

Excerpt from *Take Back The Fight: Organizing Feminism for the Digital Age* by Nora Loreto, (Fernwood Publishing, 2020) © Nora Loreto 2020

I am a white cis woman who came to feminism as a result of needing feminism, of accessing its victories and standing on the shoulders of its giants. I owe so much to the feminists whose work has been ignored or obscured, written out of books, or appropriated by white feminists.

As a white woman who lives extremely online, I am part of a cohort that has far too often taken up too much space, claimed credit, defined issues and erased the contributions and work of Black, Indigenous, racialized, disabled, queer, non-binary and/or trans and cis women. My analysis of what feminism could be or how it might be renewed or reorganized in the digital era is saturated by my positionality. So, *Take Back the Fight* is a conversation I hope to continue with white feminists, especially those who are cisgendered, as we navigate ways to play supportive roles that don't assume, erase, or make more difficult the work that Black, Indigenous and racialized feminists are and have always been engaged in. My goal with this book is to reach people for whom feminism is new, who like me also came to it through necessity or maybe even just passing interest, whether they be young feminists or older feminists, and who have never found a way to put their feminism into action.

Mainstream feminism in Canada and the United States is white feminism. It's feminism that seeks to break the glass ceiling but then quickly patches up the hole for the next person to have to break (while leaving the shards on the ground for everyone else). It's feminism that promotes women politicians whose policies have hurt racialized communities or disabled communities. It's feminism that wipes its hands and says the job is done because a female top soldier or police officer has been appointed, while soldiers and police continue to criminalize, harass and hurt Indigenous, Black and poor communities. It's feminism that hasn't looked at how the Canadian state sterilizes Indigenous people or takes children away from parents at birth — it doesn't say: this is the most pressing issue of our time. Just as many feminists are doing, confronting white supremacy within feminist thinking and action is the greatest challenge that a new

feminist movement must take on, and we need a space and a structure to help navigate these debates that isn't simply through social media or the academy.

While white feminism persists as the dominant, mainstream understanding for what feminism is, important work has advanced thanks to racialized feminists and activists who have continued to organize, or who are organizing in new ways. In an interview with *Feminist Wire*, Harsha Walia who is co-founder of the migrant justice organization No One Is Illegal explains her understanding of what feminism means to her:

To me feminism is not only about issues affecting women or those outside the gender binary — in terms of violence against women or reproductive justice — but also about completely shifting our paradigms of what justice and equality means and how we embody it — in particular our relationship to community care and the gendered division of labour that sustains it. For me feminism's most transformative potential lies in the valuing of relational work, in care work like child care, elder care and emotional labour, in lifting up ancestral knowledge of grandmothers about land stewardship and how we manifest our responsibilities and accountabilities to each other, and in nurturing our communities and families through interdependency and resiliency. So dismantling patriarchy to me is as much about breaking down a system that privileges male and cisgendered supremacy as it is about breaking down a societal paradigm predicated on competition, domination, commodification, expendability, and isolation.<sup>5</sup>

Walia's explanation of feminism is excellent and is the kind of feminism I envision as I write these words. It does away with the debate about whether men and women should be equal and instead places women's liberation inside the social, political and economic context of society today. The key question is this: how do we take this definition of feminism and build around it a new feminist regrouping that could confront the plurality of injustices woven throughout society? And importantly, how does the digital age change the kinds of organizing that we engage in? A new feminist movement must insulate itself from the atomizing influence that social media has on us all, letting feminists connect past our individualization or isolation. For a new feminist movement to correct historical wrongs of mainstream feminism or put into action the theories and

understandings of racialized, disabled and queer feminists, we need locations to discuss these kinds of definitions, examine past thinking and create consensus that can move a diverse movement composed of many different parts towards the same direction.

Unfortunately, there are few structures that can facilitate such a debate. There is no national women's organization and very few provincial ones. Most feminist action is focused on winning one-off victories: changing legislation, ending practices or changing the ways we do things. Spaces that are created for action are not ideal to hold debates and collective reflection. And, because of a lack of structures that reach across provincial or regional boundaries, the ability feminists have to exact pressure on our legislative structures is limited. In absence of structures like these, the tension that white feminism creates within the broader feminist sphere hangs on a branch, ready to drip the moment that a white woman makes a declaration about women's liberation or a new ceo is chosen to lead a billion-dollar corporation. This tension has been there for as long as feminism has existed, except today we aren't forced to hash out our debates in general assemblies or meetings like feminists were in the 1970s and 1980s. As movements have fractured and atomized, old stereotypes or problematic ways of doing things remain. In some corners, they remain firmly entrenched. In others, it's a softer prejudice that permeates people's actions and words. The only way out of this is through the basic and slow work of movement building: of creating knowledge and exporting that knowledge to help form new debates and put that knowledge into action.