

**For Feminism in London workshop 2013:
"Challenging linked systems of power: towards a whole-istic feminism"**

I'd like to use my four minutes to tell you my idea of what this workshop's about. We five probably all have slightly different ideas about it - these are just mine. OK. Where to start? All of us - you, me, everyone - as individuals have relationships that are complicated by *differences* between us that confer *advantage* and disadvantage. Man/woman, White/black. Class also. In the last few years, we've learned to call these cross-cutting inequalities "intersectional". Each difference (in me, from others) affects the way the other differences (in me, from others) are experienced.

But - we don't just do power to each other as *individuals*. We're *positioned* in relation to each other by systems of power that go way back in time and span the globe - the capitalist economic system; the patriarchal gender order; the racist nation state system. As I see it, power relations like this bear on us in and through, *middle-level institutions*. Things like multinational corporations; churches, synagogues and mosques; legal systems; traditional family structures.

And it's not straightforward - it's not that one kind of institution does one kind of power. They all do several. That multinational corporation, yes, it's a class system in which the owners of capital exert power over workers and consumers. *But* it's also a phallocracy, with men in the board room and women at the sewing machine. And it's probably white men and Asian women!

So, the way I see it - systems and relations of power are intersected at the big systemic level, at the mid-level of institutions and at the individual level of you, me, him, her. That's what we mean in titling our workshop "linked systems of power". You can't tease them apart. *They work in and through each other. They are each others' environment, bearing on and shaping each other.*

What does this say for the women's movement? I'd argue that, yes, we have to struggle against systemic male dominance and men's control of our bodies - as we do in radical feminism. But we need more than that.

Let's imagine I work in a big hotel chain. The management is pretty much all men, and us 'chamber-maids' are all women. We can't get either the management or our trade union to take seriously our protection as room-staff from sexual abuse by male clients. *We've got a struggle against patriarchy here, and it's not just the bosses!* If the men in our union won't wake up and act against the exploitation of women by the hotel chain AND the prioritizing of male interests in the union, we women may need to set up our own union branch.

But then again, the management is trying to put a lot of us workers, men and women, on zero hours contracts. We need solidarity in this classic *struggle against capital* we have here.

And - don't think that's the end of it. We've got another fight coming up, on the *race discrimination front*. Kitchen cleaning jobs in this hotel are about to be

subcontracted out to a company exploiting vulnerable migrant labour from south-east Asia.

So what I need as a 'chamber-maid' employee in this hotel chain is a strategy of resistance that's *feminist, socialist and antiracist*. At a minimum!

A women's movement that doesn't perceive and resist all dimensions of oppression and exploitation is no earthly use to me. Nor is a socialism that isn't feminist and anti-racist. I need a whole-istic movement, a whole-istic feminism.