

Introduction to the Special Issue of Gender and Radical Political Economics: On the 50th Anniversary of the URPE Women's Caucus

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Over fifty years ago, the URPE Women's Caucus was formed to bring women's liberation into the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE) and feminism into the economics discipline. This special issue on Gender and Radical Political Economics intends to honor the formation of this Caucus by demonstrating the power of feminist radical political economy. The contributions push against notions of progress in a heteronormative racialized caste-based capitalist patriarchal political economy. They include both theoretical and empirical contributions that further our understanding of the situations of working people in the Global North and South. They are intersectional in their approach and challenge us to collectively consider the gaps that persist even within radical political economy analyses. In doing so, they point out the crucial tasks of what remains to be understood, analyzed, and put into practice for true liberation and empowerment.

Marlene Kim finds that the URPE Women's Caucus resulted in pathbreaking research on Marxist feminist theory, feminist economic history, and much important work in this field. In addition, it provided a forum for women to communicate with and support each other, discuss their work, and challenge the male-dominated profession—and URPE itself.

She argues that within the academic profession, gender and radical political economics can now be published in the *Review of Radical Political Economics* (RRPE) and *Feminist Economics*. That said, more has to be accomplished. Although the most blatant gender discrimination in the field of economics and in its cannon has faded from view, heterodox and feminist research about women has yet to be fully recognized and valued. The very foundations of mainstream economics are still gendered, and women's unpaid reproductive labor, care work, and feminist economic theory are largely absent.

Heterodox economists, including feminists and feminist political economists, have contributed considerably to understanding how fundamental these missing elements are to economic life. Much has been accomplished through intersectional analyses. This volume addresses feminist political economy arguments regarding gender and heteronormativity in families and in capitalism. The scholarship adds to existing thought about how capitalism

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thrives on breakdowns in labor solidarity through racial and/or gendered divisions. There is further consideration of the ways complex phenomena increase men's power intersectionally with race, class, immigration status, citizenship, caste, geographic location, immigration status, citizenship, and many other dimensions.

Sarah Small, for example, examines the intersection of race, gender, and income groups, and introduces a relatively unknown theory (to economists) of hegemonic masculinity. She finds that men at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy dictate masculine norms, but that those at the bottom of this hierarchy are less likely to follow such norms. Thus, although women are more likely to undertake housework if they out-earn their partners in general, this is less likely for black men, and for white men at the bottom of the income distribution.

Several articles engage, expand, or critique social reproduction theory (SRT), a framework that examines paid, unpaid, and necessary work performed by women and the critical role of social reproduction in capitalism. Abhilasha Srivastava and John Willoughby employ an intersectional lens to consider the ways caste, violence, and patriarchy combine to both drive and impact how marriage functions in India. They argue that Brahminical Patriarchy amalgamates with social relations of neoliberal capital within the institution of marriage to create new forms of regressive social norms and oppressions. Smriti Rao and Smita Ramnarain's research, also in the Indian context, contends with capitalism, caste, and class in consideration of a public works social protection program directed toward rural employment. They find that the gender-caste-class dynamic responds to economic crisis in ways that reproduce existing gender-caste-class hierarchies and that these demographic and locational factors intersect with social reproduction to produce outcomes that perpetuate inequalities.

Sirisha Naidu critiques SRT for its emphasis on wage work and argues that we must address how capitalist production, noncapitalist production, and subsistence production are interrelated labor processes that are coconstituted with nature in the circuits of social reproduction in the Global South. An important feature of this lens is that it highlights these interrelated labor processes as sites of surplus extraction because wage labor does not guarantee socially determined necessary consumption. This then manifests as crises of social reproduction for gendered labor, and the interrelated labor processes themselves become potential sites of resistance.

Capitalism's reliance on normative heterosexual family archetypes both contributes to intra-class divisions but also frames common theorizations of social reproduction. Duc Hien Nguyen argues that queer emancipation is not possible without overhauling the political-economic structures of reproductive capitalism. Mainstream narratives of progress via modest gains in income for those with capital obscure inequities within the queer community. From this intersectional lens we can see familiar half steps and contradictions that reflect related struggles in gendered and racialized communities.

The lived experience in a heteronormative neoliberal patriarchal capitalist society is often obscured by how we conceptualize and measure what matters, how we conceive of progress, and how we prioritize areas of concern. Irène Berthonneau's article focuses on the way that standard measurements of poverty hide particular experiences of women, with an emphasis on the problematic political economy of engaging with national or multilateral institutions that have immense power in representing, defining, and measuring indicators that matter. Jennifer Olmsted and Caitlin Killian argue that women's sexual and reproductive health are particularly vulnerable in conflict zones, and this reflects the patriarchy and violence embedded in the militarized nature of the global political economy.

From a critical policy lens, Lygia Fares and Ana Luíza Oliveira employ a class analysis framework to uncover contradictions and reconstitutions of precarity associated with the neoliberal flexibilization of working hours in the Brazilian context. This consideration of how market-oriented reforms that allow firms to engage a so-called flexible workforce are at odds with the needs

of working women, and blur the life-work divide in particularly gendered ways, especially when considered alongside class and social status dimensions.

Lastly, the *RRPE* invited Nancy Folbre, Heidi Hartmann, and Drue Barker to contribute new articles to the journal's occasional series "What 'Radical' Means in the 21st Century." In her 2018 *RRPE* article, Jennifer Cohen (2018) pointed out that, in the manuscripts published in this series up to that point, the authors' definitions of "radical" hinged critically on insight from feminist radical political economy. These new contributions published in this issue, with an introduction by Cohen, describe a shift to intersectional political economy to understand exploitation beyond class, with theoretical and political implications, by Folbre; how policy can be feminist and radical as we seek ultimately to change from a profit-motivated exploitative economic system to one designed to meet human needs, by Hartmann; and how "being radical" as speaking truth to power—if truth is speakable at all in a "post-truth" era—is systematically suppressed when such speech challenges men's power, by Barker. Each concludes that feminist radicalism requires collective action to enact desirable changes.

In sum, over the past fifty plus years, research on gender and feminism in radical political economics has expanded: it is intersectional and global, advancing theory and inquiry. Women in the URPE Women's Caucus fifty years ago should be proud of the work they initiated and inspired, and that this work has continued along so many threads. Although much remains to be examined, feminist radical political economists are up to this worthy task.

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*The RRPE special issue collective on Gender and
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Reference

- Cohen, Jennifer. 2018. What's "radical" about [feminist] radical political economy? *Review of Radical Political Economics* 50 (4): 716–26.