished radicals from liberals. By implication, social reproduction, which highlights the dependence of exploitation on superexploitation, is, or at least was, central to being radical.

Although Bond is writing about a specific time and place, he links his claims to broader shifts in political economy, including the turn toward regulation theory, in which race and gender have a relatively minor presence limited mostly to labor market analysis. It bears noting that the phrase “social reproduction” is used in regulation theory but tends to mean “societal reproduction,” a less politicized definition, in terms of its elucidation of power relations, than the one feminists offer (Ayers 2012). In contrast to regulation theory, economic thought in which race and gender oppressions plays a larger role tends to see superexploitation—or vice versa—that radical thought that saw superexploitation also saw race and gender.

That is not to say that superexploitation is the same as systems of oppression or oppressive social structures and coercive norms. Rather, people are superexploited insofar as they do the unwaged work of social reproduction without which exploitation, and therefore capital accumulation, would not be possible. In practice, those people tend to be women of all races in households and are often women of color, for example, during slavery in the United States and during
apartheid in South Africa. Still, the concept of superexploitation may facilitate a more “difference-sensitive” analysis because recognizing the dependence of production on reproduction makes the gendered and racialized work of social reproduction more visible.

Fine (2012a) discusses the definitional problem noted in the introduction regarding the term *superexploitation*. Calling this dependent relationship “exploitation” may be a misnomer in Marxist terminology, in which exploitation applies to capitalist relations of production and the appropriation of surplus. If radical political economists adhere to this definition, we cannot anticipate seeing many discussions of superexploitation in Marxism. Yet we might still see discussions of social reproduction that note the dependence of production on reproduction, and, at minimum, demonstrate awareness of the gender of the workers who typically do the work, as Fine does. Demonstrating a degree of humility unusual in the discipline, Fine (2012b: 117) writes, “To focus upon economic reproduction in terms of the circuits of capital is both to highlight central aspects of capitalism and to acknowledge the limits of such an analysis as far as economic and social reproduction more generally is concerned” (emphasis added). Ultimately, Fine and Bond, both of whom do research about South Africa, are engaged with work about social reproduction, including that of Harold Wolpe, but only Bond brings it—and with it, women and households—into his discussion of radicalism in the RRPE.

The others who offer a definition—Carroll, Amin, and Sherman—tend to align with this quote from Bertell Ollman (quoted by Carroll 2015):

Liberals believe “each problem has an independent existence and can be understood and even solved in a way that does not bring in other problems. . . . Radicals, on the other hand, recognize a pattern in these problems. For them, these problems are linked together as part of the necessary life processes of the capitalist system.” (Carroll 2015: 663, emphasis added)

The claim that problems are linked together suggests a kind of “holism,” which may take two forms. The first is recognition that the problem of capitalist exploitation is connected to other kinds of oppression and ecological degradation, the original background of Ollman’s (1978) quote. The second is simply the quote at face value: liberals take a piecemeal approach where radicals see those interventions or reforms as coping mechanisms.

According to Ollman, “the worst problems of our society [are] poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, social and economic inequality, racism, sexism, etc.” (Ollman 1978: 130). Through his comments on the subaltern, through his use of the phrase “patriarchal capitalism,” and perhaps through quoting Ollman (although Carroll excludes Ollman’s list of problems from his RRPE piece), Carroll acknowledges two things. First, that humans are not homogeneous and, second, that systems of oppression are constitutive of actually existing capitalism.

Adopting the second form of holism, Amin (2013) implies agreement that a systemic approach is what distinguishes radicals from liberals. He writes that liberals’ strategies are “non-strategies, they are merely day-to-day adjustments to the vicissitudes of the imploding system” (Amin 2013: 408).

Sherman (2011: 350) holds a similarly systemic view:

The meaning of radical political economy is that the economic and political spheres are two aspects of one process. In fact all of society is an integrated process behaving like a single organism with many parts. One must understand every part, such as economics, in detail, but one must also understand each part as embedded in the whole society.

The three—Carroll, Amin, and Sherman—share a kind of “holism,” which demands envisioning a society composed of integrated processes, but *in each case their holism neglects to mention social reproduction, women, or households either directly or at all.*
Feminist political economists are particularly attuned to holism, however, and have been pointing out that an economic analysis that neglects the household is incomplete for nearly one hundred years. The development of feminism in economics, mostly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, lies precisely in critiquing the narrowness of economic inquiry, which did not take into consideration heterogeneity among people and their experiences. Feminist theorists continue to maintain this position.

To summarize, for Bond, concern with superexploitation distinguishes radicals from liberals while a holistic, systems-based approach does the same for Carroll, Amin, and Sherman. But feminist radical political economy focuses on expanding economic inquiry such that the mechanics of capitalism are rendered visible. It clarifies how capitalist exploitation in production depends on superexploitation of women in reproduction in a single, integrated process for a unitary understanding of capitalism. In effect, it seems to be the contributions of feminist radical political economy that define “radical” in radical political economy.

Of course I do not mean to suggest that the concept of holism came from feminist political economy. Rather, systematic holism forms the basic foundation of feminist research, and feminists theorized the production/reproduction relationship. Yet, with the exception of Bond’s article, women, feminism, and social reproduction, as a process that includes the gendered work required for the reproduction of people, are virtually written out of this set of definitions of radical and out of the series more generally. How can it be that some insights from feminist political economy are critical to radicalism while key concerns in feminist political economy have been dismissed? The following analysis takes the simple approach of counting to answer this question.

Carroll (2015) quotes feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith, and cites feminist philosopher, Nancy Fraser. Feminism does not appear directly in the series otherwise. Of the sixty-two authors cited in the series, nine are women. Carroll, a sociologist, is responsible for eight of those nine citations. The final citation is made by Patrick Bond, a geographer. Of the economists who cite people other than themselves, Amin and Baker, neither cites a woman.

Women are mentioned a total of five times in the seven articles—twice by Doug Dowd in relation to sex scandals and male politicians, and three times by Patrick Bond, in relation to the disproportionate impact on women of a variety of social ills, women’s organizations as a source of antineoliberal protests in South Africa, and to pregnancy, HIV, and access to medication to prevent vertical transmission of HIV from mother to child.

Reproduction is mentioned five times in the seven articles, three times by Amin (2013) and twice by Fine (2012a). Fine (2012a: 104) refers to the reproduction of “future generations of political economists” and of “political economy” itself. In Amin (2013: 401, 405), the things being reproduced are “the system of accumulation,” “the system of generalized monopoly capitalism,” and “accumulation dominated by monopolies.”

Since one of the most fundamental insights of feminist research is that the reproduction of this system of capital accumulation depends on social reproduction—possibly a critical component of the holism that makes radicals radical—it is puzzling that references to feminism and social reproduction remain largely outside of the definitions offered.

Limited attention to feminist research persists despite a long history of radical work by feminist economists and feminist efforts to claim space for women in URPE, which dates back to the late 1960s. A summary of URPE’s history notes, “The Women’s Caucus was formed in 1971 to protest the white male domination in the organization that tended to mute women’s and feminists’ voices.” It is because the Caucus’s demands for representation on the RRPE editorial board and URPE steering committee prompted a walkout of women economists and male economists’ wives and girlfriends at Camp Muffly in 1971 that the Caucus was positioned to publish special issues on the political economy of women (Laurie Nisonoff, unpublished email interview with author, 2018). The first line of Nancy Folbre’s (1980: 1) introduction to the fourth special issue on women reads: “The RRPE special issue on women has become, after a great deal of struggle,
a part of URPE tradition,” which is indicative of the advances of, and resistance to, the Women’s Caucus. Historically when feminist work has been present in RRPE, it has been published in these special issues, the most recent of which was published in 2001.

Feminist research still does not appear often in RRPE: only 3 percent—seven of 252—RRPE articles use a feminist lens, or are about women, girls, or gender. In an audit of thirty-two issues, in which I include each in a given year at five-year intervals (2017, 2012, 2007, 2002, 1997, 1992, 1987, 1982, 1977, 1972) excluding special issues and proceedings issues, 10 percent of the 288 authors in the sample are women. Restricting the sample to 1997–2017, just one of the 124 articles (0.8 percent) uses a feminist lens or is about women, girls, or gender, and 10 percent of the 151 authors are women, indicating that demographic representation has not improved over time, and theoretical representation may have actually gotten worse.

This analysis suggests that although feminist work in radical political economy contributes critical insight—insight that may even make radical political economy radical according to some—feminism (and women) are either missing incidentally, are excluded, or are obscured. Yet social reproduction plays a major role in the set of RRPE articles reviewed here.

Most of the “What ‘Radical’ Means” pieces make a normative case for change. The reasons for removing money from politics (Dowd) and for working against patents (Baker, Bond), and the goals of audacity (Amin), of a postcapitalist future (Carroll), and of change (Sherman, Fine), are essentially about people having an opportunity to reproduce themselves and future generations under better conditions. This point is not explicitly acknowledged in most of the pieces, which suggests that social reproduction is assumed. But making this assumption, assuming the appearance of labor/people, as neoclassical economists do, elides the question of who those people are and who does the work of reproduction. It reduces the visibility of women, effectively erasing them, and diminishes the value of their work.

Furthermore, the policies discussed in the articles have disproportionate impacts on women—impacts which have been detailed in feminist research—but women themselves are curiously absent. Amin, Dowd, Sherman, Baker, and Bond discuss austerity, socioeconomic programs, privatization of public services, government-funded human services jobs, and low-wage workers. State provision of services and jobs, and policies benefiting low wage workers all impact women more than men. Women are more likely to be employed in human services, and to be employed by the (perhaps less discriminatory) government. Women are also more likely to use health services. More generally, in their normative commitments to improved well-being and social and environmental needs, each “What ‘Radical’ Means” author has social reproduction as his ultimate aim albeit without acknowledging it or the ways in which it is gendered and racialized.

In addition to erasing women and their work, assuming social reproduction induces a particular kind of myopia. For example, Dowd (2011: 578) repeats Marx’s error of conflating “the means of life” with production. In another case, Sherman identifies the most important aspects of society as economic institutions (relationships between classes), political institutions (government/media), technology (science, R&D), and ideology. Households are not included in any of the societal aspects despite being relevant to each, as they are where people are socialized (ideology) and are the space in which all of the people doing the work in each other aspect are reproduced.

2Although they are correlated, I do not mean to imply that gender identity and theoretical orientation overlap completely. Not all women publishing in RRPE are writing feminist radical political economy nor is it the case that only women can/do write feminist work. Indeed at least one feminist article had male authors.

3Including proceedings and special issues (forty-one issues with 302 articles and 366 authors) only raises representation to women being 15 percent of authors and 8 percent of articles using a feminist lens or being about women, girls, or gender. This underrepresentation is substantial by any measure. Between 1997 and 2017, on average, women made up between 26 percent (assistant professors) and 11 percent (full professors) of the faculty members at PhD-granting institutions, and in 2017 accounted for 43 percent (assistant) and 27 percent (full) in non-PhD-granting institutions (CSWEP 2017).
3. “All I’m Askin’ . . . Is for a Little Respect”

What you want
Baby, I got it
What you need
Do you know I got it?
All I’m askin’
Is for a little respect . . . . (Aretha Franklin, 1967)

The foregoing analysis suggests that feminist work in radical political economy contributes important insight to radical political economy, possibly including the very insight that makes radical political economy radical. But those contributions may go uncredited or may be “sanitized” of the thing that makes them radical in feminist radical political economy: the feminism.
The assessment is consistent with two seemingly contradictory statements from Hartmann and Markusen published in one of the special issues on women in 1980:

While the Review of Radical Political Economics, at the insistence of women editorial board members, continues to publish special issues on women, feminist theories have not worked their way into the mainstream of radical political economy . . .

Among the most grievous and insulting developments in recent Marxist theory is the borrowing of the analysis of reproduction from feminists and the subsequent destruction of its feminist content . . . A sphere of reproduction, with location and its own dynamics, is recognized, but women’s role within it is completely ignored. (Hartmann and Markusen 1980: 87, 89)

In fact, the second statement is a modification of the first. The analysis of reproduction, the insight into the narrowness of productivist economics, and the concept of superexploitation may have made their way into the “mainstream” of radical political economy, but the feminist theory that generated them did not.

It is unlikely that the authors of the “What ‘Radical’ Means” articles had any intent of erasing women or co-opting feminist insight, and not all of them do. It is also quite likely that the Editorial Board of RRPE wants to publish more feminist radical political economy. This too was an issue in 1974 when the editorial board released this statement:

At the RRPE Editorial Board meetings in Amherst last fall, we talked about the kinds of work people are doing, judged by the kinds of articles submitted to the journal. One of the things that came out of that discussion was that RRPE receives very few articles about women, despite the fact that there are people doing research and thinking about women’s role in society.

Some of us know of women who do not submit articles to “male-dominated” editorial boards of left journals. Some of us have had experiences with left journals that lead us to believe that they are not receptive to articles on women’s issues as such.

We decided two things about this. First, a stylistic decision, that authors are encouraged NOT to write articles in the male gender. Second, that we would publish this note in the Review to assert the commitment of the RRPE to developing analyses of the social and economic situation of women, of sexism, and of the women’s movement. (Bridges 1974: ix)

And yet, nearly fifty years later, these challenges remain, with many outcomes that merit discussion. I touch on three and conclude with a proposal for URPE and the RRPE.

First, in missing the household and social reproduction, radical theorists are not only negating a site of work, they miss a space for radical politics. Several successful radical victories have
been won around issues pertaining to social reproduction, including the Treatment Action Campaign and “new urban social movements” that Patrick Bond touches on. Changes in the structure of work have resulted in some people increasingly working from home or as own-account workers, which may provide new avenues into social movements. Federici (2009: 2, emphasis added) argues that a longer history is revealing:

From the Mexican to the Chinese Revolution, the most anti-systemic struggles of the last century have not been waged by industrial workers, Marx’ projected revolutionary subjects, but by campesino/as. Today as well, they are fought by subsistence farmers, urban squatters, undocumented migrants, as well as high-tech workers in Europe and North America. Most important, they are fought by women who, against all odds, are reproducing their families regardless of the value the market places on their lives, valorizing their existence, reproducing them for their own sake, even when the capitalists declare their uselessness as labor power.

Second, if this set of journal articles is any indication, the radical project is directed at, as Carroll (2015: 664) writes, “reaching from a troubled present to an alternative future.” Invariably this future sounds better than the current moment and is a future in which women would be prime beneficiaries. A critical part of generating that future depends on us doing two kinds of projecting. The first is the projection: consciously imagining how we want the future to look, in spite of the ways in which our imaginations are limited by existing ideologies. The second is the project: the work we can do to create the future that we want. Carroll (2015: 664) writes of radicalism in its prefigurative modality:

If people make their own history, if the present is always history in-the-making, then the future, as potential, already inhabits the present. Radical prefiguration consciously strives to create from that present an alternative future of human thriving within a context of ecological health.

This is an optimistic project, not least in the sense that it is necessarily experimental, and we cannot know how it will change us as people. For example, we might find that, say, valuing social reproduction and leisure in an attempt to radically alter our value systems alters our use of time and, ultimately, ourselves. This is a dynamic process; those changes will influence what we are capable of imagining for our collective future.

In contrast to that utopian project, the third consequence is exceedingly practical, and extends yet another feminist insight: in the same way that seeing one’s self unrepresented sends the message that one is likely unwelcome, seeing one’s theoretical orientation unrepresented sends a similar message. Worse, seeing insight from the body of research present but uncredited and neutralized goes a step further to suggest one may work tirelessly only to find that their contributions will go unacknowledged. To misquote intentionally:

Feminists make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. (Karl Marx/George Sanayana)

Between about 1968 and 1991, or perhaps 2001, URPE hosted, with variable degrees of warmth, the development of the building blocks of feminist theory in economics and beyond. By 2018, one must dig deep to unearth this history. Feminist radical political economy offers an opportunity to reposition feminist work in URPE, not as a side project but as a critical contributor of insight, perhaps even of that which makes radical political economy radical. Embracing this opportunity cannot take the form solely of occasional special issues of RRPE; it requires substantive changes. This is an opportunity to project a vision of radical political economy in which feminism finds not merely a home but one filled with supportive comrades.
This project could start with a confirmation of the 1974 “stylistic decision, that authors are encouraged NOT to write articles in the male gender” and a statement that RRPE is committed to publishing “analyses of the social and economic situation of women, of sexism, and of the women’s movement.” Such a statement ought to take seriously—after nearly fifty years—the point that a truly holistic economic analysis must take social reproduction into account. One way to do so might be for articles to specify whether their use of the word “production” takes into account the gendered work of producing labor power or refers more narrowly to the production of commodities.

This year, 2018, is URPE’s fiftieth anniversary. The last special issue of the RRPE on the political economy of women was published seventeen years ago, in 2001. In 2021, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Women’s Caucus could be commemorated by a special issue of the RRPE on feminist radical political economy and a commitment that women and people of color will make up a portion of the authors in each issue of the RRPE and of panelists in URPE-sponsored panels. Such a commitment could make publishing in special issues about gender, women, and feminism a genuine choice to pursue instead of the main channel for an entire demographic to publish in the RRPE.

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4There are many ways of enforcing effort. For example, in issues of the journal in which women and people of color are less than 20 percent of the authors, the editorial board could be required to publish a statement explaining why this is the case. At minimum, to begin to address the issue of representation, there should be no further white male authors-only issues of the journal.


**Author Biography**

Jennifer Cohen earned her PhD in Economics at the University of Massachusetts in 2012. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Global and Intercultural Studies at Miami University and a Research Associate in the Society, Work, and Development Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her scholarship focuses primarily on the political economy of work, women, race, and health in South Africa and the U.S. She is the co-founder of Feminist Radical Political Economy (FRPE), an organization working to claim space for a variety of feminisms and feminist research in radical political economics.